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## "I'm Done!" Stories of Veteran Teachers Driven Out of the Profession

Jill L. Stassie

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# “I’M DONE!” STORIES OF VETERAN TEACHERS DRIVEN OUT OF THE PROFESSION

by

JILL STASSIE

(Under the Direction of Delores D. Liston)

## ABSTRACT

My dissertation inquiry builds upon the works of Nancy Hoffman (1977/2003), Madeleine Grumet (1981, 1988) and Dana Goldstein (2014) to examine the enduring effects of the feminization of teaching on the profession. My research question asks, “How do former teachers describe the emotional, social-political conditions that contributed to their exit of their teaching in public schools?” Utilizing narrative inquiry as the methodology, I interviewed four teachers who recently left the profession. I also collected archival data to provide the history and context of teaching.

This study provides a detailed account of what teachers face daily in their classrooms and schools to illustrate the factors that have the biggest impact on job satisfaction and teacher attrition. The experience of my participants are categorized into three related themes: support, teacher morale, and the physical and emotional manifestations of stress. The overarching theme that developed illustrates how the experience of all teachers, both male and female, are affected by the feminization of teaching. The feminization of teaching propagates the subordinate status of teachers. This inquiry illustrates how most educational reforms and policies recycle the same issues from the past centuries, perpetuating an oppressive environment for teachers and negative perceptions of teachers and public schools.

**INDEX WORDS:** Teacher attrition, Teacher shortage, Educational reforms, Feminization of teaching, Teacher retention.

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my family for their unwavering support through this entire process. You listened and encouraged me every step of the way.

To my father- thank you for the reminders that I am resilient and can overcome any obstacles that come my way.

To my children, Jason, Sean, and Madeline, thank you for believing in me and supporting me. You three are my inspiration and motivation for everything I do.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Why Teachers Quit?

The 2009-2010 school year was a watershed year in my career. It was my ninth year teaching, my sixth in high school, after teaching middle school for my first three years. Up until this year, I had really enjoyed teaching. I had developed a good reputation amongst my peers and students, I had some good instructional and classroom management strategies and felt on top of my game. Yet, by November of that school year I was miserable. I seriously considered leaving teaching and switching careers. I thought about going to law school. I took the LSAT twice, scored well enough for most schools, and applied for two that were nearby. I was waitlisted at my preferred school and accepted by another. I discussed my plans with my colleagues and they all agreed that I would be a great lawyer. I then looked at the debt and time away from my family and reconsidered. My children were still in elementary, middle and high school and law school and a career in law would take a lot of time away from my family. I was miserable, though, and felt the weight of my work crushing me daily. I decided to reflect on my situation to discover the root of my discontent with teaching. The biggest issue was that my school climate was terrible. We were on our third principal in six years, with the current one making all sorts of daily demands through a barrage of emails. The teachers were miserable, the support staff was miserable, and the custodians were miserable. This principal continually harped on the necessity of making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which is important; however, constantly harassing teachers about it does not inspire or motivate teachers. In the end, it was the students that made me decide to keep teaching. I enjoyed my students and when I saw former students, I was encouraged by our conversations. It was them that made me decide to remain in the classroom. It

was not the family-friendly school schedule, it was not the hope for a better administration, it was not the fact that I had already dedicated 10 years to this profession- it was the knowledge that I made a difference and reinforcement that I received from my former students.

That same school year we had two new teachers leave teaching altogether for other professions. These two teachers fit the oft-cited statistic that 50% of new teachers leave within the first five years. During the year I had taken some time to get to know them, as I usually tried to make new teachers feel comfortable at a new school. They appeared to be good teachers and seemed to enjoy teaching. I asked them why they were leaving, and they gave a long list of complaints, such as discipline and administration that would not handle discipline. Each of them shared my negative view of the school climate. We had discussed my thoughts about a second career, and when I told them I had decided to stay, they each told me I was stronger than them. They felt guilty for leaving but knew it was the right decision. I thought the effects of teaching in such a negative environment and how that had affected them. They did not consider transferring to different schools, they decided teaching simply was not for them. I had been fortunate to enjoy my first seven years of teaching in a positive environment, so I knew there could be better days and I knew how good it felt to teach in a positive place. They did not have these experiences. Their only experience was in this negative environment. They did not have former students to remind them of the positive impact they had on them. All of these thoughts remained with me throughout the school year and summer. Instead of leaving for law school, I decided to recommit myself to my career and enrolled in a Master's program in Administration and Leadership to try and figure out how to solve these problems. While I did not go into administration, I do feel that what I learned enabled me to better contribute to my school. I remained at that high school and yet another principal took over and there was some improvement; however, it was short-lived

and when I finally did transfer to another school, the school climate had become very negative again. There were days I had trouble motivating myself to get out of my car in the mornings to enter the building. Teacher attendance was very poor, with many teachers missing 10 or more days, myself included. It was in this environment that I decided to enter the Doctoral program. When it came time to decide on a topic of study, I remember those dark days when I wanted to quit and I decided to research why teachers leave the profession and the effects of the high attrition rates on schools and society. I believe that the only way to communicate what life is like in the classroom was to tell the stories of those that live it day in and day out. Teachers spend 180 days in the classroom with students; therefore, their stories provide insight into the positives and negatives of life in the classroom. I have a story to tell, as do all teachers, about why we teach, what we love about teaching and what we want to be able to provide the best for what matters to us most- the students. This dissertation is about who teachers are and why they went into teaching, and ultimately why they left teaching. It all begins, however, with that decision to be a teacher. I provide stories from teachers that support the idea most teachers have a strong desire to make a difference and strive to have a positive impact on students. This is why they go into teaching, remain in teaching, and feel guilty about when they leave the teaching profession.

In the United States, an estimated eight percent of teachers leave the teaching force every year, which is nearly double that of other professions and nearly twice that of high-performing countries like Finland or Singapore (Westervelt, 2016a, p. 1). These countries are considered high-performing based on their test scores and the high percentage of students that continue on to higher education. A Learning Policy Institute (LPI) (2016) study confirmed those statistics and added that teacher attrition rates are higher for beginning teachers in high-poverty schools and districts (p. 1). In addition to teachers leaving the profession, LPI reported that there was a

decrease in people entering the profession. The most recent data found that between 2009 and 2014 teacher education enrollments dropped approximately 35% (p.1). The high rate of teacher attrition, combined with fewer people entering the field, has resulted in a teacher shortage in many areas of the country; with many reports predicting the shortage to become increasingly critical.

Why are teachers leaving and why are fewer young people joining the profession? There are numerous reasons: economic, social and political. Goral (2014) depicts the perceptions of teachers as part of the problem, citing Former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who considers the long-standing “idea that teachers are miracle workers and can walk on water,” on the one hand and the fact that they are “highly politicized” on the other as part of the problem (p. 4). Teachers are either perceived as villains or saints- there usually is no in-between. Teachers have very little say over the policies that dictate their entire profession, yet, are expected to rise above the politics to do what is best for the children. This perspective about teachers remains prevalent in the minds of the public, and this is one reason little change has occurred since the inception of the teaching profession and the system of public-education. Teachers are ordinary people charged with extraordinary tasks. Riggs (2013) blames politics for the high rates of teacher attrition; claiming that teachers are held to very high standards, they do not call the shots, “they are told what to do; it’s a very disempowered line of work” (p. 1). Michael Apple (1982) cites the root of this disempowerment as “deskilling,” a term which could apply to any profession. He applies the term to teaching and describes it as,

Skills that teachers used to need, that were deemed essential to the craft of working with children — such as curriculum deliberation and planning, designing teaching and curricular strategies for specific groups and individuals based on intimate knowledge

of these people are no longer necessary. With the large-scale influx of prepackaged material, planning is separated from execution. (p. 255)

When teachers do not regularly use these skills and all their professional development centers around collecting and analyzing data from tests, they lose these skills and readily accept the packaged curriculum that is handed to them. Giroux (2012) also cites the deskilling and devaluing of teaching as major issues facing teachers. He goes a step further and considers it an attack on teachers as public intellectuals. As public intellectuals, teachers are supposed to prepare the youth to be active and critical citizens; however, instead, “they (teachers) are reduced to the status of commercial salespersons selling knowledge, skills and values that have less to do with education than with training students for low-wage jobs in a global marketplace,” or worse, “security officers employed largely to discipline (students)” (Giroux, 2012, p. 1). This environment does not encourage innovative and personalized teaching. This environment does the opposite in creating an environment that is hostile to any methods that deviate from the norm; creating adversity that teachers are expected to rise above and teach. Teacher attrition is an important topic because despite all the debates over education there is one constant- kids will continue to come to school and there needs to be teachers to greet them.

The Spring 2017 Issue of PAGE ONE, the Professional Association of Georgia Educators journal features articles about inspiring the next generation of teachers and improving teacher recruitment and retention methods. Meg Thornton (2017) reported on the struggle many school districts throughout Georgia are facing to fill teaching positions. Special education, science, math, engineering and technology jobs are the top critical need areas. Some counties are offering signing bonuses and referral fees, while others are hiring uncertified teachers; which is permitted through the strategic waiver system, which offers flexibility on some rules in exchange



for increased accountability of these uncertified teachers. Other systems use long-term substitutes until they can hire qualified teachers. Clayton County Schools, in Georgia, reported using more than 150 long term substitutes in the 2015-16 school year. To prevent the reliance on long-term substitutes, and to increase recruitment and retention, they instituted employee recruitment and retention incentives that totaled \$53.4 million. Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools utilized the Alternative Pathways to Teaching Program to fill their 450 openings. This program allows candidates holding a bachelor's degree with a major in the subject they wish to teach in the classroom while earning certification by attending the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GA TAPP).

Another reason for Georgia's teacher shortage is due to the fact that the demand for teachers is surpassing the supply of teachers; due to the fact that there are fewer young people going into education. The 2017 Georgia Teacher of the Year, Casey Bethel, offered some suggestions to attract people into the field of education. He calls upon current educators to encourage and recruit the next generation of educators. To do this, he believes, "we must promote the positives while appropriately sharing the difficulties we face...Modern society presents new, complex obstacles that we must circumvent, and teachers endure all this in exchange for very little appreciation" (Bethel, 2017, p. 15). By sharing the positives of being a teacher, he believes we can change the narrative and restore our "collective teacher morale," and "rebuild our communities' faith in our schools" (p. 15). The negative media portrayal of teachers, as well as the "accountability era" of education has taken a toll on the profession. The feel-good movies about teachers, like *Dead Poets Society* (1989) and *Freedom Writers* (2007), have been replaced by negative movies about teacher misdeeds and movies like *Bad Teacher* (2011). Bethel taps into one of the big issues in education, caused by all the negative press that

began with the passage of NCLB and continues today- a decrease in the supply of teachers due to teacher attrition and fewer young people going into education. This is a trend in Georgia and nationwide.

### **Statistics**

The roots of educational research on teacher attrition are attributed to the work of British labor statistician J. Whitener (1965). In an exploratory study, he obtained lists of all teachers entering employment in ten Missouri school districts during the calendar years of 1951, 1952, and 1953—a total of 937 teachers—and recorded their lengths of service at the time they terminated employment in the district, if they did, through a ten-year period. The data was converted into a survival curve showing the proportions of the cohort still in employment at yearly intervals. The study also identified the factors that led to teacher survival. He found a strong correlation between age and sex, with male teachers showing higher survival rates, along with older teachers. The study found that younger teachers were the most at-risk for not surviving and leaving the profession, with 38% of the cohort surviving the first five years, with over 75% of those that survived the first five years surviving at least ten years in the district. In the 1970s, studies conducted by Charters (1970) and Mark and Anderson (1978) estimated that twenty-five percent of all people with teaching certificates never begin teaching or leave teaching within a few years. In the early 1980s, Murnane (1981) found that there was a thirty-three percent probability that a first-year teacher would leave, whereas in the late 1960s, that same rate was only sixteen percent. However, it was not until the early 1980s, when a series of highly publicized reports began to focus national attention on the coming possibility of severe teacher shortages in elementary and secondary schools, that teacher attrition garnered any attention in educational research or the media. In response, the National Center of Education

Statistics began conducting school and staffing surveys (SASS), along with teacher follow up surveys (TFS) beginning with the 1988-89 school year, which provided details on the percentages of stayers, leavers and movers, and teacher attrition. The surveys were sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the Institute of Education Sciences within the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of these surveys is to provide a detailed picture of U.S. elementary and secondary schools and their staff. This information is collected through questionnaires sent to districts, schools, principals, teachers, and library media centers (NCES, 2014, p. 1). The NCES (1995) reported that between 1990-91 and 1991-92, there was an overall teacher turnover rate of 13%, which includes teachers in all stages of their careers, as well as those that retired. More recent reports (NCES, 2010, 2014) show the teacher turnover rates between 8 and 9% from the 2008 – 2012 school years.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) decided to focus on first year teachers. They conducted the Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study (BTLs), beginning in the 2007-2008 school year and concluding with the 2011-2012 school year. This study enabled researchers to examine the careers of beginning teachers as well as factors that may influence attrition and mobility (NCES, 2015, p.1). For each year, the retention rates of teachers by characteristics, the mobility (e.g., moving to a different school) for those who stayed in teaching, and the occupational status of those who left teaching (leavers) are provided. The teacher attrition rate for each school year were: 2008-2009 - 10%, 2009-2010 -12.3%, 2010-2011 - 14.8% and 2011-2012 - 17.3 % (NCES, 2015, p. 5). This study only examined beginning teachers, which is an important consideration. Throughout the same time period, the NCES (2010, 2014) conducted the same surveys with teachers at all stages of their careers and the teacher attrition rate remained steady between 8 and 9%.

While lowering the teacher attrition rate would reduce shortages more than any other factor, the decline in the number college students majoring in education is an alarming trend that cannot be ignored. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) held a teacher retention symposium in Washington, D.C. in 2002. They presented a report which examined the number of people entering the teaching profession. They found that between 1984 and 1998 the number of institutions preparing teachers increased from 1,287 to 1,354 and the annual number of graduates with Bachelor's and Master's degrees jumped by over 50 percent to 230,000 by the 1999-2000 school year (p. 5). Mary Ellen Flannery (2016), writing for the National Education Association, illustrates how things have changed since 2000. Flannery reports that the number of students who major in education has reached its lowest point in 45 years. According to data gathered by the UCLA's Cooperative Institutional Research Program, only 4.2 percent of students intend to major in education compared to 11 percent in 2000; 10 percent in 1990; and 11 percent in 1971. Flannery blames No Child Left Behind (NCLB) as one of the factors that have led to these decreased numbers. She explains how these students have been taught in the new corporate-backed and created era of scripted curriculums, graduation tests, and other tests that determined their value, along with their school and teacher's value. She explains the students' perspectives of teaching under NCLB in this way, "they were the ones who say, 'I remember my teachers. They had a manual, they opened it up, and they taught from it.' All they knew were teachers who read out of these books, and there was no creativity" (Flannery, 2016, n/p). Teaching can be a tough sell for students who were educated in this environment. There are additional explanations for the decrease of young people going into education- other career paths, such as in the computer science field, actively recruit the students and offer a variety of incentives. However, one cannot ignore the fact that since most college-

aged students have been alive, teachers have been regularly attacked by the media and general public. While the overall teacher attrition rates have remained fairly steady at 8-9% before and after NCLB, it is important to consider other factors that encourage teachers with experience to remain in the profession. One major factor is that teaching is hierarchal, where both pay and job security is gained by experience. Teachers' salaries are on a step-schedule, with step increases usually occurring every two years and capping out at twenty years. Teachers' also earn higher pay for higher degrees. If a teacher has invested time in earning a Master's degree, then that pay raise, along with their seniority pay raise, is an incentive to remain in the job. If a teacher wishes to leave teaching after year ten years to join the private sector, they would most likely be starting over at the entry level with a lower salary, and most likely fewer benefits. These conditions are even more difficult to handle during times of economic hardships, such as the 2008 recession.

### **Teacher Shortage**

The decrease in the supply of teachers, resulting from the decrease in the number of college graduates as well as rising numbers of teachers who leave the profession, has brought the predicted teacher shortages to fruition. Some states are hit harder than others; however, most states, like Georgia, have some districts facing shortages, usually rural or urban areas. Arizona, California, and Washington, DC are three states that have been facing extreme shortages for many years. Cronkite News, of Arizona PBS, examines the issues in education in Arizona. Penningroth (2017) reports on Arizona's teacher shortage and investigates why teachers are unhappy. For at least the past decade, many Arizona counties faced teacher shortages at the beginning of the school year. In order to uncover the reasons for this shortage, Cronkite news administered a survey to teachers asking about their working conditions and why they feel there is a teacher shortage. Over 160 teachers responded to this survey with some common complaints.

The majority complained about being “overworked, over-evaluated and undercompensated” and felt underappreciated by parents and legislators and bullied by administrators who they classified as “under-qualified and ill-equipped” (pg. 1). One teacher shared their perspective of the problem, “There is a shortage because there is a mentality of the state government to discredit, demoralize, and de-fund public education,” while another added, that every time policy decisions regarding education are made without teachers, “it chips away at the professionalism of the teacher profession in Arizona” (Penningroth, 2017, p. 1). This atmosphere does not encourage young people to join the profession and does not attract teachers from other states, both of which contribute to this shortage. California, like Arizona, has also faced teacher shortages for a number of years as well due to increasing student populations and teacher attrition. Watson (2017) reported on the numerous efforts school districts across the state of California have utilized to attract and retain teachers. The state has offered student loan paybacks and signing bonuses as recruitment and retention efforts. Washington, D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) is another district that has been hit hard. DCPS lost more than a quarter of their teaching staff for the 2016-2017 school year. Matos (2017), reporting for the Washington Post, obtained data on DCPS teacher resignations. In most DCPS schools, the faculty is stable, with the data showing that of the 115 schools in the system, 59 had two or fewer resignations. However, a handful of schools were hit hard with many mid-year resignations, ranging from 10% to 20%. Ballou High School was hit the hardest, losing 21 teachers, 28% of its faculty, from August through February. Some of the teachers that resigned explained their reasons to the Post. They cited a variety factors for their resignations, from student behavior, large classes and attendance issues, to lack of administrative support and unfair teacher evaluations. These are all factors that lead to unpleasant teaching environments; they are also directly related to school reforms, such as

NCLB and Race to the Top. These educational reforms have placed an unreasonable emphasis on student assessment as measured by high-stakes testing. One test usually determines if a student has shown growth, as determined by an algorithm that does not consider all increments of growth or non-school factors. Even if a student shows some growth it may not have increased enough to declare their teacher effective. For example, a fifth-grade teacher works all year with a student and raises their reading level up two grade levels, from first grade to fourth grade. Yet, the benchmark was that the student has to be at grade level. This student has shown growth and then is told they, along with their teacher, are not meeting the standards. This is discouraging to both the teacher and the student, as they both get a report showing their growth was not up to the standards. This makes retaining teachers in a struggling school like Ballou High because, even if the students show some growth, if they do not meet the benchmark the teacher is labelled as ineffective and they receive an unfavorable evaluation.

Texas and Oklahoma also have widely reported teacher shortages. There are a variety of reasons for these shortages, with low pay being one of them. Education Weekly reported that many teachers in Texas work second jobs. In a survey administered by Sam Houston State University, almost a third of teachers who responded said they hold outside jobs during the school year to support themselves and their families - 86 percent responded that they wanted to quit their second jobs but would need a pay raise of about \$9,000 to do so. Nationwide, about 16 percent of teachers across the country work a second job, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (Will, 2016, n/p). These factors do not encourage people to go into teaching and often makes teaching too stressful to remain in the classroom. A career in education does not appear very attractive and having holidays and summers off is no longer enough to draw young people in. The negativity surrounding the profession makes recruitment efforts very challenging

for many school districts. Yet, it is in this environment that politicians challenge universities and school districts to recruit the “best and the brightest” to enter the profession.

The notion of attracting and retaining teachers, particularly “the best and the brightest,” is not a new idea. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a time for the recruitment of women into the teaching profession, led by Beecher and founded on the idea that teaching is an extension of mothering, making women natural teachers, to the campaign to send East Coast girls out West to launch school houses on the frontier (Hoffman, 1977/2003; Goldstein, 2014). These early campaigns hinged on the fact that women were the considered natural teachers and best suited for the job of teaching. The Teacher Corps in the 1970s and today’s Teach for America both represent efforts to attract the “best and the brightest” into the teaching. Presidents and politicians have led recruitment efforts as well. Politicians, including presidents, provide a dual rhetoric regarding teaching. On the one hand, they attempt to glamorize teaching and claim to appreciate the work of teachers; while on the other hand, making teachers the scapegoats for all the evils and shortfalls of society. In his 2000 State of the Union address, President Clinton challenged all Americans to make sure that there is a talented, dedicated, well prepared teacher in every classroom across the country (Clinton, 2000, n/p). In 2002, when George W. Bush gave his No Child Left Behind (NCLB) signing address, he complements teachers by saying, “I thank you for teaching. Yours is indeed a noble profession. And our society is better off because you decided to teach...We trust you. We want you to have as much flexibility as possible to see to it that every child that walks in your classroom can succeed” (Bush, 2002, n/p). Yet, NCLB institutes policies that are not flexible and ushered in the shame and blame culture that remains prevalent in education. In his 2016 State of the Union address, President Barack Obama calls on Americans to continue to “recruit and support more great teachers for our kids” (Obama, 2016,



n/p). Yet, his Race to the Top built upon the unrealistic ideas of NCLB and created a competition for federal funds during a time of economic downturn. Education, and teachers themselves, have been center stage in the political and social arena for many years.

Educational reforms have been instituted, debated, and recycled from the time when teaching became a profession. Ravich (2000) reduces the great educational questions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to just two: “who was to be educated and what they were to learn” (p. 14). There are both educational questions; however, they are inherently questions of political and sociological importance, because they are really about who will be empowered and enriched in our society. The problem of educational reforms is that they ignore the broader societal context and the ramifications on society as a whole. This is something teachers are aware of and affects their perceptions of all educational reforms and their own obligations to their students. The negative perceptions of most educational reforms, such as the narrow focus on testing, contribute to the idea that the power of the teacher to change lives, to make a difference, is now limited. Teachers experience the harmful effects of this short-sighted thinking on their students, and that weakens their resolve. This weakened resolve combined with the increased workload and low-pay pushes many teachers out of the profession. These negative perceptions also contribute to making the profession less attractive to young people, which is cited as one of the contributing factors to the decrease of new education graduates.

In this dissertation, I examine the experience of teachers from the past and present, along with a history of the teaching profession, public education system, and educational reforms, to provide a rationale for the high teacher attrition rates. My overarching context question asks, “How do 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century teachers describe their struggles within the profession and how do these struggles reflect the broader socio-political context that shaped the teaching profession?”

This question provides the context of my study by analyzing the relationship between the feminization of teaching, educational reforms and teacher attrition; providing insight into how they are intertwined to provide the context of the socio-political forces that shaped the experiences of teachers in the classroom and contribute to teacher attrition. Teaching has always been considered a lower-status profession and this dissertation investigates the roots of this lower status, along with the effects this low status had and continues to have on the teaching profession and the lives of current teachers, which is the focus on my study. My research question asks,

How do former teachers describe the emotional, social-political conditions that contributed to their exit of their teaching in public schools?

### **Significance of Study**

In this dissertation, I illustrate how most educational reforms and policies recycle the same issues from the past centuries, creating an oppressive environment for teachers and reinforcing negative perceptions of teachers and public schools. The history of educational reforms illustrates the patriarchal power structure of our educational system, since teachers, the majority of whom are women, had no voice in the creation of these policies and reforms that dictate their profession. This, in turn, leads to reforms and policies that form the oppressive environment of the field of teaching and the current oppressive environment of both teaching and learning. Since the creation of the public-school system, reforms and policies were established not by teachers, which were and still are mostly females, but by mostly male educational leaders and politicians. Teachers were not and are still not consulted or trusted to make educational policy decisions; a notion supported by the media. Teachers continue to be portrayed in the media as inept and incapable of making policies about their work. These portrayals can be traced

back to the feminization of teaching, which was established with the profession, and continue to affect the perceptions of teachers.

I also explore the effects of the increasing government and corporate involvement in education. Businesses, in league with the government, have dictated educational policies since the establishment of the public-school system. These policies control every aspect of public education and teaching. These mostly white, wealthy, men of the corporate and political world, many of whom do not send their children to public school, establish the requirements for one to obtain teacher certification, what curriculum will be taught, essentially what knowledge is deemed important, how to teach, when to teach, and how to measure learning and progress. Considering the impact of the history of educational reforms, along with the history of teaching itself, is important to provide a “big picture” view of the educational system. The view provides insight into how policies affect teachers and teaching, as well as student experiences; revealing how much has changed and, surprisingly, how much remains the same. The presentation of stories from disillusioned teachers from the past and present illustrate the negative effects of these educational reforms as measures that reduce teaching and learning to a few bits of data. The ways in which to improve our educational system, including the job of teaching, vary greatly and are widely debated in the political and public arenas.

The most common practice that has been recycled since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is the use of standardized tests to measure student achievement, and more recently, teacher effectiveness. The use of these tests as the main evaluation tool creates a hostile environment to teachers and stymies any real progress because the emphasis is on one report that determines which teachers are effective and which are ineffective, in addition to naming entire school districts as high performance or low performance districts. This report reduces learning and growth to something

that can be measured by one or two standardized tests and creates misleading labels that harm students. Despite the fact that most teachers know there is much more to learning than performance on a test, testing still becomes the focus of most schools, from elementary to high school, from February through May. Many elementary schools even hold Pep Rallies to get kids excited for testing. The emphasis on testing and performance becomes the focus of faculty meetings and district initiatives (Booher-Jennings, 2005, 2006). This creates a stressful environment for administrators, teachers, and students. This stressful environment leads to higher instances of teacher illness, an increase in missed days, which leads to increased costs for substitute teachers, which leads to pressure to not miss days. Additional pressures include conformity to the testing mentality, negative consequences for speaking out against testing or district initiatives, such as unfavorable evaluations and teaching assignments, which often creates a very negative work environment (Farber, 2010; Finkle, 2013; Thibodeaux, M. Labat, Lee & C. Labat, 2015; American Federation of Teachers, 2017). The ripple effect of this fervent emphasis on testing affects the students as well, as those that do not perform well on tests are considered “at risk of failing” and placed in remedial, test preparation courses in addition to their academic courses. This makes the students feel less intelligent and capable than their peers and causes them stress, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure (O’Brennan, Pas, & Bradshaw, 2017; Herman, Hickmon-Rose, & Reinke, 2018). The goals set for student achievement on these assessments, such as 90% pass rate, are often unrealistic and do not consider the many other factors, including non-school factors (Watkins, 2012; Bohnstedt, 2013). Additionally, NCLB sets different goals for different subgroups of students, based on race and socio-economic status. The achievement gap that these subgroups revealed took on greater importance with the passage of NCLB and the requirements to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which included raising

the test scores of subgroups. For accountability measures, subgroups were black, white, multiracial, special education, and economically disadvantaged (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2001). In 2012, I was called to my principal's office and told that the superintendent wants me to raise my test scores for the black students. There was, and continues to be, a gap between our white and black students. In my case, my black students were passing at a rate of 55%, while my white students were passing at a rate of 71%. This does not consider my special education or economically disadvantaged students, which were different subgroups. I asked him how he would like me to do that and he replied that he did not know. He suggested that I should be sure to include any differentiation and remediation activities on my lesson plans as a way to document my efforts to close this gap. Had I not been a veteran teacher with a high sense of self-efficacy, I may have been intimidated by that request, or gotten upset and paranoid that I might lose my job. Teachers with less than three years of experience do not have a legal expectation of employment and can be non-renewed for no reason, so a newer teacher would have reason to be fearful for their job. However, I just continued to teach the content the best way I knew how and remediated when possible, documenting all my efforts. I admit that I spent more time than usual teaching how to take a test, using different test-taking strategies such as color coding and process of elimination, instead of teaching the content. I also admit to being nervous before test scores came out, knowing they would be announced and scrutinized in a faculty meeting, with the good scores highlighted in green and the bad test scores highlighted in red. I was the only Economics teacher, so everyone knew it was "my fault" if the students did poorly and/or we scored below the other schools in the district. Additionally, the district attempted to tap into our competitive spirit and compares each school's scores, offering incentives to the administration for having the highest test scores. Many teachers, both veteran and new, find this competitive, shame-inducing

environment very intimidating and oppressive. Thomas (2017) reported that it is not only new teachers that are affected by these demands, and that many veteran teachers cannot handle this pressure and retire early, often being pressured by the administration to retire. NCLB promoted a “new” way of teaching, one that is “data-driven” and “student-focused,” conveniently available in packaged curriculum programs, scripted and ready to use, as if what teachers had been previously doing was inadequate. One English teacher with thirty-nine years of experience, remarked, “I have never seen such a ridiculous focus on standardized tests and testing.” While another teacher explains that they retired five years early, “because I just couldn’t take it anymore...there is less and less time for grading and doing those little things that go into great teaching” (Thomas, 2017, p. 3).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, another effect of the increase of negative perceptions of teaching, and public schools in general, is that fewer college students major in education and enter the field. This decrease of future teachers, when combined with high teacher attrition rates, has led to teacher shortages, as is referenced earlier in this study. Many states have faced shortages for many years, especially in the areas of special education, math, and science. The school districts that are hurt the most are urban and rural areas with a high number of low-income and minority students, while the more affluent suburbs have very low teacher attrition rates. The disparity between areas with teaching shortages and those without teacher shortages is due to more than income- it is a result of the series of educational reforms that use the “shame and blame” accountability methods to punish not only the districts but the teachers themselves (Farber, 2010; Strauss, 2013; Westervelt, 2016a, 2016b). Bader (2017) shares the story of a Green Bay Area public school teacher who quit her job after three years in the district. Karen Westcott, a 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, felt her calling was to teach at-risk kids and she loved it and was

good at it. She was 2014 recipient of a “Golden Apple Award,” presented each year to Green Bay area teachers who excel at their profession. Yet, in 2017, she left Green Bay Area public schools out of fear for her safety and frustration for her students. She told the school board, “I would not survive another year in the toxic setting at Washington. I must resign, even though I have a broken heart. Because, I cannot survive in this unhealthy and unsafe environment any longer,” she continues, “In addition to verbal abuse, the people at Washington are getting injured more than ever...just a couple of weeks ago a teacher was taken away in an ambulance, with a bleeding head wound caused by a fight among three students” (Bader, 2017, p. 1). She recounted the negative effects this environment had on the students as well, saying they ultimately will pay the price for this toxic environment. She told the board about one student that she taught in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. By the time he was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, he went from being a polite young man, to an aggressive, foul-mouthed, violent young man. She blamed the toxic environment of the school for this change. The environment of this school is not unique, it is occurring in many cities across the country. This unsafe environment promotes aggressive behaviors and prevents learning, with the kids academically falling more behind every year. Teachers like Westcott can most likely move to a “better” district, even though their heart is in teaching the at-risk students (Ayers, 2010; Farber, 2010; Riggs, 2013; Heim, 2016; Matos, 2017). Schools like this one that will be labeled as failing and have the state and federal governments directing them, usually with scripted curriculums and half-hearted professional development provided by an agent of the state department of education that has limited experience in the classroom. In many cases, professional development is now conducted online, which makes it easier and cheaper to reach more teachers, because districts do not have to pay for substitute teachers to cover classrooms. While online professional development is not necessarily inferior to face-to-face courses, it is

usually completed individually on the teachers' own time, either during planning or their personal time. This type of rushed professional learning exemplifies the notion that this professional development is not genuine and is just being completed to look good for some report. The focus is not on the non-school factors that are hindering student achievement; it is only the in-school factors that are emphasized. State and federal interventions can move beyond curricular directives. Under NCLB, entire schools could be reconstituted if a school fails for five consecutive years, meaning the entire faculty was fired, and then re-hired if they applied and were approved. There have been studies of these reconstitution actions, with the findings showing mixed results (Rhim, 2004; Gottlieb, 2009; Kowal & Hassel, 2007; Dee & Jacobs, 2010). In some cases, the states turned the schools into Charter schools, simply replaced the principal, and, the most drastic measures of replacing the entire faculty. Kowal and Hassel (2007), found that restructuring has been largely an urban phenomenon. They found that in the 2005–06 school year, approximately ninety percent of schools in restructuring were located in urban districts. Moreover, the restructuring in fifteen school districts accounted for nearly one-half of all schools in restructuring (p. 267). One such district is the Washington, DC Public Schools, referenced earlier in this study, where in 2016, nearly 200 teachers have quit their jobs since the school year began, forcing principals to scramble to cover their classes with substitutes and depriving many students of quality instruction in critical subjects (Matos, 2017, p. 1). The school with the highest number of resignations, Ballou High school, was reconstituted in the 2015-2016 school year, its second shakeup in five years. The mid-year resignation rate was lower in the years before the reconstitution. In the D.C. system, 184 of about 4,000 teachers, quit from September to mid-May. That was a 44 percent increase over the 128 teachers who left in the 2013-2014 school year. These early and mid-year resignations hurt the students the most, as



they are left with long-term substitutes for most of the classes. The lowest income students, like the ones in D.C., suffer the most from high teacher turnover and attrition. In California for example, schools with high percentages of low-income and minority students are consistently staffed with higher numbers of underprepared teachers (O'Brennan, Pas, & Bradshaw, 2017; Herman, Hickmon-Rose, & Reinke, 2018). The most-qualified teachers are typically recruited to better-funded districts with high levels of support. (NCTAF, 2002). Teachers are hesitant to work in a high-needs district out of fear of being punished for low-test scores. What teacher would want to work there when their evaluations, and in turn, careers, are based on student growth and performance? This is a prime example of how the children who need the "best and the brightest" teachers get the opposite- they get the uncertified teachers, the teachers who are being punished by the district, or even well-intended teachers who eventually leave due to poor working conditions, such as a lack of resources, and unprepared students. These students often do not have the support at home and it is up to the strongest of teachers to provide them a foundation for learning, often by providing for their basic needs first. While they are attempting to make a difference in the school in which no one wanted to teach, they are being evaluated and punished for lower test scores. Even when students show some progress, if it does not meet the mandated goals, the teacher is labeled as ineffective. This takes a toll on the teachers, administrators, and students and creates a very negative environment for everyone.

Another by-product of educational reforms and the competitive "shame and blame" culture it creates is teacher depression and disillusionment in the career choice. Teachers can simply lose hope. Strauss (2013) writes about teacher depression and highlights David Fritz, a middle school teacher, who writes and illustrates the story of his own depression, caused by changes that reform has brought to his classroom and his profession. Before he began his comic

strip, he posted on Facebook and asked if any other teachers have suffered from bouts of depression due to changes in their (teaching) profession and he received 98 responses within the first day. The comic portrays his life in teaching and his struggles and joys of teaching and how the emphasis on standardized testing changed the profession for the worse and made teaching miserable, as well as making school miserable for the students. Ayers and Alexander-Tanner (2010) portray the effects of reforms in an elementary school classroom. They depict an elementary school classroom that is being observed by outside administrators who instruct the teacher to use their one-size-fits-all methods and then wonder why the students do not respond well and the teacher is unhappy. There are other published stories of fed-up teachers who quit because they could not handle being part of the problem- a system that oppresses teachers and actually prevents genuine learning (Riggs, 2013; Matos, 2017; Penningroth, 2017). These stories resonate with the complaints have been recorded since the creation of the public-school system (Hoffman, 1977/2003; Goldstein, 2014). These stories proclaim that the standardization of both teaching and learning has taken the joy out of both teaching and learning. There are scripted curriculums and a “one size fits all” approach to teaching and learning that simply is not realistic as students learn at different paces and in different ways and teaching is an art, and different methods work for different personalities (Ayers & Alexander-Tanner, 2010; Finkle, 2013; Strauss, 2013). The irony, which adds insult to injury, is that this takes place when there are demands on teachers to differentiate their instruction for individual needs; with the demands to document this differentiation for “proof” of their good teaching efforts. Of course, this differentiation is also standardized as well. Teachers now spend more time documenting all this differentiation, remediation, acceleration, and the fact that they teach the standards, which leaves them little time for planning and teaching. These demands, in addition to the unrealistic

achievement goals, placed on teachers contribute low teacher moral, as Finkle (2013) and Ayers & Alexander-Tanner (2010) portray in their comics.

The fact that the same reforms in education continue to be recycled for over a century illustrate how little progress has been made in our public education system. Ironically, it is 2018 and teachers are still complaining about the same poor working conditions, lack of resources and evaluation methods (Goldstein, 2014; Hoffman, 1977/2003). The government is still complaining about a lack of student achievement. Educational reforms focus on the symptom instead of the problem, which distracts us from addressing the underlying sources of the perceived problem of unacceptable student achievement. There is a continual, purposeful focus on in-school factors that affect student achievement and a complete absence on the non-school factors that we all know affect student achievement. For example, we know that a student who is hungry, in pain, stressed or lacking sleep will have trouble learning. All education majors are taught the importance of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, yet the reforms instruct them to ignore this logic. Maslow's hierarchy is a five-tier model of human needs. Maslow (1943) explained that people are motivated to achieve certain needs and that some needs take precedence over others. Our most basic need is for physical survival, and this will be the first thing that motivates our behavior. Once that level is fulfilled the next level up is what motivates us, and so on. Maslow considers these basic and psychological needs as deficiency needs. As these needs go unmet, the deficiency grows. The higher these needs are met, the more a person can progress toward their self-fulfillment needs. So many of our students do not have their basic needs met; which in turn, means their psychological needs cannot be met. However, these students are expected to learn at the same pace as students whose needs are being met at a higher level. Education reforms ignore these non-school factors, which research and teachers cite as the

underlying sources of their learning problems and continue to spend billions of dollars on testing and other items that do not address any non-school factors (Maslow, 1943; Ravich, 2000; Boother-Jennings, 2005; 2006; Chigos, 2012; ‘Met Life Survey’ 2013; Phillips, 2015). In fact, social programs continue to be cut while per-pupil school expenditures continue to increase. Those in education, mainly teachers and school-level administrators know this and become increasingly frustrated with each additional report and reform requirements. Many optimistic educators remain in the field, hopeful they can make things work. However, many continue to leave the profession, causing high teacher turnover rates. The reforms will continue to be mandated and students will continue to be tested, so districts will have to find a way to recruit and retain teachers in this environment.

### **What We Know and Still Need to Learn**

Curriculum studies focuses on “what knowledge is of the most worth?” and who determines the answer to this question. My study will contribute an overview of educational reforms, along with narratives of teachers’ voices, to answer this most critical question of curriculum studies. Critical theorists, such as Giroux (1981, 1983, 2001, 2011, 2012), Apple (1982, 1988, 2001), and McLaren (1994, 2003) scrutinize those in power and what measures they take to maintain their power and explore the possibilities of teachers as agents of change. For teachers to be agents of change, they must have a voice in educational policies and reforms. Giroux (2012) specifically examines what he considers a war on teachers as public intellectuals and this war strives to keep the power out of the teachers’ hands. This study will contribute to this discourse within critical inquiry that links the history of the teaching profession, the feminization of teaching, and the socio-political context of public education that contributes to the long-standing subordinate role of teachers.

In addition to adding to the field of Critical Theory, this study contributes to the field of Critical Feminist Studies by viewing the role of gender in the establishment of the teaching profession and how critical the feminization of teaching was to the establishment of the public-school system itself. This process was as dependent on the subordinate status of women, as it was on the low-pay for teachers that enabled the system to develop. Horace Mann (1841), in his report to the Board, used this salary gap as a reason to hire female teachers, stating, “a female will keep quite as good a school as a man, at two-thirds of the expense” (p. 46). If not for the entrance of women into the teaching profession, there would have been insufficient funds to establish a public education system. This study will join the works that analyze the role of women and the feminization of teaching in the development of the teaching profession and public-school system. Hoffman (1977/2003), Grumet (1981, 1988, 2010), Weiler (1988), and Goldstein (2014), as well as hooks (2000) each view the teaching profession through a feminist lens. Hoffman and Grumet provide a comprehensive examination of the process of the feminization of teaching and how this process laid the foundation that continues to affect teachers today.

The work of critical theorists, along with feminists, has impacted the field of and the scholarly work of curriculum studies. By exploring the intertwined nature of the history and socio-political context in which the teaching profession and public-school system was created, the foundation of the oppressive nature of the both the profession and system is revealed. By adding the experiences of contemporary teachers, I provide insight into the effects of more recent reforms, the longstanding perceptions of the profession, and teacher attrition. The goal of this dissertation is to shed light onto the roots of the force that has enabled our government to leave

teachers out of the discussion when determining the major components of their profession-teaching and learning.

## CHAPTER 2

### TEACHING CONTEXTS

#### The Key to the Future Is Found in the Past

##### **Teaching is Women's Work**

To understand the current state of education and educational reforms, it is important to trace the history of the teaching profession, and our educational system. The inception of the profession of teaching, along with the creation of the public-school system, dates back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century. Hoffman (1977/2003) and Goldstein (2014) cite industrialization, urbanization and immigration as the main catalysts for the inception of public schooling and development of the teaching profession. The primary emphasis was on elementary education, with the main focus being the best way to mold the young minds of the new republic; and who was best suited to do this molding. Horace Mann (1841) was a leader in the movement for both public education and the movement to create an image of the teacher into an “exemplary woman,” as opposed to previous image of teachers as second-rate men that could not find other work (Hoffman, 1977/2003, p. 38). In his *Fourth Annual Report of the Board of Education* (1841), Mann presents a strong argument that females are “incomparably better teachers for young children than males, cannot admit of a doubt” (p. 45). His argument is based on the presumed moral superiority of females, along with the idea that they are less vulnerable to the most common and notorious vices, such as profanity and intemperance. Mann goes on to proclaim, females are also “endowed by nature with stronger parental impulses, and this makes the society of children delightful, and turns duty into pleasure” (p. 45). Thus, the argument goes, women were not only more suited to be teachers, they would even delight in the task. Additional merits include; females were less likely to seek “future honors and accolades” or seek an escape from their “domestic circle” to

make a name for themselves in the world. They would be content to remain in their domestic sphere. In addition to these arguments, Mann also presents females as more likely to elicit a “feeling of chivalry” toward young men that would promote better behavior. The young men would, “respect a request from a mistress, though they would spurn a command from a master” (p. 46). The influence of a female teacher is “of a moral character,” and would promote peace and unity in a school. Mann concludes that females were “infinitely more fit than males to be guides and exemplars of young children” (p. 45-46). Mann, and others, initiated the common school system to “perfect” the new republic, and normal schools to train women teachers. Mann’s ideas were successful, and women became the new face of teaching.

By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, teaching became a viable career choice for women, providing them with options other than, or until, marriage. Catherine Beecher was a leading advocate of teaching as an ideal profession for women. Beecher built upon the ideas promoted by Mann (1841) and touted the profession as not only one that women were inherently suited for but also as one that was a high and honorable profession which would appropriately challenge educated women (Hoffman, 1977/2003). Beecher saw teaching as an opportunity for educated women to not be forced into marriage, a method to place them in the public sphere, and provide them with independence. Louisa May Alcott (1873) declared teaching as an occupation for “women who stand alone in the world.” (p. 207).

In addition to women entering this newly established profession, the numbers of teachers grew tremendously. By 1900, there were 450,000 teachers in the United States, with 75% being women (Hoffman, 1977/2003, p. 25). The U.S. Department of Bureau Labor Statistics (2016) reported that in 2014 there were 3.1 million public school teachers, with 76% being women. The report broke it down further and reported that in 2014, in elementary school, 81% of the teachers



were women and in secondary schools, 57% were women. The high percentage of women, particularly in elementary education, illustrates how the “feminization of teaching” (Grumet, 1981, 1988) established norms in the educational system that remain today. The feminization of teaching is an essential component of the history of education. This laid the foundation for the profession, establishing long-held norms and acceptance by society of these norms. The feminization of teaching is one of the major factors that laid the foundation of the profession, as well as the establishment of public schools.

While teaching enabled women to have a career of their own, there were drawbacks that continue to affect the profession. The feminization of teaching saw vast numbers of women enter into teaching; however, the power and decisions were always held by men. The advent of “normal schools” was deemed necessary when women entered the teaching force. Interestingly enough, these schools were not necessary when teachers were men. The men did not require any special training to be principals and superintendents; they were automatically promoted when women became the teachers due to the subordinate status of women. The notion of the teacher martyr, where the teacher is a selfless woman, working for sub-standard wages and conditions for the “good of her beloved students,” is a notion that remains today and hinders teachers from being considered educated professionals. The roots of this notion can be found in 19<sup>th</sup> century society and the doctrine of separate spheres, which held that women and men maintained separate spheres, with women being in the home, and men in the “unruly” labor market. This doctrine reinforced middle class domesticity and maintained the system of patriarchy both in the family and the labor market (Hoffman, 1977/2003, p. 31). Mann (1841) cited that doctrine of separate spheres as one of the reasons females were more suited for teaching. He considered teaching a profession that would remain in the domestic sphere; which is one of the reasons

women would be content to work as teachers, even “delighting in the task.” Hoffman summarizes the 19<sup>th</sup> century argument about why women were best suited for teaching, “The female teacher remained truly feminine; she had no desire for notoriety and, like the ideal mother, worked not for money, not for influence, nor for honor, nor for ease, but with the simple, single purpose of doing good” (p. 37). While teaching offered women independence, the profession women were so “well-suited” for would be a double-edge sword. Teaching offered independence to some degree; however, without the respect (and salary) that comes only with a “male” profession.

In addition to these notions about women teachers, there were also economic factors that led to women becoming the main labor source for teaching. One can make a strong argument that without the feminization of teaching, the educational system would not have had the funding to be successful. Women provided a low-cost labor source, while the men moved into higher paying administrative jobs. Women were paid less than half the salary of males and this is a critical component that led to the success of the establishment of public schools. If female teachers were paid the salary of males, the system would have gone bankrupt and never gotten off the ground. In 1840, in Massachusetts, male teachers were paid \$33.08 per year, while female teachers were paid \$12.75 per year (Mann, 1841, p. 11). Mann used this salary gap as a reason to hire female teachers, stating, “a female will keep quite as good a school as a man, at two-thirds of the expense” (p. 46). The salary gap was not an issue for women looking for employment. At the time, the only method for lower class women, both white and black, to gain employment was to parlay their domestic roles into paid labor. This meant more domestic work or factory work. This offered some independence but not as much as teaching would. Teaching granted women geographic mobility and more independence than factory or domestic work. The

economic motivation was evident, with women accepting the lower pay as a trade-off for the independence teaching provided. Additionally, women were already paid less, so this was not out of the norm for society at the time; a fact that established the patriarchal hierarchy in the educational system that remains today. The feminization of teaching, as well as the accompanying accepted gender norms, were reinforced by the "martyr teacher mother" claim that teaching was an extension of mothering; thus, preventing any strong arguments for higher pay. Of course, this "martyr teacher mother" image conjures up images of upper and middle class white women that did not constitute the main source of teachers then or now. The issue of the low pay of teachers remains. Teachers acknowledge that they enter the profession aware of the low salary, thus signaling their acceptance. However, if you factor in "first-generation" college students who major in education, which are the bulk of the education majors (NCES, 2005) the lower salary of teaching is still more than their parents. There are not high numbers of wealthy students joining the field of education; mainly due to the lack of status the profession provides, along with the low salary. The feminization of teaching is a contributing factor to the lower-status of the profession, the lower pay, as well as the reforms enacted by the male-dominated government.

The long-term effects of the feminization are evident throughout the history of educational policies, especially in regards to teacher salaries, and the reforms, from the centralizing of the public education system, the use of standardized testing to group and track students, the "Back to Basics" in the 1960s, and "No Child Left Behind" in the 2000s. These reforms placed the blame on America's problems, both social and economic, on the shoulders of teachers. The 2010 Documentary *Waiting for "Superman"* director Davis Guggenheim investigates the public- school system in the United States to illustrate the state of decline of our

educational system. This documentary is pro-NCLB, pro-standardized testing and charter schools, reminiscent of *A Nation at Risk* (1983). Guggenheim profiles five students in “dropout factory” schools in the inner cities. The film does acknowledge the role of non-school factors such as poverty and crime; however, the solution is to place these students in charter schools, not fix public schools. The film criticizes teachers’ unions and teacher tenure, claiming these are obstacles to teacher improvement. Rick Ayers (2010) of the Washington Post, published an answer sheet to address the film, claiming it provides unrealistic notions of the role of charter schools and standardized testing and feeds into the “shame and blame” culture of educational reforms. Ayers also points out the film’s emphasis on men being the solution to the problems. He points out that the film, “suggests that teacher improvement is a matter of increased control and discipline over teachers,” and that, “that teachers just need a few good men with hedge funds to come to the rescue” portraying the predominately female teaching force as weak and ineffective (2010, n/p). He continues by explaining how teaching is devalued due to the female work force, with lower salaries and less control over working conditions than other professions. He compares the salary of an elementary school teacher, which is typically female, to the salary of a hedge fund manager, which is typically male. In 2009, the highest paid elementary school teacher made approximately \$80,000 a year. The top 25 hedge fund managers took in \$25 billion in 2009, enough to hire 658,000 new teachers. The target audience for this film is upper and middle-class white America, who already supports the ideas touted in the film. These ideas and perceptions trace back to the middle and late 1800s when the public-school system was established, and women became the teachers.

## **Educational Reform: The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same**

**Foundations of educational reforms: 1865-1920.** The earliest educational reforms related to the creation of a centralized public-school system. This included what to teach, to whom to teach, and who would do the teaching. The development of the teaching profession reflected the issues of education itself, mainly who would control the school system. The centralization of schools marked the development of the public-school system we see today. As schools were established out west and the South, a common system emerged. While most students did not attend past the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most children did attend primary school in some capacity. The schools were overcrowded, and the conditions were rough, in both rural and urban areas, and the teaching conditions were tough; however, the expectations for teachers were high. This was also the time when a flood of immigrants came to the United States, and, as a result, the reforms reflect the nativist sentiments of the time period. Adele Shaw (1903) wrote a series of six “first hand studies of American public schools.” She reported on the terrible conditions of New York City schools and the tireless work of the teachers to educate the immigrant students. The role of the teacher was to assimilate these immigrant children and to produce good American citizens. She provides a favorable view of teachers; however, she provides strong criticisms of the school systems – from their run down, overcrowded buildings, to the “despotic” administrators.

The use of standardized testing to measure student achievement and ability is another recycled practice for the past. No Child Left Behind (2001) may have reinvigorated the use of high stakes testing to assess and track students; however, using standardized tests to group and track students is not a new concept and dates back over a century to the wave of educational reforms from the early 1900s that focused on efficiency (Ravich, 2000). Progressivism focused

on efficiency, an idea brought on by factories and assembly lines, and the scientific management of schools. This efficiency was applied to everything from homemaking to education. This era is one where the shift of educational authority is given to scientific experts in the new schools of education. The scientific experts, such as Edward L. Thorndike, David Snedden, and G. Stanley Hall believed schools should increase their efficiency by dividing students up into “appropriate” programs. This reflects a shift in thinking about the how to educate children. In the past, all children had equal access to the same educational opportunities; whereas now, in an effort to increase efficiency, children were tested and placed on an educational path which prepared them for their future occupation. Education now was based on utility and needs to prepare students for the work force, and a few for college. Appropriate programs were put in place to correct the problems in the school caused by the “laggards in the schools” (Ravich, 2000, p. 89). Replaced “laggards” with “children left behind” and one can see where NCLB has its roots. Instead of looking at the possible issues that were causing the lag, they instead created a new “differentiated” curriculum for these “problem” students. During this time period, the early 1900s, most students left after the 8th grade to go to work; however, a small number did continue their academic education in order to attend college. To determine which students were appropriate for not only college but the other vocational programs, schools used intelligence tests. The remainder of the students, those not deemed appropriate for college, were sorted into other programs. This led to assigning students into “tracks,” citing that society benefitted the most from an educational system that prepared students for their future roles as workers and homemakers. The prevailing belief was that intelligence was fixed and their paths were set at an early age and that education should be determined by the child’s future occupation. An example of Snedden’s social efficiency movement in action is seen in the Cleveland public schools, where

the superintendent, William H. Elson decided that this differentiation should begin in elementary schools, which were grades 1-8 at the time. He believed that the elementary curriculum should be reorganized because, “the social order needs lawyers, doctors, preachers, teachers, men of science, of art, and office holders, but it takes but 4% of breadwinners of our country to do all the professional work of society” (Charters, 1923, p. 13-14). The remaining 95% of the children in Cleveland were destined to be industrial and commercial workers. This speaks volumes about the notion of equality of opportunity. These ideas reflect the prevailing beliefs of the early 1900s that the academic curriculum was only suited to children of “strong mental capacity.” This mental capacity was determined by IQ tests, another hallmark of the social efficacy and scientific management of schools era (Ravich, 2000, p. 91). The Cleveland public school system is just one example of how an urban city chose to deal with increasing numbers of school-aged children. Cleveland, and other school districts, relied on the new experts, these “educational engineers” who promised to make schools more efficient. This era set the tone that remains today that places education in the hands of “experts,” many of whom do not even work in education, who claim to have the new solution to our “modern” educational problems, such as Common Core (2009), Brain-based learning (1990-2000), and so many others.

The ideology of social efficiency gained permanency with the 1918 Cardinal Principles on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (CRSE), which was sponsored by the National Education Association (NEA). The main idea of this report was to justify the creation of different curriculums for high school students. They claimed that schools needed to respond to the changing social and economic trends, such as the rise of factories. They also claimed that due to increase in immigration, high school enrollment was larger and more diverse, with the large number of new students being “less capable” than previous students. And finally, they cited the

new educational theories by Snedden, Thorndike, and Bobbit to legitimize their claims on the merits of testing and classifying students. With this report, the ideas of the Progressive “experts” remained firmly intact until the 1950s.

This early era of education, the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century, is marked by the transformation of the rural school house to the professionally managed centralized public-school systems we have today. The responsibility of teaching was placed on the shoulders of “virtuous, moral women” entrusted to guide the future generations to become “productive American citizens.” The responsibility of running the schools, along with determining what was to be taught, and how, was given to the schoolmen, business leaders and other civic elites/politicians (Hoffman, 1977/2003; Goldstein, 2014). This era also experiences the rise of experts in education who would promote various methods of education to provide the strongest results. Scientific principles, such as social efficiency, along with the use of standardized tests ushered in new standards and grouping of students.

The new school system, much like the old system, did not empower teachers to make decisions regarding curriculum and teaching methods. Teachers had no power or collaboration in setting educational policies. The educational system’s hierarchy continued, with men maintaining the power and women continuing to play the role of “dutiful daughters” content to remain in this domestic sphere of shaping the lives of young children. There was some backlash, however, and teachers in urban areas, such as Chicago and New York, felt exploited and decided to organize. Margaret Haley (1904), business agent of the Chicago Teachers’ Federation, spoke to the National Education Association in 1904 and presented her argument for teachers to organize. Haley presented a variety of reasons for teachers to organize, citing the need for democracy to be preserved through a strong education system equipped with strong teachers.



Two major reasons were the fact that teachers worked in poor conditions, such as overcrowded classrooms, and were overworked for little compensation, with no provisions for old age or tenure. Her arguments touched many teachers; however, teacher organizations were limited to the urban areas and failed to spread to the rest of the country. One reason for this could be the notion that teaching was a temporary career for women until they married. This was the prevailing belief at the time so one could question the need for retirement or tenure for a temporary profession. Additionally, many did not consider teaching a profession, something that Haley mentioned in her speech, and Haley's demands for provisions would be deemed unnecessary for a "job" that is on the same level as seamstress or factory worker. These ideas carry over into teacher attrition rates, which were not tracked during this time; however, there were no documented incidents of teachers quitting in large numbers due to these conditions. There was no shortage of teachers and, while some teachers did complain amongst themselves, the majority of teachers did not consider teaching a lifelong profession, so little was done to promote change. This era, influenced by industrialization and immigration, laid the foundation for the system of public education, the teaching profession, and educational reforms.

**Modern education: 1920 – 1960.** There were many social, political and economic changes in the United States and the system of public education usually reflected each of them. The years between World War I and World War II brought an increased use of standardized and intelligence testing. There was a renewed emphasis on the necessity of schools to prepare citizens who could function as productive and loyal, citizens of the United States. World War I ushered in an isolationist period for our country, as well as longing for the past when "American" values were emphasized and the American way meant working the farms and manufacturing in the factories. Vocational education continued to grow, with a strong foundation

laid by the Smith Hughes Act of 1917. Congress passed the Vocational Education Act in 1946 and then added the Health Amendments Act of 1956, which added Title II to the 1946 act. The purpose of these acts was to organize and streamline the laws passed by Congress pertaining to vocational education. The country needed factory workers and that is what the school provided. That all changed on October 4, 1957 when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik I. The response of the American people and the government is considered a watershed moment for the American educational system (Toppo, 2008; Goldstein, 2014). The general consensus was that America's failing educational system was to blame for the Soviet's lead in the "Space Race." The Cold War represented an "in" for the federal government to become more involved in public education. Previous federal involvement had been minimal. *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1952, 1954) illustrates the lack of federal involvement in schools until this point. While the Supreme Court instructed schools to desegregate "in due speed," the federal government did not enforce this until almost six years later in Little Rock, Arkansas and then in other states. The Cold War, however, appealed to the masses, particularly white America, by tapping into the public's nationalist sentiments and fears brought on by the threat of communism and nuclear war. William Pinar (2012) explains, "It was onto the American public school that Cold War anxieties were projected" (p. 63). The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) enacted in 1958 by the Kennedy administration was a direct response to the threat symbolized by Sputnik. With the launch of Sputnik, the Soviets were establishing their technological and scientific dominance. The United States government would not stand for this and decided schools were to blame because they were not teaching a rigorous enough curriculum that focused on math and science. Initially NDEA was referred to as a restoration of "Law and Order" and then, simply, "Back to Basics." (Derthick, 1959). The media portrayed schools and teachers as traitors and claimed that

the schools were at fault for all of the protests of the era, the anti-war, civil rights, and others, because they failed to produce obedient patriotic students (Dean, 2007; Powell, 2007, Toppo, 2008; Goldstein, 2014). Public school teachers themselves became the scapegoats, defined as traitors who “stabbed us in the back” (Pinar, 2012, p. 64). This sentiment allows the public to project their fears about the social changes, such as desegregation, and communism, onto the teachers and public schools. The government then increased their control over the teachers because they were the easiest to control and the public would support their efforts, due to the negative press the government generated and the fact that teaching was already a lower-status profession. There were scripted curriculums and an emphasis on math and science, utilizing skill and drill teaching methods (Powell, 2007). Successful classrooms were considered those that had uniformly compliant students, reciting the same content and thoughts, passing the same tests. There was a return to the classrooms of the early 1900s, when nativist policies dictated teaching, students were grouped and placed in pathways based on their test scores, and the emphasis was on creating productive patriotic American citizens, with these methods of shame and blame, as well as control, being emphasized whenever America is threatened by outside forces, such as September 11, 2001, or another country’s education system ranks higher than the United States (Bracey, 2007; Powell, 2007; Giroux, 2012; Goldstein, 2014).

The effect of these policies on teacher attrition is notable. J. Whitener (1965) study of teacher survival in 1950s Missouri schools found that younger teachers were the most at-risk for not surviving and leaving the profession, with 38% of the cohort surviving the first five years, with over 75% of those that survived the first five years surviving at least ten years in the district. Charters (1970) and Mark and Anderson (1978) showing similar figures in their studies. These studies found that age and gender were significant factors in determining teacher survival, as

more women were entering the workforce in general, meaning more employment opportunities were available to women. In 1950, one in three women were participating in the labor force, with women between the ages of 16 – 34 participation rates of thirty-four percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000). Participation rates for adult women rose dramatically in the 1970s and by 1980, the participation rates for women in the work force were 50% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2003). While those numbers illustrate full and part-time employment, the rate of women who worked part time also rose, with full-time participation rates at 38% in 1960 to 45% in 1980. At the turn of the century to the mid-1900s, work was considered temporary, as women were expected to quit when they got married. The idea of working for an independent income gained some merit during the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While employment opportunities for women generally remained limited to office, secretarial, nursing, and other “female” professions, there were more opportunities for women available, which could explain the interest in teacher attrition, along with higher numbers of women leaving the profession.

**Excellence in education: 1980- present.** In 1981, the idea that schools were in crisis appeared yet again when Ronald Reagan appointed a commission to create a comprehensive report on American schools. This conveniently coincided with the Reagan’s space program “Star Wars” and the nuclear weapons standoff with the Soviet Union. *A Nation at Risk* (1983) was the scathing report on public education, as the name implies. Berliner and Biddle (1995) call this educational crisis the “Manufactured Crisis,” and call *A Nation at Risk* “the mother of all critiques” of American education (p. 139). This crisis began in 1980, with the election of Reagan, and coincides with the increase of American patriotism and a cry for America to be number one in all areas. This notion dates back to the embarrassment of the Russian Sputnik launch in 1957. This report generated a great deal of public attention toward education;

unfortunately, it was negative attention. Gregg Toppo (2008), in his article “Nation at Risk: The Best Thing or the Worst Thing for Education?” examined the impact of this report on its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. This report rejuvenated the era of tough talk regarding public schools that began with Sputnik and increased federal involvement in public schools by passing reforms such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Toppo uses this direct quote from *A Nation at Risk* (1983), “If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves,” (p.1) to illustrate the inherent Cold War rhetoric used in the report. The government continually uses this combative “us or them” rhetoric to generate public support for whatever it wanted the public to accept. Corporate programs for educational reform gained its strength during this time. The Business Roundtable (BRT) funded a national lobbying campaign to change educational policies at the state and national levels. An “education summit” was held in January 1989, with 218 CEOs in attendance. Gerson (2012) reports that by 1994, 19 states had instituted state standards, statewide standardized tests, and rewards or sanctions based on student test scores (p. 108). Emery and Ohanian (2004) illustrates the power that corporations continue to hold over educational policies, citing how No Child Left Behind was based on the BRT’s “Nine Essential Components of a Successful Education System.” The roots of corporate control over educational policies were planted here in response to this report.

Educators’ responses remain mixed about the effects of the report, some, such as educational reformer George Bohrnstedt (2013), believe it was a much-needed critique of our educational system and served as a catalyst of positive reforms. Others, such as Paul Houston, executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, believe it ushered in a rising tide of attacks on teachers and schools. “It was an overstatement of the problem, and it led

to sort of hysterical responses," he says, "for one, it took liberties with the link between economic development and overall education rates" (Toppo, 2008, p. 2). These "hysterical responses," as seen in the McCarthy era, continue to resurface with each wave of reforms. When NCLB was passed, there were documentaries and films, such as *Waiting for Superman* and vehement attacks on teachers in the media. Rick Ayers (2010) in his response to the documentary *Waiting for Superman*, points out that the film, "proposes a reform "solution" that exploits the feminization of the field of teaching; it proposes that teachers just need a few good men with hedge funds (plus D.C. Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee with a broom) to come to the rescue" (p. 1). This references the venture philanthropists, such as Bill Gates, that have become vocal critics of public education. These corporate leaders cite ineffective teachers and weak districts providing their own, ineffective curriculums that were the problem and charter schools, along with new, expensive curriculum, training, and technology were the answers. While they have spent billions of dollars on charter schools through their foundations, they also make a great deal of money through the use of their technology platforms, and curriculum and testing materials. When Common Core (2009) and Race to the Top (2010) were promoted, the attacks on teachers and public schools continued. The long-term effects rooted in making the schools and teachers for the nation's problems will continue to stymie advances in public education and continue to devalue and demoralize the teachers.

The increased federal involvement of America's "failing" schools continued with No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001). This ushered in the standardization of public education, complete with corporate and federal government control, and a major step in the further disempowerment of teachers. Teachers would have even less autonomy and less control over their teaching and curriculum. Gerson (2012) describes the new wave of educational reformers

that emerged right before NCLB was passed- “the ‘self-made’ billionaires who established massively endowed ‘venture philanthropies’” (p. 109). The most prominent are the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Walton Foundation, and the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation. These foundations could, and did, invest billions of dollars into education. Ravich (2010) reports that between 2000 and 2008 the Gates foundation spent \$2 billion creating 2,600 small schools in 45 states, which they ended up abandoning. In 2007, the Walton foundation gave \$82 million to charter schools. There was an increased emphasis on corporate practices and outsourcing many services to private contractors. In return for all of these investments, these venture philanthropists required evidence of improvement to show a return on their investment. They expected immediate results, failing to understand that children all learn at different paces and that some progress is better than no progress. As corporate leaders, they treated teaching and learning as a uniform, believing that with certain criteria, and “effective” teaching, all students will meet their productivity goals. The new system of instruction must be “evidence-based” and “data-driven” just like in the corporate world. Gerson (2012) provides a definition of “data-driven” to mean, “breaking down jobs into tasks, breaking tasks into components, and then measuring and quantifying each component to develop target working norms” (p. 110). These “working norms” are used to create a narrow “teach to the test” curricula and made public education the new cash cow by requiring scripted learning, software packages and platforms, and a plethora of standardized tests. A Brown Center on Educational Policy, Brookings Institute, study reports standardized-testing regimens cost states some \$1.7 billion a year, a figure that only represents what states spend on the actual tests (Chigos, 2012). These norms used as criteria for the published reports that rank schools and become sources of pride or embarrassment. These reports have also led to other, less ethical practices in order to make the “grade,” so to speak. The

Atlanta Public School (APS) cheating scandal publicized the dark side of high-stakes testing and the pressure placed on teachers and administrators to produce high scores. The APS cheating began in 2009 when an Atlanta Journal Constitution report uncovered multiple instances of cheating on standardized tests, where the teachers would change answers on the answer sheets. The investigation revealed the pressures began at the top with the superintendent, down to the principals allegedly encouraging teachers to cheat. In the end, the 12 teachers went to trial, charged with racketeering. Of the 12, 11 were found guilty and sentenced to jail time, probation, and community service. The administrators were found not guilty of tampering with witnesses and the Superintendent died before any legal action could be taken against her; however, she denied any involvement with or knowledge of the cheating practices. While the administrations allegedly instructed the teachers to cheat, they did not face jail time. This is an example of the teachers bearing the brunt of the blame. This scandal thrust testing, along with merit pay and other incentives, into the spotlight. Was this an isolated incident? Jacob and Levitt (2003) had previously conducted a study of the prevalence and predictors of teaching cheating. They used data from Chicago Public Schools and focused on elementary schools. They developed an algorithm for detecting teacher cheating that combines information on unexpected test score fluctuations and suspicious patterns of answers for students in a classroom. They found that serious cases of teacher or administrator cheating on standardized tests occur in a minimum of four to five percent of elementary school classrooms annually. They concluded that, “the observed frequency of cheating appears to respond strongly to relatively minor changes in incentives. Our results highlight the fact that incentive systems... “often induce behavioral distortions such as cheating” (p. 876). These incentive systems are introduced to produce positive data that portray the school in a positive light. These incentive systems are directly



related to the demands of accountability placed on the schools. Upon deeper inspection, the use of the term accountability is a bit of a misnomer. While the public sees it as a method of ensuring their children are being taught by highly qualified teachers, the teachers know all too well that this term is used as a method of shame and blame, placing all the responsibility for student test scores on their shoulder. The school district, individual schools, administrators and teachers are all affected by these demands, and in many cases, their jobs rely on producing positive data, such as test scores.

The accountability requirements placed on schools requires them to provide a variety of reports to the public. In many states they are called “report cards” and include letter grades that the public is familiar with. Many teachers complain that these reports contain misleading data that most of the general public does not understand. The public views the teachers as the main influences of the data in the reports; meaning, if the reports are good, the teachers get some credit, yet, if they are bad, the teachers get criticized. How those grades are calculated is of no interest to most of the public, they just know an “F” is bad and an “A” is the best. There is also a political motive for this emphasis on accountability, which is to increase the negative perceptions of public education in order to further governmental and corporate control of education (Apple, 2001; Giroux, 1981, 2001, 2012; Gerson, 2012). If the public believes that public schools are the problem they will support whatever educational reforms are proposed. This works for both the government and the corporate leaders that promote these reforms. The government gains support for their increased control of education, and the corporations gain financially from having a market for their products. All these accountability measures require tests, online platforms for testing and evaluations, and computers and computer-based resources. Education has become a

billion-dollar industry, all supported by public funds, which the public accepts without question, to make our schools better, since they are apparently failing so badly.

Another by-product of NCLB is the renewed interest in the school choice movement from the 1990s. This was due in large part to the charter school movement. Advocates of the choice movement campaigned for states to pass laws that authorized charter schools. When they did, school choice came in three versions- charter schools (the most popular), vouchers for private schools, and for-profit, privately managed schools. All of these schools receive public funds to educate students but were not considered regular public schools and were not run by a government agency. In many cases, these charter schools were exempt from the tests that they used to justify their existence (“National Alliance...,” 2018). Voucher schools are privately managed schools that are operated by an outside entity under contract. These privatized schools, owned and managed by corporations or their foundations, get public funding, which is taken from the public schools. These charter schools, which include both brick and mortar and virtual schools, are free to students because they receive the money that the public school in their district would have received for them. The main theory of the choice movement was to increase competition between private and public schools, and thus improve both. This is part of the corporate-driven market plan to privatize many public services, such as prisons and education. School choice was touted as something that would transform American education. The venture capitalist foundations, such as the Gates and Walton Foundations, established charter schools and provided some funding for scholarships for low-income students. NCLB built upon this momentum and provided provisions that forced school districts to offer school choice if their school was failing. Schools had to send letters to parents if a teacher was not highly qualified and provide annual report cards with their grade by the state. If the scores were too low, or too high

of a percentage of teachers were not highly qualified, parents could choose, via a waiver, to send their child to a different school in the district. However, the parents were responsible for filling out the paperwork for the waiver and providing transportation for their child to the better school (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2001). In a district with charter schools, it was a great advantage of these charter schools to portray the public schools as failing and ineffective. The use of vouchers benefits the higher income families, usually white middle class, while placing what many would consider unfair barrier to lower income families. Schools do not provide transportation for out of district students, which those using vouchers are. The rules of using the vouchers placed a burden on the family to transport their children to and from school. The charter then siphons off the higher income and higher achieving students from failing schools, which causes them to lose funding, along with the higher test scores. This causes a domino effect, which exacerbates the cycle of punitive responses, which further intensifies the problems in the schools. (Apple, 2001; Bornstedt, 2013; Giroux, 2012; Ravich, 2010).

NCLB set unrealistic goals and then punished teachers when those goals were not met. When teachers claimed the goals are unrealistic, the government responded that “good teachers” would find “what works, and only lazy or “bad teachers” would fail and make excuses. This “what works” notion has become a national obsession, with countless approaches and curriculums, new standards, and new catch phrases, such as STEM education, and College and Career Ready. This is reminiscent the dominant philosophical position of Progressivism, rooted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the emphasis on social efficiency and the scientific management of schools. There is a renewed obsession with skills- technical skills, reading and math skills, mastery of skills- all spelled out by standards and measured by standardized tests. This marks a return to the testing methods of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to group students according to ability,

while claiming they are individualizing each student's education, and preparing them for college and the workforce. Politicians, corporate leaders, and school district superintendents state that they are improving education to better prepare our students for college and the workforce making it sound as if they are revolutionizing education (Bracey, 2007). Like the Progressive reformers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the goal of education is to prepare students for the workforce has returned to the forefront. Current reformers use the term "college and career ready," as their catchphrase for diverting students into certain programs, now called "pathways." Gerson (2012) believes politicians and corporate leaders have exaggerated and, in some cases, manufactured educational crises, beginning in the 1980s with *A Nation at Risk*. They claimed public education was declining rapidly, putting us behind other countries and the cause for this decline was bad teaching and a lack of strong and uniform standards. Finally, they placed an added emphasis on the "achievement gap" between low-achieving and high-achieving schools, thus ushering in new teaching methods based on corporate management strategies, along with high-stakes testing based on standards. School-choice was then added to placate the white middle-class to give them the façade of getting a better education. They use misleading accountability reports to tout their successes and demonize the failures, placing the blame of those failures squarely on the teachers' shoulders. This high-stakes testing has become the bane of teachers' existences and is difficult for any teacher to ignore. It has become all about the test scores and the end of the year school and district report. This pressure leads schools to engage in what Jennifer Booher-Jennings (2005, 2006), a sociologist at New York University, describes this as educational "rationing" or "triage." She studied the actions of a Texas elementary school after the passage of NCLB. She documented teachers diverting resources and time to the group of students who looked like they were closest to passing the test. These kids, who might make the minimum passing score if given

intensive help, were described as being "on the bubble." This relatively small group of students received a disproportionately high amount of the teaching and resources available. Meanwhile, those children who had previously scored low on tests were deemed "hopeless cases," as they would not pass the test no matter what interventions were provided. To determine who was "on the bubble," and who was a "hopeless case," required teachers spend time examining the data from past performances. The hopeless cases would be accepted as the students who would "ding" their test score data, and no additional test preparation or resources would be devoted to them. This practice would be considered "data analysis" and the resulting grouping and measures would be considered "data driven" decisions. This is all done in the name of "school improvement" in the hopes of earning a good annual report. The test scores of students' who withdraw, transfer or are placed in alternative school settings remain with the school they spent the majority of the year with. This prevents schools from attempting to send these hopeless students to alternative settings. Schools are also measured on testing participation rates to prevent schools from simply not testing these hopeless students. This published report is used to evaluate teaching and learning, with good reports and labels of excellence placed on banners proudly displayed on school entrances and bad reports used as the basis for parent complaints and the furthering of bad reputations. This comes despite the fact that reports dating back to 1966 find that non-school factors, usually related to a student's socio-economic status, are far more responsible for lower achievement rates than in-school factors (Ravich, 2000; Boother-Jennings, 2006; Gerson, 2012) These non-school factors are not considered in school evaluations, other than to designate a school as Title 1, which provides additional funding for schools with at least 40 percent of enrolled children coming from low-income families. These schools are eligible to use Title I funds for schoolwide programs designed to upgrade their entire educational programs

to improve achievement for all students, particularly the lowest-achieving students. The U.S. Department of Education (2015) reports that in school year 2009-10, more than 56,000 public schools across the country used Title I funds to provide additional academic support and learning opportunities to help low-achieving. For example, funds support extra instruction in reading and mathematics, as well as special preschool, after-school, and summer programs to extend and reinforce the regular school curriculum. Most reports do include demographic data, which includes socio-economic data, such as the percentage of students that receive free and reduced lunch; however, they remain a small component of the algorithm used to rate schools.

Through their membership in the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), state leaders, including governors and state commissioners of education from 48 states, two territories and the District of Columbia, led the effort to develop the Common Core State Standards in 2009. The goal was to create “consistent, real-world learning goals... to ensure all students, regardless of where they live, are graduating high school prepared for college, career, and life” (“Development Process,” 2017, p. 1). While Common Core did not establish a national curriculum, they actually did establish a standardized curriculum in many areas, such as math. These new curriculums limited teachers’ options in the classroom and tied their professional assessments to a handful of results that could be high or low for non-school factors, such as lack of parental support and poverty (Ravich, 2010). In addition to limiting teachers’ options, many curriculum changes occurred so rapidly that schools and teachers could not continually replace their resources and courses. Thomas (2017), in his study *Why Teachers Quit*, cited educational reforms and lack of control over content and curriculum as two complaints of teachers. Teachers struggle to keep up with ever-changing curriculum standards, juggling federal, state, and local directives. Too often,

by the time the teacher settles into the new routine, the district changes things again and the process starts all over. In addition to the changes, the district usually does not have the resources, such as textbooks and other teaching materials, to accompany the new content. Thomas explains that teachers complained that are required master the new material they had no control over, and are evaluated according to the results. The decisions about these materials, their teaching methods, and evaluations are made by those outside of the classroom. Thomas uses the high school math curriculum as an example. In many states, he explains, the math curriculum changed as much as every two years. The high cost of new materials, professional development, and the development of new standardized tests to match these standards understandably provided a strain on school budgets, as their allotted funds did not increase; while benefitting the educational testing companies, such as Pearson and McGraw. Chigos (2012) estimated the cost of implementing Common Core standards will total approximately \$15.8 billion across participating states, which is a “mid-range” estimate that only addresses the basic expenditures required for implementation of the new standards. It does not include the cost of additional expenses such as performance-based compensation or reduced class sizes. The estimated supplementary seven-year cost includes additional expenses of \$1.2 billion for the new assessments, \$5.3 billion for professional development, \$2.5 billion for textbooks and instructional materials, and \$6.9 billion for technology infrastructure and support. Online testing was a part of these reforms, so schools had to purchase computers for their students to take the tests on, as well as teacher evaluation platforms and other platforms to record and aggregate student data. States and local districts need increased funding to keep up with these costs and the Obama Administration had the answer- the Race to the Top Initiative.

Race to the Top (RTTP), beginning in 2010, instituted by the Obama administration, increased the stakes set by NCLB and tied accountability to federal funding. If states wanted increased funding, they would have to work for it and produce measurable results. States competed against other states for the funding, which fits right in the notion of competition and education. The US Department of Education describes RTTP (2016) as:

Awards in Race to the Top go to States that are leading the way with ambitious yet achievable plans for implementing coherent, compelling, and comprehensive education reform. Race to the Top winners help trail-blaze effective reforms and provide examples for states and local education agencies throughout the country to follow as they too are hard at work on reforms that can transform our schools for decades to come (para. 2).

RTTP was conducted in 3 phases between 2010 and 2014. It was classified as a competitive grant and awarded 4 billion dollars to states. This ushered in an era of increased competitiveness and a stronger emphasis on data-driven decisions based on high-stakes testing. Each state created new measurement tools for student achievement and teacher evaluations, usually combining high-stakes testing and student enrollment in programs such as dual-enrollment in college, enrollment in Advanced Placement courses, and student-growth measurement tools that usually consist of comparing a student's score on a standardized test to their score on the test from the previous year. The competitive nature of RTTP led states to institute creative measures to improve their scores on the evaluations. These measures usually involved finding ways to increase enrollment in Advanced Placement courses and Dual Enrollment programs. In previous years, districts would attempt to test on days in which migrant students were absent or expel students and assign them to alternative schools before testing. However, the federal government found ways to combat those efforts by measuring the percentage of students participating in



testing and instituting stronger student tracking measures. A school was penalized if their testing participation was below 95% and if a student was relocated to alternative school or moved during the school year, their scores would still be associated with their school base or previous school.

Teacher evaluation was an area that reformers focused on, as many blamed teachers for students' poor performance. NCLB and RTTP both included provisions regarding teacher evaluations. The easiest method of revamping teacher evaluation was to add student test scores to the standard observations of teachers that were used. Anrig (2014) reports on New York's Governor's decision to tie students standardized test scores to teacher evaluations in an effort to allegedly improve public education. One can view this improvement effort as another method to undercut public schools, paint teachers as inefficient, in order to move toward a more open educational marketplace for educational dollars. Anrig contradicts the Governor's claims, citing research that concludes that "test scores are a poor proxy for teacher quality and that adopting them will make it harder to implement changes that are proven to help student outcomes" (p. 1). New York is not the only state to implement this method of teacher evaluation. A National Council on Teacher Quality (2013) study states that from 2010 to 2013 the number of states requiring that teacher evaluations include standardized test scores rose from 16 to 41; with 35 of those states and the District of Columbia's requiring that standardized test scores be counted as either a significant or the most significant factor in teacher evaluations. This value-added method of evaluating teachers is not effective for a variety of reasons. Anglin cites three main reasons with the first being that the results tend to be very unstable for all but the very best and very worst teachers. Secondly, the students assigned to each teacher will vary and cause variations in test scores, and those variations can be both substantial and difficult to quantify. An example

would be a teacher with many English-Language Learners or special education students, as opposed to a teacher with primarily advanced students. Lastly, students in any given classroom are affected by all sorts of factors outside a teacher's control, such as socio-economic status and other experiences outside of school. Darling-Hammond (2011) conducted a study regarding value-added models and teacher evaluations and concurred, "With respect to value-added measures of student achievement tied to individual teachers, current research says that high-stakes, individual level decisions, or comparisons across highly dissimilar schools or student populations, should be avoided" (p. 13). American Education Research Association and the National Academy of Education also conducted a study on value-added models and composed a brief for policy makers that highlights the ineffectiveness of value-added models for teacher evaluations and proposed alternative measures. However, politicians and policy-makers ignore the research and prefer the easier evaluations used in the corporate world (Ravich, 2010; Gerson, 2012). These value-added methods provide easy to explain data and reports, as well as incorporating seemingly scientific measurement tools to add legitimacy to the data. This is easier for the public to understand and is used to simplify teaching and downplay the profession. Anglin (2015) points out that the results of these reforms harm teacher morale and increase teacher attrition rates, along with a decrease in enrollment in teacher training colleges of 20 – 50% in big states like New York, California, Texas, and North Carolina between 2010 and 2015. These reforms have far-reaching consequences for our educational system and the teaching profession. Many states, such as Texas and Arizona, are experiencing state-wide teaching shortage, while most states are experiencing shortages in some districts and some content areas, such as math and special education. Students will continue to enroll in school and show up daily; society will continue to expect the public schools to educate the nation's young people.

However, with teacher attrition rates remaining steady at 8% and fewer people entering the profession, a nationwide teaching shortage does appear to be a very real possibility.

The effects of educational reforms on teacher attrition is most evident during this post-*Nation at Risk* era, with teacher attrition rates rising from around six percent in 1980 and rising to eight percent since the 1990s, where it remains today. In addition to high attrition rates, the number of people entering the field has been on the decline since the early 2000s (LPI, 2016). While age and gender remain a factor in teacher attrition like in the early studies from the 1950s and 1960s, other factors, such as job dissatisfaction, lack of support and demands from educational reforms have shown to be stronger factors in the teacher attrition rates (Westervelt, 2016a, p. 1-2). The educational reforms of this period brought education back to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, going almost full circle, with the emphasis on testing, grouping and tracking students, along with the standardized curriculum. There are many parallels between recent educational reforms and those in the past. Margaret Haley (1904) lamented about this standardization of teaching and learning, calling it “factorizing education,” which “makes the teacher an automation, a mere factory hand, whose duty is to carry out mechanically and unquestioningly the ideas and orders of those clothed with the authority of position” (p.2). This argument could, and has been, used by teachers complaining about the scripted curriculum and their lack of autonomy. The difference for teachers in the Haley’s time and now is that teachers today have more employment opportunities; therefore, teachers who do not like their jobs have options. This idea is supported by labor statistics; which provide insight into the decline of teachers entering the profession and attrition rates. In short, women have many more options available to them; options that provide greater salaries and management opportunities. Between 1972 and 2002, the proportion of women holding managerial jobs doubled, increasing from 20 to

46 percent, as well, the ratio of women's to men's earning has risen sharply from 63% in 1979 to 78% in 2002 (Labor of Bureau Statistics, 2003). While the gender income gap remains, the gains illustrated by the statistics are promising and provide some grounds for the argument for the correlation between increased employment opportunities and a rise in teacher attrition, along with the decline in education majors.

## CHAPTER 3

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Theoretical Framework

Teaching has always been considered a lower-status profession and this dissertation investigates the roots of this lower status, along with the effects this low status had and continues to have on the teaching profession and the lives of current teachers, which is the focus on my study. My research question asks, ““How do former teachers describe the emotional, social-political conditions that contributed to their exit of their teaching in public schools?” The best method to answer this question is to study the history of the profession and the public-education system. In order to understand the process of the feminization of teaching and its role in the development of the teaching profession and public-education system, one must examine the socio-political context in which this occurred. This context reveals the role of the power structure that governs both the social and political spheres of the times. To better understand the experiences of teachers, this dissertation uses Critical Feminism to investigate the hierarchal power structure that controls the system of public-education and how this power structure affects the lived experiences of teachers.

To understand the foundation of this power structure, one must first acknowledge the role of gender in the establishment of the teaching profession and public-education system. The feminization of teaching and its role in the development of the public-education system is discussed in detail in Chapters 2 and 3. The role of gender becomes important in 1841, when Horace Mann convinces the Board of Education to hire women as teachers, instead of men, because they can be paid half as much as men and are *naturally* better suited to teaching young children (Mann, 1841; Hoffman 1977/2003; Grumet, 1988; Goldstein, 2014). This ideology sets

the stage for the feminization of the teaching profession. Critical feminist theory provides the framework to examine the foundation of this power structure. The feminization of teaching provides the foundation; therefore, it is important to view this through the lens of critical feminism. The feminization of teaching established teaching as “women’s work,” and thus laid the foundation for the profession as a lower status profession, with the women teachers subordinate to the men in power. Critical feminist theory focuses on the role of gender as the foundation of the profession, which continues to influence the experiences of all teachers- both male and female, as well as the educational system. Whether the teacher is male or female, the context in which they work remains the same. By studying and comparing the experience of teachers of both genders, one can examine the effects of the patriarchal power structure that remains in-tact.

This chapter will begin by providing a definition of Critical Feminist Theory. The elements of Feminism that have been incorporated in Critical Feminist Theory will be examined next. The assumptions of Critical Feminist Theory are presented and applied to this dissertation, which includes an overview of the relevant literature. Finally, the ways in which Critical Feminist Theory frames this dissertation will be presented.

### **Critical Feminism**

The process of the feminization of teaching was dependent on the traditional gender norms of American society. Critical feminist theory examines the role of gender and social and economic inequalities, which provides the framework this study. The Critical feminist perspective was largely introduced by C.A. MacKinnon (1983, 1987, 1991), with its roots in Feminism, and Legal Feminism, with connections to Critical Race Theory. Critical Feminist Theory frames the exploration of many topics, such as employment rates (Becker, Lauf, &

Lowrey, 1999) and mathematical ability (Tiedemann, 2000). There remains a strong connection with Feminism, which peaked in 1948, 1920 and 1945 and 1960s. An understanding of the ideas of Feminist Theory that contribute to the assumptions of Critical Feminist Theory is important.

One of the topics explored within Feminist Theory that is relevant to this dissertation is the examination of power by studying gender. Jane Flax (1979) asserted that feminist theory seeks to understand the power differential between men and women, and to understand how the oppression of women evolved and changed over time and how it is related to other forms of oppression, such as race or class. By studying gender, one is able to gain a broader perspective on existing gender norms in our society; enabling a critical distance. Flax (1979) maintained that this critical distance can help “clear a space in which reevaluating and altering our existing gender arrangements may become more possible” (p. 623). This is crucial in education, as many are not aware of the prevalent gender norms and arrangements in education and the effects they have on everyone’s lived experiences. Bell hooks (2000) acknowledged that it is important to remember that we all have been socialized since birth to accept the prescribed gender norms. Girls play with dolls, and boys play with cars, period, end of story. She asserts that that Feminist Theory is rooted in finding ways to challenge and change sexist thinking to change the power structure in society. These methods are relevant to teaching and the education system, as they are political, and political power is held by men. Flax also links feminist theory to action and asserts, “Feminist theory is the foundation of action and there is no pretense that theory can be neutral. Within feminist theory is a commitment to change oppressive structures and to connect abstract ideas with concrete problems for political action” (p. 3). Hooks (2000) believes that ending patriarchy requires society to acknowledge that we are all participants in its perpetuation and commit to changing our “minds and hearts” and letting go of sexist thoughts and actions and

replacing them with feminist thoughts and actions. This means gender equality politically and socially. This means ending hegemonic masculinity in our schools, which harms both women and men, and letting go of our long-standing gender norms. Griffiths (2006) explains how masculinity is hegemonic, and pervades education by emphasizing individualism, competition, performance, and hierarchy, including ranking systems for both students and teachers. These ideas are common buzz words in education today, dating back to NCLB: accountability, standardization, measurement, differentiation. While Feminist Theory provides a lens to investigate the role of gender in the feminization of teaching and the establishment of the public-education system, Critical Feminist Theories delves deeper into the socio-political factors that perpetuate the gendered hierarchal power structure that controls our political institutions, and in turn, our public-education system.

In this dissertation, I focus on four of the following underlying assumptions of Critical Feminist Theory: gender oppression is endemic in our society, traditional claims of gender neutrality and objectivity must be contested in order to reveal the self-interest of the dominant (male) groups, experiential knowledge of women is valid, legitimate, and critical for understanding the persistence of gender inequality, and that the history and historical contexts must be taken into consideration in order to challenge policies and practices that affect women (Arrigo, 2002; Lawrence, Matsuda, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; MacKinnon, 1983; MacKinnon, 1991).

First, gender oppression is endemic in our society. This oppression is difficult to recognize because it is so normal, ordinary, and ingrained into society. Legal Feminist, Mary Joe Frug (1992) believes that all Feminist scholarship is political. As such, our institutions, such as our legal system and system of education, are grounded in the unconscious acceptance of gender



stereotypes. Grumet (1988) explains how the idea of gender is so ingrained in our society, that most educational research neglected to mention the role of gender. Joan Scott (1986) addresses the issue of gender in historical studies in her groundbreaking essay, *Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis*. Scott examines the definition of gender and how it is used in historical studies. Butler and Weed (2011) edit a volume that explores the current uses of the term gender—and the ongoing influence of Scott's on gender studies. One of the questions Butler and Weed pose is asking if gender is important and if that conclusion has already been made. They believe that because gender is so ingrained in our society that there is no need to mention it, because the reader will already conclude the ideas about gender in the study. Most educational research about teachers and power in education does not include the study of gender. However, this dissertation makes gender the focus of the context, through the presentation of the historical overview of the teaching profession and public-education system. This context provides evidence that illustrates how gender was the crucial the establishment of the system of public education and continues to affect the system and teaching profession. When I asked many of my colleagues if they understood why they had no voice in educational policy and why our pay remained so low, they cited most economic reasons. When I told them about the feminization of teaching as the root of their disempowerment, they usually replied that they did not think of that, yet, that it made perfect sense to them. When I conduct a word association exercises with people, I say the word teacher and ask what comes to mind and they usually respond with a female teacher. When I say the word professor and ask what comes to mind they usually respond with a male. This simple exercise illustrates how ingrained gender norms are in our society.

Next, is that the traditional claims of gender neutrality and objectivity must be contested in order to reveal the self-interest of the dominant (male) groups. This study presents the idea

that the patriarchal power structure is the root of the struggles felt by teachers and if that does not change, an increase in the teacher shortage will occur. MacKinnon (1983) provides an in-depth view of power in our society. She writes about who has the power, how they keep it, and why those that do not have it should want it. Her theory of power accounts for “how a systematically unequal social arrangement...is internally coherent and internally rational and pervasive yet unjust” (p. 49). She continues by explaining how men have power over everything of value in society, including the power to decide what is valuable. They use this power to shape and define a socio-political landscape that keeps men in power and women subordinate to men. This landscape is reflected in its institutions, its law, and private relationships which are organized by gender into a hierarchal power structure. The current state of our educational system is one in which the corporate interests, such as Pearson publishing, make billions off of education. The Pioneer Institute and American Principles Project (2012) estimated that the costs to implement Common Core across all states is close to \$16 billion. While the Brookings Institute reports that realigning standardized tests to changing standards, such as Common Core, costs states approximately \$1.7 billion a year (Chigos, 2012). The corporate interests, as well as their political benefactors, which are predominately male. Thus, keeping the system of education under the current power structure greatly benefits the males in power. These men are taking in great profits, while the teachers, the majority of whom are women, struggle in classrooms with limited resources and low salaries.

Another one is that the experiential knowledge of women is valid, legitimate, and critical for understanding the persistence of gender inequality. The use of stories to portray the lived experiences of woman is something that is seen in many feminist works. Marilyn Frye (1992) believes the collective experiences of women can generate a new web of meaning and

interpretive possibilities. She noted, “Our process has been one of discovering, recognizing, and creating patterns- patterns within which experience made a new kind of sense” (Frye, 1992, p. 340). This dissertation uses the voices of women from the early days of teaching to illustrate this point. Hoffman (1977/2003) uses the stories of teachers from the past to provide a history of the teaching profession. Many of the stories had to be presented as fiction and comedies, light reading, in order for women to get their message across without offending those in power, men. This can be seen in the series by Myra Kelly that portrayed the lives of teachers in the 1920s urban public schools. These early stories establish a connection to the current experiences of teachers to illustrate the effects of the unchanging power structure that controls our system of education.

The final assumption is that history and historical contexts must be taken into consideration in order to challenge policies and practices that affect women. This dissertation uses the history of both the teaching profession and educational reforms to illustrate the negative effects of the patriarchal power structure on teachers. C.A. MacKinnon (1991) reflects on the history of the women’s exclusion from and subordination by law. The history of the existing doctrine of including women on the same terms as men, a notion of equality imposed by the courts. She examines how this notion was first used on race, then sex, explaining how in order for these groups to gain equal treatment, they must first be “similarly situated” to dominant groups. While MacKinnon uses the examples of sexual assaults and reproductive control, the concept of examining the history and context of an issue is relevant. Hoffman (1977/2003), Grumet (1988) and Goldstein (2014) each provide a historical context for their studies of the teaching profession. This dissertation presents an extensive history of both the teaching profession, the system of education, and educational reforms to assist the reader in seeing the big

picture, so to speak, of how little has actually changed in our educational system. This directly affects teachers, the majority of whom are women, and any methods of improvement for our system of education, would involve including teachers into the policy making process. This, in turn, could create a domino effect in which more women are elected to political offices, thus gaining power. This would then lead to a shift in the hierarchal power structure, with an increase of women in the upper ranks.

Critical Feminist Theory frames the analysis by first examining the foundation of the power structure and then the socio-political context that maintains the power structure that controls the educational system and status of the teaching profession. MacKinnon (1987) provides the methods utilized by the men to maintain this gendered hierarchy of power. The key to their system of maintaining power is to use abstract standards and principles. These standards and principles appear, at first, to be gender neutral. However, they are not and are designed to maintain male advantage. She provides examples to prove her point. Men's physiology define most sports, their needs define health insurance coverage, their perspectives and concerns define quality in scholarship, their military service defines citizenship, their presence defines family, their inability to get along with each other – their wars and rulerships - defines history, their image defines god (p. 36). I would add, their ideas about what knowledge is of the most worth defines the curriculum, and their ideas about what defines good teaching defines teaching practices. This line of thought aligns with the works of Grumet (1981; 1988; 2010) which examines how this gendered hierarchy of power remains a mechanism used to oppress teachers. This dissertation uses these concepts to explain the persistence of the similar struggles of teachers from the past and present, such as a lack of support, a lack of control, and a general subordinate status to those in control of education. The feminization of teaching laid the

foundation of this gendered hierarchy of power. Therefore, it is beneficial to view the teaching profession and public education system through a feminist lens.

### **Teacher Attrition**

Teacher attrition has been a topic of educational research since the 1970s, with an increase in interest in the early 2000s. Teacher attrition rates are almost double other professions and the costs are high for school districts. The research examines teacher attrition, effects of teacher attrition, and gaps in teacher shortages, as well as the costs of high rates of attrition. The study of teacher attrition leads to the study of the reasons for such high attrition rates. The themes that emerge in the causes for these teacher attrition rates are support, self-efficacy, and stress. In addition to reviewing literature on teacher attrition, this review will also examine the history of teaching, with an emphasis on the feminization of teaching. The feminization of teaching laid the foundation for the teaching profession and created the perceptions of the profession that are still held today. Many of the reasons teachers cite when they leave the profession, such as lack of support, can be traced back to the early days of the teaching profession.

Teacher attrition is defined as teachers exiting the profession, while teacher retention describes those that remain in the profession. Teacher retention could also be used to describe teachers that remain in their school; while teacher turnover is used to describe those teachers that transferred to other schools. Teacher attrition rates and the factors that lead to teacher attrition are often studied together; along with teacher retention. These studies lead to studies on the effects of teacher attrition, such as shortages and the costs of high attrition rates. Finally, the decline in the numbers of college students majoring in education is another research topic that is included in teacher attrition research, particularly when the emphasis is on teacher shortages.

As discussed in Chapter 1, teacher attrition did not become a major topic of research until the 1970s. Since the 1970s and early 1980s, research begins to investigate the growing problem of teacher attrition. These early studies frequently used the terms "teacher survival" to frame their research and emphasized the factors that led to people leaving the profession, or not entering it at all after graduating teacher preparation programs. Here were a number of statistical reports generated after *A Nation at Risk* (1983) was published. The National Center for Educational Statistics provides a great deal of data regarding teacher attrition beginning in 1987, when they began conducting school and staffing surveys (SASS), along with teacher follow up surveys (TFS) beginning with the 1988-89 school year, which provided details on the percentages of stayers, leavers and movers, and teacher attrition. The surveys were sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the Institute of Education Sciences within the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of these surveys is to provide a detailed picture of U.S. elementary and secondary schools and their staff.

After the passage of NCLB (2001), the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) held a teacher retention symposium in Washington, D.C. in 2002. Their study examined the rates of teacher attrition, the teacher shortages, the cost of teacher turnover, and ways to reduce teacher turnover. Their report opens by claiming, "The No Child Left Behind Act has stimulated a national effort to find highly qualified teachers for every classroom. But no teacher supply strategy will ever keep our classrooms staffed with quality teachers if we do not reverse the debilitating rate of teacher attrition" (NCTAF, 2002, p. 2). Their solution is to balance high quality teacher preparation with strong support of teachers. They suggest strong induction and mentoring programs for new teachers and administrative support for veteran teachers.

The research on teacher attrition identifies gaps in attrition rates by region and subject matter. Teacher shortages are essentially a problem of distribution. Research finds that teachers who are both qualified and willing to teach in hard-to-staff schools, which included those in highly urban and rural areas, especially schools serving minority or low-income students are the hardest to find (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Ingersoll, 2001; Reeves, 2003; Voke, 2002). Hayes (2009) conducted research on the challenges of recruiting and retaining teachers for both urban and rural areas. These areas face the challenge of retaining teachers and suggest methods to increase teacher retention, as retaining teachers is as much of a challenge as recruiting them. Another issue facing rural areas is the social and geographic isolation and lower-than-average pay make these schools unattractive to many teachers--leading to an inequitable distribution of teachers as more head to mid-sized and suburban districts (Levin & Quinn, 2003; Reeves, 2003). The needs of hard-to-staff urban schools are often very different from those of their rural counterparts, and teacher recruitment is no exception. Brownell, Bishop, and Sindlear (2005) conducted research about the difficulties facing rural schools in recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers, with a focus on special education teachers. They explain, "because of their geographic location, culture, and lack of resources, rural administrators have always struggled to staff their schools with qualified special education teachers. NCLB and its definition of highly qualified teacher present new challenges to rural district administrators attempting to secure adequate numbers of special education teacher" (p. 1-2). Sindelar et al. (2018) published a follow up to their 2005 study. They found that there remains a shortage of qualified teachers in rural areas, especially in the area of special education. However, they did commend the schools for their resilience in meeting the needs of their students in the face of these challenges.

The research on the reasons for the high rates of attrition generally focus on teacher job satisfaction. The themes of support, self-efficacy and stress, along with teacher burnout, are common in this literature. As cited in Chapter 1, the National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES) began conducting school and staffing surveys (SASS) in 1988 to provide a detailed picture of American schools. The National Commission on Teaching and American's Future (NCTAF) (2002) presented their study that examined the high rates of teacher attrition and made suggestions to retain teachers. They found that teachers felt unsupported and overworked. Since the early 2000s, there have been numerous studies that examine the common complaints of teachers. These studies focused on three issues: support, self-efficacy, and stress. Many studies connect teacher burnout to these three issues (O'Brennan, Pas, & Bradshaw, 2017; Hermann, Hickmon-Rose, & Reinke, 2018). O'Brennan, Pas, & Bradshaw (2017) make the connection between teacher feelings of support to self-efficacy and student outcomes. The American Federation of Teachers (2017) conducted a Work and Life Survey and found that teachers reported high levels of stress when they did not feel supported by their administration. While there are many discussions in journal articles and social media, there is a gap in the research on how many teachers actually suffer from depression and anxiety and have sought medical treatment for these ailments. The Anxiety and Depression Association of America (2018) reports that approximately 6.8 million American adults, or 3.1 percent of the population, have generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). More than 16.1 million American adults, or about 6.7% of the U.S. population age 18 and older, are diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder in a given year. And about 3.3 million American adults suffer with Persistent Depressive Disorder—a form of depression that usually continues for at least two years (Anxiety and Depression Assoc., 2018). While these figures are definitely eye-opening, there are no similar statics that focus on



teachers. While the major themes of the research on teacher job satisfaction often centers on teacher burnout, which is related to teacher stress, little research exists to support the findings of surveys, such as the Met Life Survey (2013) and the American Federation of Teachers Survey (2017). The current research on teacher stress and burnout (He, Cooper, & Tangredi, 2015; O'Brennan, Pas, & Bradshaw, 2017; Herman, Hickmon-Rosa, & Reinke, 2018) investigate the effects of school factors, such as administrative support, on teacher self-efficacy and stress, they do not focus on the actions taken by teachers whose seek medical attention for any mental health issues that develop as a result of their work. There is a need for additional research in the area of teachers and mental health.

The research on teacher attrition leads to many studies that focus on the teacher shortages that occur as a result of attrition and declining numbers of those entering the field. The Education Commission of the States produced a series of studies examining teacher shortages. The president of the Nevada State Board of Education described Nevada's teacher shortage horrific and warned that they were very close to a real teaching shortage crisis. The Texas Education Commissioner considers the state's teaching shortage as the "biggest threat" to their schools. Their first brief, entitled *Teacher Shortages: What We Know*, was published in May of 2016. This brief is the first in a series of reports, which "examine the teacher shortage dilemma. It considers what the research says about teacher shortages and highlights recent state task force findings. Designed to guide state leaders in policy decisions, the briefs that follow examine five strategies states are using to address shortages" (Aragon, 2016, p. 2). They provide data on teacher attrition and enrollment in teaching preparation programs. They also provide data that illustrates how each state has dealt with teaching shortages and which initiatives have been successful, such as mentoring new teachers and professional development. They do acknowledge

that each state has unique needs; however, that all states are dealing with some form of teaching shortages in some areas, whether it be in different fields, such as math and special education, or geographic areas. They do not, however, examine any links between educational reforms and the demands placed on teachers as a factor in teacher attrition rates.

The Learning Policy Institute (2016) also addressed the teaching shortage crisis with their published a report, entitled, *A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand and Shortages in the U.S.* This report cites high levels of attrition as the main factor of shortages and that lowering attrition rates would reduce the projected shortages more than any other factor. They conclude that of those that left teaching voluntarily, most teachers list some type of dissatisfaction as an important reason in their decision to leave the profession. They also include statistics that illustrate a 35% reduction in the number of those entering the field from 2009 to 2014.

The costs of high attrition rates and teacher shortages are incorporated into teacher attrition research. The NCTAF (2002) that addresses the "teacher shortage" problem profiles the high costs of teacher attrition. They estimate that teacher attrition costs some states as much as \$329 million a year alone. Once organizational costs are added- substitutes, learning curve loss, and new training are included, the figure could reach as high as \$2.1 billion. The costs are more than financial, with students suffering as well. Richard Ingersoll, in an interview with Owen Phillips (2005) for NPR, elaborates on the high costs of teacher attrition and provides some potential low-cost solutions. Ingersoll brings up the irony that, even though there is a great deal of corporate influence in public education, there is a lack of educational reforms that address teacher attrition. While there is a great deal of research in business school about high turnover rates, and the corporate sector understands the costs of employee turnover. Yet, for some reason,

this has not carried over to education, even with the high levels of corporate involvement with public education. Ingersoll (2001, 2002) supports the idea of increasing teaching induction programs and supports for beginning teachers. He explains how increasing support for beginning teachers through induction and mentoring programs is relatively cheap and has shown to increase teacher retention and student achievement. The NCTAF (2002) and LPI (2016) reports, along with Riggs (2013), Penningroth (2007), Westervelt (2016), Watson (2017) and other researchers in teacher attrition concur that teacher induction and mentoring for new teachers would be a positive step in retaining new teachers, although more time is needed to collect the data to support these claims.

### **History of Teaching Profession**

Goldstein (2014) takes a contemporary look at the “Teacher Wars,” as she dubs them, and examines why the same issues are plaguing the profession for two centuries. Goldstein attempts to use the history of the profession to uncover why there is, and always has been, a public perception that teaching is a failed profession. Goldstein attempts to understand the context that creates and perpetuates these public perceptions. The context is both political and social, as Hoffman (1977/2003), Grumet (1988, 2010), and Goldstein concur, and remains virtually unchanged despite other social advances, such as feminism and civil rights. Yet, the status of the teaching profession remains the same.

Teaching requires a college degree, teacher preparation programs, competency tests and certification- yet, teaching is still not a well-respected profession on par with law or medicine. Some may cite the fact that medical and law schools are much more rigorous than the average teacher preparation programs and they may be correct; however, few question why that is. This can be traced back to the history of the profession and the prevalent beliefs about teaching during

the early years, along with the fact that women made up the majority of the teaching workforce. While a century has passed since teaching became a profession, many elements of the profession remain the same. The fact that the profession is still considered a lesser profession and the fact that teachers are generally not considered professionals, illustrate this unchanging landscape of the profession. Goldstein gives the media the credit for this perpetuation of this unchanging landscape. Every new era of educational reforms has been accompanied by a political and media war on existing teachers. This is seen in the early union movements, the Sputnik era, the “Nation at Risk” era, the “No Child Left Behind” era, and the current “Audit” era. In each of these eras, the blame for society’s problems is placed squarely on the shoulders of the teachers.

Teaching, along with social work and nursing, are professions historically dominated in numbers by women. Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were established as semi-professions, or secondary professions. Law and medicine were already well-established professions and other areas, such as plumbing, banking, and pharmacy, were considered either handicrafts, trades, or an “arm” of the medical profession. Social work was another developing profession. At the Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, Abraham Flexner (1915), appeared to answer the question “Is social work a profession?” with a no, it was not. In his presentation, he defined the six characteristics of a profession, with the last one stating that a profession is one that is “becoming increasingly altruistic in motivation” (Flexner, 1915, p. 580). In 1915, teaching did not meet all six of the criteria. It did not “derive their raw material from science and learning,” or “this material they work up to a practical and definite end,” or “possess an educationally communicable technique,” or “tend to self-organize.” However, in time the profession did grow to meet these criteria with the establishment of teacher colleges and the development of educational research centers, many within colleges and universities. Yet, at

its inception, teaching did not meet the prescribed “profession model” defined by Flexner. The professions of nursing and university professor best illustrate this patriarchal foundation. Flexner cited the reasons why nursing is not a considered a profession, “The trained nurse plays into his hands; carries out his orders; summons him like a sentinel in fresh emergencies; subordinates loyally her intelligence to his theory, to his policy, and is effective in precise proportion to her ability thus to second his efforts” (p. 590). One could argue that “teacher” could replace “nurse.” He explains university professor is a profession, “University professors, engaged in teaching, in the training of teachers, in the increase of knowledge or the development of thought, stand the tests that we have thus far enumerated: -their work is intellectual, learned in quality, and definitely practical in object” (p. 592). At that time, only men were university professors, while women had become the main teaching force for younger children. This perspective continues today and is the reason university professors are still held in higher esteem than P-12 teachers, despite the fact that many teachers have higher salaries than an average professor.

The blog post entitled, *Patriarchy’s Magic Trick: How Anything Perceived as Women’s Work Immediately Sheds Its Value* (Leonard, 2013), explains the reasons for the gender wage gap. The myth is that it is women’s fault that they get paid less than men by choosing jobs in lower-paid industries, such as social work, child care, teaching, customer service and administrative office work. Men tend to gravitate toward the higher paying “manly, well paid industries,” and, thus, deserve the higher pay. This myth, of course, ignores the forces that led both men and women to their respective career paths and the role of patriarchy in creating “male” and “female” jobs. This is why society does not really see a problem with the fact that professions such as teaching or administrative, secretarial work are lower paid. The notion of

patriarchy is absent from the discourse, therefore out of sight equal out of mind. Overall, society does not see a problem; therefore, there is no need to devise a solution. There is a general perception that women are free to choose the higher-paid “male” careers; of course, with the caveat that they can only be successful in these jobs if they behave more like men. Yet, even this presents a problem, as success is not guaranteed and often limited. Burton & Weiner (2016) illustrated in their study that illustrates the struggles of women in leadership roles, where female participants were often criticized for masculine behaviors, while their male counterparts were given accolades for the same behaviors. The problem lies in the undercurrent of patriarchy that continues to flow through our society.

### **Feminization of Teaching**

There have been a number of studies examining the history of teaching, tracing how the history illustrates the feminization of teaching. Goldstein (2014), Hoffman (1977/2003) and Grumet (1988) provide a comprehensive history of the profession from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hoffman (1977/2003) asks, “How did it come about, then, that casual teaching was the work of men, but when the nation needed a system of schools, the work of teaching was entrusted to women?” (p. 2). They each discussed women’s entry into the profession, beginning with Catherine Beecher’s promotion of women as natural teachers, that teaching was simply an extension of motherhood, with the added benefit of women becoming a cheaper labor force. Therefore, it was from the very beginning that “woman” and “teacher” became one identity; with this one identity permeating both the profession and society that it became so natural that the connection of “gender” and “teacher” remained unremarked. While teaching provided women independence and career options, as Hoffman (1977/2003), Grumet (2010), and Goldstein (2014) all emphasize, it also rendered them powerless and subordinate within the educational system, as

the leadership positions were all initially filled by men. Ornter (2014) considers patriarchy as one form of male dominance and subordination that utilizes the “father figure” ideology of protection and benevolence, which serves to hide the ideology of dominance and control. Just like in society, Hoffman (1977/2003) explains women became complacent in their positions, with their silence taken as an acceptance of the patriarchal system, where men lead and women teach.

Madeleine Grumet (1988, 2007, 2010) writes extensively about the effects of the feminization of teaching. Grumet (1988), utilizing a feminist cultural analysis, examines the roots of the notion of woman as natural teachers. She focuses on biology: reproduction and motherhood. She spends a good deal of her study examining the maternal body. The maternal body becomes the primary object in a child’s experience, and the strong bonds formed through this experience. When the child enters school, their teacher, most likely female, could be viewed as an extension of this maternal body. Men, as the leaders, as provided with a way to “reclaim” their children through “languages and epistemologies that encode their identities,” and through the shaping and structuring of their schools, the patriarchal structure remains intact and accepted. Weiler (1988) examined the ways schools reproduce oppression and hegemonic masculinity. Using a feminist framework, she conducted a study that analyzed the experiences of high school teachers who defined themselves as feminists. These women were attempting to create a feminist counter-hegemony within the bounds of structural, institutional constraints of their schools. Despite the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity, these women maintained a sense of agency, which is a point of interest. Upon further study, it is hypothesized that these women gained their sense of agency through their educational experiences in experimental programs in the 1970s. These programs stressed empowerment and teachers abilities to “make a difference.”

Griffith (2006) and Mallozzi and Campbell (2014) present an extensive discussion on hegemonic masculinity and how it affects both women and men. Their study, which is grounded in social constructionism, examines how male and female teachers construct and orient themselves with masculinity. They found that women often reinforced gender norms, such as the idea of men as protectors and women as nurturers. This was often unintentional and subconscious; however, it was prevalent throughout the study. Men were considered stronger disciplinarians and teachers often sent difficult students to a male teacher, especially male coaches. Griffith (2006) points out that the current “audit” era reforms spearheaded by the neoliberal corporations, such as Race to the Top and NCLB, are examples of the hegemonic masculinity by examining the language of the reforms and the practices of measurement and accountability. There is no one practice that is considered feminine; however, there are many masculine traits evident in leadership and politics. Practices of measurement and accountability, the shame and blame mentality and audit culture that are so prevalent in education today are all masculine traits and assist in maintaining patriarchy. Griffiths argued that, “the globalization of managerialism has the effect of intensifying gender issues, for example, by encouraging hegemonic masculinity and by reinforcing a rigid male/female binary” (p. 402, footnote 71). These ideas help maintain an environment that keeps the patriarchal structure firmly intact.

The future of education is examined in feminist terms in quite a few studies. Griffiths (2006), Grumet (1988, 2007, 2010), Weiler (1988), Hoffman (1977/2003), Wooten (2011) maintain that, despite many social advancements, the oppression of women in education, as well as the lack of respect for the profession in general, will continue. Goldstein (2014) suggests that making teaching “an attractive, challenging job that intelligent, creative, and ambitious people will gravitate toward” (Kindle L 288) will serve as a starting point to elevate the profession.



Wooten (2011) considers Grumet's (1988) ideas from *Bitter Milk* as relevant today as they were in the past and cites the waves of educational reforms as evidence. The "Father has spoken," notion discussed by Grumet (1988) is exemplified by the fact that a male-dominated government dictates educational reforms that teachers must follow, despite the fact that the teachers know they are not beneficial. Further, the "shame and blame," competitive spirit of today's reforms reinforces Grumet's (1988) explanation of how female teachers compete for the approval of male administrators. This all creates an environment that wears down teachers and makes them appear complicit and accepting of the continued patriarchal structure. Grumet (2007) blames the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) for ushering in the corporate culture and language system, for creating a context that oppresses teachers' future, while reinforcing both hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy. This oppression silences teachers and breaks them down, which is why they appear complicit.

While teachers may appear complicit, many are not and choose to leave the profession. Many young people are now choosing not to even enter the profession at all, as evident in the declining numbers of educational majors. The research illustrates how the history of the profession, along with the feminization of the profession, is intertwined with the current state of the profession, including high attrition rates. The working environments of all teachers, both male and female, are affected by fact that teaching is a lower status profession, which is a result of the feminization of teaching. The feminization of teaching laid foundation of the teaching, and, in turn, established the profession as a lower-status profession, controlled by male dominated leaders and a male dominated government. Educational reforms are the most obvious examples. These reforms affect the daily lives of teachers, as well as public perceptions of teaching and schools. Yet, teachers have no voice in the development or passage of these

reforms. Teachers are not empowered to make decisions regarding their craft-teaching- and the results are low job satisfaction, teacher burnout, and high attrition rates. Teachers cite a lack of support, a lack of respect, and high levels of work related stress as the main reasons for leaving the profession. The issues such as testing, teacher support, and working environments have been fairly common complaints since the creation of the public-school system. My work highlights the link between the history of the profession and the high attrition rates by exploring the foundations of both the profession and the system of public education itself, in an effort to understand the long-standing power structure that controls the system of education.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY

In this dissertation, I examine the experience of teachers from the past and present, along with a history of the teaching profession, public education system, and educational reforms, to provide a rationale for the high teacher attrition rates. My research questions asks, “How do former teachers describe the emotional, social-political conditions that contributed to their exit of their teaching in public schools?” My overarching context question asks, “How do 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century teachers of the past and present describe their struggles within the profession and how do these struggles reflect the broader socio-political context that shaped the teaching profession?” This question provides the context of my study by analyzing the relationship between the feminization of teaching, educational reforms and teacher attrition; providing insight into how they are intertwined to provide the context of the socio-political forces that shaped the experiences of teachers in the classroom and contribute to teacher attrition. Teaching has always been considered a lower-status profession and this dissertation investigates the roots of this lower status, along with the effects this low status had and continues to have on the teaching profession and the lives of current teachers, which is the focus on my study.

#### **Let Me Tell You a Story: Humanizing Teachers**

Clandinin and Connelly (1989) explain the relationship between researcher and participant in the process of narrative inquiry, stating that “the process becomes even more complex for, as researchers, we become part of the process. Our narratives are lived, told and retold in the research process. Thus, the two narratives of participant and researcher become, in part, a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through the inquiry” (p. 11). I use the methodology of narrative inquiry for the presentation of the stories of my participants to study the experience of

teachers as their stories. This form of inquiry fits the framework of Critical Feminist Theory, which assumes that the experiential knowledge of women is valid, legitimate and critical for understanding the persistence of gender inequality. These narratives establish the context and tell the story of my participants in order to portray the reality of their lived experiences. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) believe that it is through the stories teachers tell one another about their educational experiences that they come to know what they know about teaching and their experiences as teachers. Johnson and Golombek (2002) concur, explain how teachers use their stories to reflect on their experiences and make sense of their teaching lives. As they share their stories with one another, teachers inquire into their beliefs and practices as well as question their assumptions. Due to the fact that this study chooses to use teachers' words rather than statistics to present their view of experience as phenomenon, narrative inquiry provides an ideal approach. A narrative inquiry collects participants' stories and retells the participants' views by combining the researcher's experience with those of the participants to produce a collaborative narrative (Creswell, 2003). The narratives will portray their experiences as teachers in the public schools and provide interpretation and meaning to their stories in ways that statistics cannot. These stories illustrate the people behind the statistics. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described the narrative inquiry approach as:

Inquiry into narrative. By this we mean that narrative is both phenomenon and method. Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study. To preserve this distinction, we use the reasonably well-established device of calling the phenomenon "story" and the inquiry "narrative." Thus, we say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories by those lives, whereas

narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience. (p. 2)

Narrative inquiry includes the stories of lived experiences, the description of these experiences, the collection of these stories, and the narratives of these stories, which conveys the complex nature of this methodology. Combined with the emphasis on context of portraiture, the narratives I write will portray the participants as complex and real characters and provide insight into their motivation to become a teacher, their joys and sorrows of teaching, and their decision to leave the classroom.

Narrative inquiry is at its essence an inquiry of humanity. It allows our stories to be shared and learned from in a way that is intensely human(e). Done collaboratively and respectfully, narrative inquiry gives voice to participants and allows us to embrace the humanity of each other, thus humanizing the educational statistics that most are familiar with. Through these narratives, teachers will be given a voice and be able to portray their lives in the classroom. Teacher voices are often left out of the process of developing and implementing educational policies; yet, they are the ones that are affected by these policies. The absence of teacher voice from the discourse of educational policy and reforms have dehumanized teachers, portraying them as numbers, statistics to be analyzed and criticized. These narratives serve as a method of giving teachers a voice and empowering them to share their experiences in hopes of educating the readers about the truths of the profession and improving the profession as a result. Cremin (1951) used educational biographies in *American Education* (1970, 1980, 1988), a three-volume comparative history of education in the United States. Cremin (1970, 1988) believed in the power of biographies and stories to draw the reader in and allow the reader to see themselves in the stories. That is the power of narratives- enabling people to relate to stories, thus making the

story relatable and personal. By making the stories personal, the reader is more invested and more open to accept the ideas presented. The realities of the experiences as a teacher are often much different than they are portrayed in the media and popular culture. The experiences most people had with teachers are from when they were in school; which portrays a very one-sided perspective. These stories evoke feelings and present experiences that statistics and reports cannot. These narratives provide insight into the individuals and the socio-political context that shaped their experiences; and serve as a method to humanize the statistics and reports that bombard the media.

The study will also incorporate *personal-passionate-participatory inquiry* (He & Phillion, 2008) methods. Personal-passionate-participatory research is “compelled by values and experience, grounded in a commitment to social justice, and built on long-term, heartfelt engagement and shared efforts” (He and Phillion, 2008, p. 2). The researcher and participant collaborate on the inquiry, with the researcher vying to make the personal political. He and Phillion (2008) further this idea, “They contextualize their inquiries within the historical, sociopolitical, and cultural struggles of underrepresented individuals and groups in order to understand and act upon these struggles” (p. 269). This heart of this study is to illustrate the socio-political forces that shape the teaching profession and public-school system, both of which shape the lived experiences of teachers. This collaboration embodies the form of personal~passionate~participatory inquiry; with the goal of which is to liberate those who are oppressed so that they are empowered to make their own decisions, in this case, decisions regarding their classrooms and profession. These inquiries empower both the participants and researcher through their collaboration and reflection on their experiences. These inquiries fit within Critical Feminism based on the emphasis placed on storytelling and counter-narratives.

These stories illustrate the power structure that shape the lives of the participants and their response to this power structure. The researcher incorporates narrative, story, documentary, and other forms of media into inquiries in education to understand experience in its own terms. Experience is the starting point and remains a part of the entire research process, both the experiences of the researcher and participants. Researchers bring their personal experiences into the inquiry and are connected to the lives of their participants. This study was formed by my experiences as a teacher and the experiences of my colleagues. My experiences served as a starting point and have been in part of the research process- from research design, to the selection of the participants, to the development of research questions, and to the data selection. When I decided to on this topic of research, my starting point was to reflect on my experiences and the experiences of my colleagues. I have been a committed and passionate educator for 17 years and my goals is, and always has been, to be the best teacher I can be for my students. This research is one method of achieving that goal. From the analysis of the narratives of teachers from the past and present, a new understanding of the struggles of the profession are provided, with the hopes of elevating the profession and the public education system.

### **Who are These Teachers: Why Them?**

Savin-Baden and Major (2013) suggest that the focus of the narrative approaches should be on a small group of individuals. This study follows their suggestion and will utilize purposive sampling to select four participants to interview for the narratives of teachers from the contemporary era, which covers approximately the past three decades. I decided to focus on teachers that left after teaching for at least five years and teachers that retired right at their 30<sup>th</sup> year. I thought about who I would select for my participants and developed a basic criterion. I wanted teachers who enjoyed teaching and teachers who were considered successful, with

successful being based on their general reputation amongst their colleagues. I selected these participants because they were known to me as someone who enjoyed teaching, taught for more than five years, and decided to leave teaching either before retired, but after at least five years, or retired right at their 30-year mark. When I approached them to participate I explained my research, the purpose of my research and why I would like them in particular to participate. I explained that while I would use pseudonyms, I would explain our relationship and how I knew them, along with the reasons I selected them. They all agreed to participate knowing their anonymity was circumstantial, as I had to disclose our personal relationship. I was aware of the limitations of selecting participants I was familiar with, and that all worked in the same general geographic location. I decided to accept these limitations, partially out of convenience, partially because I trusted them to be part of my dissertation. There are benefits to our prior relationship in that they felt comfortable with me and I had worked with them and understand their environment, so when they talk about their experiences I understood what they were referring to could elicit deeper responses as a result. The downside of this familiarity is that I had to be cognizant of ensuring that I adequately discussed this familiarity and provided details so the readers understood what the participant was describing. Additionally, they were selected because they do not represent the typical leaver, one who leaves within the first five years, portrayed in the media and educational research, which I discussed in detail earlier in this dissertation. While those stories are relevant, this study chose to portray stories of those that with more experience because typically, the longer one teaches, the more likely they are to remain teaching. While these participants' experiences are not atypical, they do represent a traditionally less studied group. This group of participants all taught at least 9 years, enjoyed



teaching, received positive evaluations and had good reputations, and left the profession. The table below summarizes the participants.

Pseudonym	Age at time of interview	Years of experience	Number of schools	Degree(s)	Current area of employment
Marie Thompson	55	30	4	B.A & M.A. in Special Education	Retired Substitute teaching
Susan Murphy	54	30	4	B.A. History & Secondary Education	Retired Substitute Teaching
Coach Kincaid	42	13	2	B.A. History M.A. Secondary Social Studies Education	Fellowship of Christian Athletes representative
Bradley James	37	9	1	B.S. Geology	Geology/Engineering

Participant number one will be referred to by the pseudonym of Marie Thompson. She is a recently retired female teacher in her mid- 50s. While she is from New York, she spent her entire teaching career in Georgia. She has taught all grades levels, with the last 15 being in middle grades as a special education and math teacher. She retired in December 2017 opting to buy out her remaining five months with her unused sick days. She and I worked closely together her last 2 and a half years of teaching. I found her to be a dedicated and passionate educator who used “old-school” methods to teach math, as opposed to some of the newer Common Core methods, such as using multiple methods to solve a problem or turning a math problem into a word problem. She focused on the basics and had many successes. She and I taught many of the same students and I believed she was a strong teacher and an asset to the teaching profession.

Participant number two is a retired female teacher in her mid-50s. She retired when she finished teaching her 30<sup>th</sup> year. She is from a small, Southern town and taught at the high school she graduated from. Over the course of her career, she taught middle grades and high school social studies in two neighboring districts, finally teaching at the high school from which she graduated. She was a well-respected teacher; she was a certified Teacher Support Specialist and had many student teachers during her career. She enjoyed teaching during the first two-thirds of her career; however, she was not fond of the changes in education that occurred during the last ten years of her career. She was very involved in her school, participating in many extra-curricular activities, serving as class sponsor for many years, and attending sporting events to support her students. She and I taught World History together during her last three years teaching. She discussed her decision to retire, which is one of the reasons I invited her to be part of this study.

Participant number three is a female in her mid- 40s who taught for 15 years, coaching softball during those years as well. She is from the same small, Georgia town that she spent most of her career teaching in. She worked with many of the teachers that taught her and taught and coached many students of her former classmates. She described herself as highly competitive and this applied to both the sports arena and her classroom. As a teacher she was very active and dedicated, going the extra mile for students and parents. She served as a mentor to new teachers and was a favorite among the faculty and staff of her school. She taught at the school from which she graduated. She is a highly respected teacher and coach in the community. She led her softball teams to many Regional and State titles, winning Regional Coach of the Year more than once. She left to pursue a position with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, an organization she was involved with as a teacher and coach. I selected her due to her passion as an educator and coach,

and her high level of community involvement. I worked with her briefly, her first-year teaching, before she moved to her alma mater. Both my son and my daughter were in her World History class. When she announced she was leaving teaching, I knew she would be perfect for this study.

Participant number four is a male in his late-30s who taught high school science for 9 years before leaving the classroom for a job in the corporate world. He grew up in the same town in which he taught. He ended up teaching with one of his former teachers. He was an enthusiastic and dedicated teacher. I worked with him and my son was in his class. For three years we taught on the same hallway. This is when I got to know him very well. He was the type of teacher that would help any colleagues or students, even if it was before or after school. I remember him as someone who was always trying to be better, reflecting on his teaching and up for trying new things. I moved schools before he left, so I was not there while he decided to leave teaching.

The data was collected from the participants through interviews. The interview protocol is included in Appendix A. It includes a series of open ended questions that served as a guide for them to share their experiences as teachers. The three main topics are: motivation for going into teaching, meaningful experiences while teaching, and reasons for leaving the profession. Each topic has a leadoff question and follow-up questions. Jacob and Ferguson (2012) suggest starting these questions with the phrase, “tell me about...” to prompt your interviewee to tell a story, rather than just answer a question. This phrase also keeps the question general enough that the interviewee can take the question in several directions and leaves room for ideas, impressions, and concepts to emerge. The first question asks, “Tell me about your decision to become a teacher?” with a follow-up questions asking if there were any particular incidents that affected their decision. Since I use broad, open-ended questions, I developed the follow-up questions to

guide me through the topic of discussion and to use to discuss areas that the interviewee did not mention. I will also be prepared to make revisions during the interview as new ideas and areas of interest emerge. Creswell (2007) considers this “emergent design” as one of the hallmarks of qualitative research. The ability of the researcher to make adjustments and add questions to the interview protocol is one of the benefits of qualitative research and narrative inquiry. The design of my study was shaped, in part, by my data analysis through the stories of my participants.

### **What Do These Stories Tell Us?**

Creswell (2007) describes the process of data analysis for narratives as consisting of four parts: codes, categories, patterns, and themes. These four elements will “feed into a loop of description, classification, and interpretation” (p. 151). This process was repeated several times as the data was analyzed, classified and interpreted. I used the data from the stories to interpret the meanings the participant gave to themselves, their environment, and their lives as they relayed their lived experiences as teachers and their decision to leave the profession. Lawrence-Lightfoot (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) details the role of the research as one who listens for a story. While the research does identify the story to some degree, they are challenged to “shape the stories coherence and aesthetic” (p. 12-13). This was an important component of the data analysis- listening for and creating a story. After the interviews were conducted, I transcribed the interviews of my participants. I used NVivo to code and organize the data. After the coding was complete, I looked for themes that were common to all the interviews. Three themes emerged: support, teacher morale, and the physical and emotional manifestations of stress. Sub-themes also developed out of the themes. A sub-theme for stress was the work environment and educational reforms. A sub-theme for support was administrative support, support from colleagues, and support from parents and the general public. There are also

connections between themes with all the themes relating to one another. These connections are discussed in detail in the analysis section. I used NVivo to code and organize my other sources of data. These data include research studies, blogs, and journal articles. These secondary sources of data are used to contextualize the generalizations of the issues raised by the interviews. They also serve to connect the research and overarching questions that guide this study. These connections are discussed in detail in the last chapter of this dissertation.

Next, I created stories from the narratives, along with my input and additional insights that add to the context of their experiences. I used a pseudonym for each participant. Following the tenets of both narrative inquiry and portraiture, I began by introducing the reader to the participant. I did this by beginning the narrative with a description of the participant and how they decided to become a teacher. This enables the reader to better understand them and their motivation. This also creates the context in which their story is set. I take the time to explain the history and the context for the narratives. Establishing the history and historical context is an important element of critical feminism. Next, I wrote about their first few years of teaching and progressed through their career as they described their most influential experiences. I concluded the narratives with how they decided to leave the profession and if there was anything that could have made them stay. Savin-Baden & Major (2013) advise the researcher take the following steps to ensure the quality of the narrative design by ensuring the following: the story is authentic; the story is 'real'; it is clear who 'owns' the story; decisions have been made in advance about how the stories are analyzed and managed; and participants' voices are heard not lost. This also follows the Critical Feminism framework, which emphasizes maintaining the authenticity and uniqueness of the voices of the participants. While the data analysis and interpretation may have uncovered some hidden values and views, bringing them to the surface, they remained the values

and views of the participant and the stories reflect that. I then shared the first draft of the story with the participant, seeking their input on the authenticity and accuracy of the story. I then conducted a follow-up meeting over the phone to share and confer the meanings of the stories that emerged from the interview. They enjoyed reading their stories and felt I captured their feelings. They each said it made them somewhat sad because it reminded them of the good days they had teaching and why they enjoyed teaching. These measures were taken to ensure that the narratives accurately represented the experiences of the participants. The participants were very pleased with how their stories were portrayed. They each expressed some hope that their experiences can play a part in righting the wrongs in education.

### **Challenges**

There are several limitations present in this study. The use of purposive sampling leads to the possibility of selection bias. Sampling bias occurs when the sample selected is not representative of the population intended to be analyzed. In this case, the samples selected are all teachers who left the teaching profession, either choosing to enter a new profession, or to retire. The samples selected are all teachers who worked in the same geographic location. In addition to that criterion, three of the participants worked in the same school district, with two of them in the same school. There is the potential for sampling bias based on these factors. There is also the potential for interviewer bias due to the fact that I have worked with all of the participants; therefore, I have an established relationship with all of them. This could lead to an over-familiarity with their experiences and could result in my reading into their interviews. To lessen the impact of this overfamiliarity, I will make a concerted effort to fully explain any details that they reference. In some cases, they may assume I know what they are referring to, and I do;

however, the reader will not understand the reference, so I will make a point to elaborate on those references.

These biases could affect this study by providing a misrepresentation of the teaching environment and educational practices. There is the possibility of the data being interpreted in such a way that magnifies and overgeneralizes the issues raised in the data. The alternatives to this purposive sampling would be random sampling using a survey. This method would have enabled the study to select participants from other geographic regions; thereby limiting the sampling bias. Random sampling would also offer an alternative to the interviewer bias by selecting participants that I do not have a personal relationship with. In order to minimize these limitations, I used methodological triangulation and collected data multiple sources. While the interviews provided a large portion of the data collected for this study, I also collected data from other sources to use for the analysis and this dissertation. The collection of data illustrates the connection between the data presented in the interviews with the teaching population at large, enabling some degree of generalization.

## CHAPTER 5

### WHO ARE THESE TEACHERS?

In this chapter, I present the stories collected from the interviews of the participants for this study. I selected four teachers who left the teaching profession to interview about their experience and their decision to leave the profession. Two of the participants are teachers who retired early or right at 30 years. The other two participants are teachers that left the profession after approximately ten years in the classroom to work full-time in the private sector. The interviews begin with their decision to become a teacher, then move on to their experience as a teacher, and conclude with their decision to leave the profession. The goal of these interviews is to illustrate the lives of teachers, including the daily pressures and the effects of these pressures on the decision to leave the classroom.

#### **Marie Thomas**

*I always knew I wanted to be a Special Education Teacher due to one of my nephew's being autistic.*

Marie Thomas grew up in Long Island, New York in the 1970s and 1980s as part of a large, close knit family. When she was in high school her older sister had a son. As he began walking and talking, Marie noticed something was different about him. When she asked her sister about it she told her he was autistic. She enjoyed spending time with and helping him learn how to do things. She did not see his autism as an impediment to learning, she saw it as an opportunity to see things from a different perspective and a way to learn things differently. She cites her experiences with her nephew that led to her desire work with special needs students. By her senior year in high school, she knew without any hesitation what she wanted to do and after graduation in 1981 she enrolled in the Teachers College at the State University of New York, Fredonia.



After graduation, she moved to Georgia and got a job teaching adults with special needs. She continued her education by earning a Master's Degree in special education. After about a year, she took a position teaching Special Education at a high school. She believed that special education students could learn more than most people expected them to if they had high expectations placed upon them. In her opinion, the teacher's role was to figure out the student's strengths and weaknesses and help them reach their full potential by challenging them, not enabling them to use their disability as an excuse.

**Marie Thomas:**

There were teachers that looked at my students probably in a different light as far as all they had was a handicap, that they couldn't learn and such. I always had high expectations for my students. I was never an enabler. I always pushed them, and I always expected the best from them, whether they were special education or not (Interview, April 4, 2018).

The students usually responded well to her high expectations. She describes her students experiencing success and reaching goals they set together as what made teaching so rewarding. She found that many of her students had little confidence in their abilities after years of not being challenged academically due to their special education status, which led to a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy- they do not think they can learn like the "regular" education students, so they do not try. In addition to their lack of self-efficacy, some teachers, even those that may have been well-intentioned, acted as enablers by being afraid to academically challenge the students because they did not believe they could achieve past a certain level. When I asked her what was the most rewarding experience of teaching she could not recall one or two instances; but, rather, many moments throughout her career.

**Marie Thomas:**

I would say when you see your students realizing what that they are able to do. It is like, “Oh, I can really do this!” It is this whole “Aha” moment, should I say, when they do succeed. I wasn’t the one that would say, “oh, well, the students have to get a C.” No, I would make them work at it and when they worked it and they could really see that they could do it then to them, that C was their A. That is what I enjoyed the most from teaching (Interview, April 4, 2018).

This would be her attitude from her first-year teaching until her final days teaching. She did not waver in her belief that students would rise to the expectations you placed on them. She may have moved from high school to middle school, taught in different schools, taught different types of students; however, her core beliefs and desire to challenge her students to reach their potential never wavered.

I met Marie when I was in my third year of teaching. I was teaching social studies in middle school. I had some collaborative classes and worked with the special education department. I really did not know Marie well; however, she had the reputation of bringing out the best in her students. I worked with Marie again at a different middle school. She and I shared an office that connected our classroom. She taught remedial math for 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades. We worked together her final two and a half years of teaching, until she retired early in December, using her unused sick leave to “buy” out her last five months of work. Marie was the teacher that worked with the lowest level students during their “connections” classes. In middle school connections classes are the “fun” classes, like band, physical education, chorus, STEM, and the like. I taught Business education and computer science and she taught Remedial Math. As one can imagine, her class was the least favorite amongst the students. They would much rather have

a non-academic class, like band or physical education. Plus, it did not take long for the students to realize they were placed in the remedial, aka “dumb” kids class. Marie did not let that deter her efforts to teach and challenge her students. She got to know her students, learned their strengths and weaknesses, and pushed them to do their best. Marie strove to find engaging lessons, reviewed the basics, and tried many different methods to motivate her students. Some students responded well and made progress; while others resisted. She mentored students, often spending her lunch period with students, and coached various sports and sponsored various clubs

Marie describes the first ten years or so of teaching as a very positive; she felt supported and trusted by both the administration and parents alike.

**Marie Thomas:**

Back then, I would say that the administration was really good with Special Education more so than it is now. The parents, well, you still have the same thing. They really depend on the teacher and say, ‘You’re the expert,’ which some still do now. You’re the expert, and back then, as they do now, they still don’t know much about Special Education. In respect to the parents, it is most still that way, with the exception of a few that take it to the limit. The administration, on the other hand, has changed their tune in regard to Special Education, especially when it comes to mainstreaming instead of inclusion (Interview, April 4, 2018).

When I asked her what she felt was the catalyst of the change in Special Education, especially the change from inclusion to mainstreaming, she cited No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB instituted changes in Special Education in regard to accountability and testing. This resulted in a shift from placing students in an inclusion setting, where their classes consisted of other Special Education students, to a regular education class with a collaborative teaching model; meaning the

class was taught by both a regular education teacher and a Special Education teacher. These students were “mainstreamed” back into what the schools consider a “least restrictive environment.” These students also took the same standardized tests, with modifications, and their scores were counted toward the Adequate Yearly Progress reports and published. This change was good for some students, particularly the higher functioning students with less severe learning disabilities. However, the change was not a positive one for many students and the both regular and Special Education teachers were pushed to teach in a collaborative setting with little or no training and then evaluated according to the test scores of these Special Education students. Marie cites this time as a challenging one for both students and teachers.

**Marie Thomas:**

For the mildly intellectual and the severe kid, that wasn't a good change because they were being looked over. They weren't really worked with like they were when we had our self-contained classes. So, I wasn't in favor and a lot of other teachers were not either. I was hearing that our country was moving toward the collaborative mainstreaming model and I said to another teacher, ‘Are you really serious that we have to? Even the really severe students had to be included in the regular class?’ and she said, “serious.” That, to us, I mean not only to myself but other teachers, were not very happy about that (Interview, April 4, 2018).

Since these changes were instituted rather quickly, with little or no training, teachers tried their best to adapt. Both general education and special education teachers were provided with notebooks that illustrated various co-teaching models and there was some professional development provided. One issue that Marie and I discussed was the ideal collaborative teaching environment. We agreed that finding the right partnership between general and special education

teachers was ideal, it was not a focus of the administration. Teachers were regularly moved around from classroom to classroom, which made developing routines and practices that result in a successful collaborative classroom very difficult. The biggest issue was personnel and teacher turnover. She elaborates on the problem.

**Marie Thomas:**

I would say that staying with the same teacher for more than one year would be ideal.

The thing about it is that there wasn't enough personnel as far as Special Ed teachers to do that. See, when you deal with co-teaching you get to really know that teacher and that teacher gets to know you. But, you have to go with the students, and go where it's needed. Like I said, with a shortage of personnel that becomes a problem (Interview, April 4, 2018).

Marie's experience in the middle school as a co-teacher was not a positive one, mainly due to the high rate of teacher turnover.

When our discussion turned to her decision to retire when she did, she cited all the educational reforms and the resulting changes. While she always knew she wanted to retire at 30 years, she began to count down her time around year 27. She cited the numerous administrative changes passed down from the district office as a strong motivating factor. Her school had five different principals and assistant principals in ten years. The school she taught at was the least desirable in the county; however, it was also a rite of passage for administrators wishing to be promoted to either the central office or a bigger and better school. This revolving door of administrators results in high rates of teacher turnover and a lack of consistency for both teachers and students. One effect of this lack of consistency were increased discipline issues and more micromanaging of teachers. Each administration conducted themselves differently; yet, most

would come in and “set” new rules for both teachers and students. As a result, teachers were often put through numerous programs, both curriculum and discipline, and policies (O’Brennan, Pas, Bradshaw, 2017; Herman, Hickmon-Rosa, Reinke, 2018). One big change Marie endured was a change in teaching assignments in October. On a Friday afternoon she was informed that she was being moved from her assignment as a remedial math connections teacher to a seventh-grade special education teacher and taking over the case load for the teacher she was replacing, effective the next week. The seventh-grade teacher she was taking over for was being moved to a different grade due to certification issues. She was given less than five days to move classrooms and familiarize herself with her new special education case load. It was after this change that Marie decided to retire in December, using her accrued sick leave to buy out her last five months. When asked if there was one issue that pushed her decision, she explained that it was more of a progression of things.

**Marie Thomas:**

One of the things that pushed me a little more is just a lot of change, change in the system, change within our personnel of principals without our school. Administration that kind of pushed it and it was coming to a point, also, too where I was feeling that teachers did not have the power that we used to have. A lot was taken away from us. The changes especially coming to discipline, was a lot to deal with. It was just becoming too many steps that we had to go through to get something done with a student that was repeated behavior problem and you don’t get the backing on that or that you go through the steps. Then it became to where it was like, “okay, really?” When you are focusing more on behavior in your class than teaching, that became a problem and I was just getting to the point where I was not liking it anymore. I truly believe that if our school was running the

way it needed to be as far as discipline, administration, even the cohesiveness of the teachers and comradery, and all that stuff, if that was there, it really would have helped. I probably would have stayed until at least the end of the year (Interview, April 4, 2018).

While the change of teaching assignments, with only three days' notice, may have been the proverbial "straw that broke the camel's back," the progression of changes that occurred prior to Marie's decision to leave teaching. Marie loved teaching and she had years of success with special needs students. She was not put off by the fact that her students often had the lowest test scores, she focused on their growth. She endured years of being told to raise her test scores, as the special education subgroup scores were often the focus of district initiatives as they were lower than the general education students. In the end it was the progression of changes and disempowerment of the teacher's authority in their own classrooms that pushed her to retire. She continues to work with young people by substitute teaching and volunteer work with her church. She misses teaching; however, she does not miss the educational system. Like many former teachers have said, they may have left the classroom and the educational system, but they have not left teaching.

### **Susan Murphy**

*When I was little, my best friend and I would play school. She was Mrs. Jones and I was Mrs. Smith. One of the bedrooms would be her classroom and the other would be my classroom. We made our own little school and would play for hours.*

Susan was one of those kids that loved school. She and her best friend would play school for hours throughout her childhood in her small, southern town. All throughout school she excelled in academics and also enjoyed helping her classmates and teachers. Social studies was her favorite subject and her social studies teachers noticed. In her senior year she won the social studies award. Both her Government teacher and her US History teacher told her she just had to teach social studies; so, she did. She considered going into cosmetology. Her father dissuaded her from that profession and told her she wouldn't make any money and that teaching had better benefits and was a better career for her. With those words of encouragement, she enrolled in the local state university for a bachelor's in history and secondary education certification. Four years later, at the young age of twenty-two years old, she started her first job at a high school. She describes her first year as many teachers do- unprepared. She complained about the lack of preparation from her education program at the college.

#### **Susan Murphy:**

At my college, in the education department at the time I went though, they, I don't know, they have these rose-colored glasses. They never tell you what you should expect, I mean they never tell you what to expect when you go in the classroom. Then they never tell you in your education classes in college what to do when you see kids doing drugs. You see, I'm just going to tell you this, when you see same sex kids kissing in the hall because



back in 1984 that was not open. They never tell you what to do when a kid stands up and calls you the B word. They don't tell y'all these things. I had a class on bulletin boards and media. I could make a pretty bulletin board. I knew how to do all that, but as far as interacting with kids, you know, how to interact with the type of kids that you did not grow up with, I just did not know how to interact with some of the ones that are...difficult (Interview, April 2, 2018).

Her first job was a challenge in more ways than one. First, she was only 22, from a small town, and was sent to one of the “rougner” high schools in the district. The school had a reputation for having a high number of difficult students, meaning low-income, minority students, many of whom had parents that did not graduate high school. The school was larger than many in the district, and the school had a high teacher turnover rate. It was different from the small, old-fashioned, tight-knit high school she attended. One of the reasons for the high teacher turnover could have been a lack of resources and the lack of support for new teachers.

**Susan Murphy:**

We had nothing, nothing. My first day, oh God. The first week I was there was after Labor Day, so classes had already started. Well, they gave me Economics, which I did not have any classes in college about because I was a history major, so I had to just teach myself every night. So anyway, they gave me, all the teachers gave me the kids that they did not really want. I mean, seriously, so some of them were behavior problems and then I had to float. So I had no classroom and had to go upstairs, downstairs, and I was back and forth the whole year. I had a cart that I had to take with me and a bookbag with all my stuff in it. Some teachers would fuss because, you know, if the desks were not in straight lines, and if there was paper or anything like that on the floor. I had to erase all

my notes off the board and re-write them every class period and every day. I had little support from the principal and assistant principal. When I complained about the bad language I heard all the time, he told me he did not have time to deal with minor things like that. My department chair tried to be somewhat supportive but he was a loner and did not interact well with the other teachers. But I stayed there for two more years. The third year was better because I was accustomed to it and I enjoyed it. I was sophomore class sponsor and I started to get more involved more with the school and I got to teach US History and I taught a CVAE (Career Vocational Education) of low, low, low functioning learners. They were just getting the basics so they could graduate and go on to some kind of vocation. Those were some of my best students, though. They really appreciated me and wanted to learn and pass so they could go out and work. Just as I was getting to like this school I was moved because there were cuts. Since I was the last one hired, I was one of the first to be transferred. I was transferred to a middle school in the same district (Interview, April 2, 2018).

This practice of giving the new teachers the worst assignments is commonplace and often seen as a “rite of passage” for them. The “last one hired, first one fired/transferred” is also quite common and happens with a teacher is cut or RIF’ed, which refers to the term “Reduction in Force,” which occurs when a teaching position is cut due to cuts in funding. Susan was transferred to a middle school in the district that had a very good reputation. She went from what many considered the worst school in the district to one of the best schools in the district. After getting off to a rocky start at that school, things looked up and she stayed there for 14 years. She describes what made her stay for that long.

**Susan Murphy:**

I loved the middle school team concept. Social studies, math, science, language arts, and I liked that because if you got a good team then you worked well together, and the kids thrive and you can take care of discipline yourselves and it just works. I enjoyed that part about it. After the man who was principal when I got there left, thank goodness, as he was crazy, we got a new man, Mr. Hogan. He was tough, and he had high, high, high expectations for both teachers and students. I mean, we had to turn in lesson plans two weeks in advance. Everything that we had copied we had to turn in and have him approve it. He approved of everything we had copied. He liked me, he trusted me, he made me social studies department chair. I was on the textbook adoption committee. I did the new curriculum from when they changed the state curriculum. He wanted me to go and do the curriculum so he sent me on a lot of different trips to Atlanta, to conferences, and things like that. He trusted me a lot but he had high, high expectations, like I said before, and you'd better not ever tell him no but he was the kind of administrator, sometimes I would cry because he would just be so abrupt and just snap you up like that. But if a parent was out of control and attacking me, he would have your back and protect you. When I was pregnant with my daughter, I had a child that was in special education and his mother worked at the elementary school next door. I would stay in contact with her every day, every day. Well, the daddy was a big, huge man and just had a horrible attitude, he was just angry and it did not matter, what I did it was not good enough, no activities in my class were good enough. No matter how I differentiated it, or modified the assignment, it was not good enough. So, we had a conference and the daddy was there. He got up in my face and pointed his finger and started yelling at me and Mr. Hogan said, 'Mrs. Murphy,

leave the room.” He said to the daddy, ‘Man, can you not see that she is pregnant? She is also one of my teachers and one of my very best and I have all the confidence in her ability.’ He told me to leave and that I did not have to put up with this. I knew I was a respected teacher at this school. New teachers would come in and watch me teach and I had a lot of student teachers. I decided to leave after Mr. Hogan retired and was replaced with an inept principal that allowed things to get out of control. I left in 2001 and moved to a different district and it was like the reassurances and confidence I had built up over the past 17 years had left with me.

At first the change was good. I moved to another middle school and the principal, Mrs. Roberts was good. She trusted me too and sent me to conferences for curriculum and things like that. She liked me and so she trusted me and like my teaching ability. Then she left and Mr. Monroe took over as principal and I did not like him very much. Mrs. Roberts was a Type-A personality like me and ran a tight ship. Mr. Monroe came in and undoes everything. There was no structure, and he acted like everything was a joke. He would even start every faculty meeting with a dirty joke! I made it one year with him and then decided to move to the high school that my daughter was going to attend. I would have left and tried to go to a different middle school but my daughter was going into 9<sup>th</sup> grade. This move was probably one of the biggest mistakes I made in my career. When I first got there [to the high school], I thought, “What have I done?” and I cried and went into Mr. Barnes’ office [the principal] crying because I was out there in a trailer all alone and nobody talked to me. In department meetings nobody would really talk to me and I just felt so alone and just out there too. My daughter was miserable there too. I have a folder full of letters she wrote me every single day about her not liking it there and

wishing we could leave. Some mornings she and I would both cry before we'd get to school. This is the high school I graduated from, and I was thinking, "Where in the world is my high school?" The kids were wild and one Homecoming the seniors did the senior run [where they run through the hallways] and they started a fire in a garbage can in the lobby! I went home and told my husband what happened and said, "Oh goodness, I am in a zoo!" Mr. Barnes was nice and he was a good principal and he tried to support me but it wasn't enough and he just didn't understand. I went to his office one day and said, "Please replace me, I made a horrible mistake. Get me out of here!" I even went to see my friend in the county office in human resources about a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teaching position open and I wanted him to hire me for that, but they didn't. Mr. Barnes moved me out of a trailer and into the building, but it was not a step up. I was put in a tiny, moldy classroom that smelled like Bengay all the time and had fungus growing out of the carpet and I stayed sick all the time. Then Mr. Barnes left and Ms. Traylor took over and she was not very supportive and neither was one of the assistant principals. Thankfully the other two assistant principals were very supportive. In fact, if it wasn't for Dr. Walters, I don't know if I would have made it. I made it through, year after year and it got worse. My daughter transferred back to her old school district, back to where her friends from elementary and middle school were; but then my son came to the school. He had gone through both elementary and middle school with this group and he played sports with them, so even though I did not like this school, I let him come here because he really wanted to. My best year there was with my his 9<sup>th</sup> grade group. I made it through, somehow, year after year, and it got worse (Interview, April 2, 2018).

I worked with her at this high school and felt most of what she felt as well. I had a better teaching assignment and maybe a little more support; however, I understood how she felt. The revolving door of administrators made things worse and the general consensus was one of “every man for themselves.” I had been there a few years before she got there, so I may have been more accustomed to the chaos. I also had only been at one school before this one, so I had little to compare it to. We became friends when I was moved to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade academy and taught the same subject across the hall from one another. We taught together for three years and provided support for each other for those three difficult years. We both left at the same time. She retired, and I transferred to a different school. I asked her if there was anything that would have made her stay and postpone retirement.

**Susan Murphy:**

I might have stayed in teaching and looked to transfer to a different school, but it just gotten to the point where I was so tired. It was like fighting a battle. I told my husband, “You know, I had become the teacher I didn’t want to be because I used to be so gung ho and stay after school and do all these extra-curricular things.” I went to football games, participated in all this stuff and helped teachers and it just got to the point where I felt like no matter what I did there it wasn’t accepted, and it wasn’t appreciated, and it didn’t matter. I was so tired and stressed. It was an effort for me to even get out of the car and walk into the building every morning. It got to the point where I told my husband, “I am not made to do this. If I wanted to show a movie, I’ll put in in my plans and plan for it. Nobody cares what I do.” Nothing I did was good enough but when the administration would evaluate me they always gave satisfactory marks; probably mostly due to the fact that I was a veteran teacher and they didn’t want to try to teach an old dog new tricks, so

to speak. They did try to get me to differentiate more but overall, they just left me alone. I knew, though, that they were waiting for me to retire so they could put a younger teacher there with the “new” ways of teaching. You know, though, it’s like the old way of teaching worked. It worked! Kids were educated and, I know its mean, we had, when I taught middle school, we had separated kids by ability grouping in reading and those that were in the low end of the spectrum they were all grouped together, and they excelled and they learned to read, you know. They didn’t feel like they were in the dummy group or anything like that. They were comfortable because they were all in the same position and they were in a small class and worked hard and it paid off. Then things changed and mainstreaming became “the thing” to do and it all went downhill from there. I blame No Child Left Behind for starting all of this and do not think it was a good thing.

On top of all that, those last ten years we had so many different administrators and I didn’t trust them because they talked about teachers and they had people spy on teachers and report back to them. I know they did. The administration would have their favorites that could do no wrong and then there were the rest of us that could do nothing right. So the kids were terrible and the administration let them get away with everything, there was no discipline. The whole environment was toxic and just a miserable place to be. I was sick all the time, my blood pressure was dangerously high, I was on medication for that. That first year of retirement was tough, I was so exhausted. I wanted to sleep all the time because I was literally mentally and physically exhausted. It took me at least a year and a half just to recover (Interview, April 2, 2018).

Susan took a year to recover and enjoy her new grandchild. She spent her second and third year of retirement substitute teaching. This was an attractive option because she could choose which schools, classrooms and days she wants to work.



### **Coach Kincaid**

*I'm sick to this crap. I'm just tired. I'm tired of dealing with the petty monotonous things that take away from teaching.*

Ansley Kincaid was a high achieving high school senior in a small Southern high school when she decided to become a teacher. She was a great student and athlete, dominating on the softball field as well as the classroom. She was known for her competitive nature and her drive to succeed both in the classroom and on the softball field. Her high school was steeped in traditions and placed an emphasis on learning and behavior both in and out of school. This was a tight-knit community, with the school enjoying immense community support. Driving through the town, one would see banners and signs in local businesses and yard signs in front of most houses. There was a great sense of pride on being a part of the Waterbury Knights. This sense of pride never fades as people remain in the community and send their kids there as well. In addition to that, most of the teachers that work there also graduated from there. They return to teach to give back to the community that raised and shaped them. This was the context in which Ansley was raised and educated. She had many influential teachers and coaches. Two of her most influential teachers were her social studies teachers, Mr. Holmes and Mrs. Walker. Mr. Holmes was a young teacher and football coach. He graduated from Waterbury and was a top athlete and a scholar. He credits Waterbury and his coaches for his success. His family life was less than ideal and his coaches provided the motivation and stability he needed during his younger years. This is the reason he returned to Waterbury to teach and coach. He is a personable man, enthusiastic and very passionate both in the classroom and in any sports arena. Ansley was highly influenced by him. She described him as a passionate educator and coach and that his passion was contagious

and made her want to become a teacher. However, it was Mrs. Walker, her US History teacher the next year, that really cultivated her love of both history and teaching. She had Mrs. Walker again her senior year in her Southern history class and decided that teaching would provide her with a way to merge both her loves- history and softball. Mrs. Walker is what one would consider a legendary teacher. There are few people in the community that have not been taught by her or heard of her. Ansley described Mrs. Walker as the type of teacher that would challenge you, instill a healthy level of fear in you, yet, support you in a way very few can. She displayed a love for her students, her subject, and her craft. Ansley credits both Mr. Holmes and Mrs. Walker for her decision to become a teacher, as they both encouraged Ansley to pursue a career in teaching.

Ansley enrolled at the University of West Georgia and earned her degree in History and Secondary Education. She was also a member of the college softball team, attending college on a softball scholarship. While student teaching, she was fortunate enough to be placed with a strong teacher who gave her the freedom to try different things to help her find her own way of teaching. She describes her student teaching experience as a positive one.

**Coach Kincaid:**

I was placed with Mrs. Morgan. She taught me things I didn't know but she allowed me to really have control of her classroom. She eased me into that and then turned me loose. And I was crazy about that. I was working at a Title Pawn company selling cars and repossessing cars, so I was used to dealing with people, and teaching just seemed easy. I mean, even the difficult parts, seemed very easy. I just, I found a lot of pleasure and reaching some of those kids and connecting with them and just being able to run that

room the way I wanted to, with the content that I enjoy. So, I had a really good experience there and I knew that's what I was supposed to do (Interview, April 5, 2018).

After her student teaching experience, she got her first job at a local high school as a history teacher and assistant softball coach. It was not Waterbury; however, she knew one day she would end up there. This is where I first came in contact with Coach K (her teacher and coach name) as I was in the social studies department with her. It was my second year at the school, my fifth-year teaching overall. We did not have much interaction together; however, I do recall her being given the most difficult classes. I was teaching seniors and she had tenth grade. Her classes were large, and she was busy adjusting to teaching and coaching. She handled herself well and I recall being impressed with her resolve to maintain high standards in her classroom. She only spent one year at my school before she was hired at her alma mater, Waterbury. This is where she taught for the remainder of her teaching career. In the twelve years at Waterbury she became a highly respected teacher and coach in the school and in the community. Her softball team regularly placed high in the region, winning the region and competing at the state level many times over the years. Many of her softball players went on to play in college on softball scholarships, her own daughter being one of those. She was very involved in her school and community. She was the sponsor of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) and took great pride in helping her students both academically and socially. She regularly placed a strong emphasis on character and integrity in the classroom and on the softball field. As her teachers shaped her both morally and academically, she sought to do the same. To anyone looking at her in the classroom or the softball field, she was a woman who enjoyed her role as teacher and coach. She appeared to be “set,” meaning, she would remain at Waterbury, teaching and coaching until retirement. When she announced that she was leaving to be part of the Regional

FCA in an effort to reach more female athletes, shockwaves were felt throughout the community. Social media was abuzz with the news, and many conversations about “the news” were had at the local Walmart, grocery store, and churches. She had the support of the community, as well as her past and current students and colleagues, with everyone wishing her well after expressing their sadness that she was leaving the classroom and softball field.

How did she come to this decision? Why would a teacher who was, by all accounts, on the top of her game, walk away from the classroom and softball field – both places she loved and called home? She explains her decision as one that speaks volumes about her beliefs on the current state of education.

**Coach Kinkaid:**

I’m sick of this crap. I’m just tired. I’m tired of dealing with the petty monotonous things that take away from teaching. It drives me nuts and its so, anything from the standards, which I understand we have to have, you know, an outline of what needs to be taught but we’re educated individuals as well as professionals. And we are now evaluated frequently, which I think needs to happen but that’s about it. Those evaluations are very surface level. If I want to be a crappy teacher, I can be a crappy teacher and put on a good show for the 20 minutes or so a few times a year that my administrators comes in and evaluates me. I also don't feel like I have any backing either, as an educator from administration. In fact, I had a conversation the other day, and my administrator told me that while I was out with a hysterectomy, there was 504 meeting for student and parent, I had no idea by the way, and they had changed the 504 for that student and the student didn't do an activity the week that I was gone. She didn't do it over spring break either, and then she didn't turn it in for another two weeks, and I was asked to give her full

credit and allow her to make up another thing she didn't do and refused to do it. I said flat out, no I'm not doing that, sorry I don't care what is going on. She flat out told me she didn't do it because she didn't want to. I'm not going to give her another opportunity. I didn't give one student who has dealt with his mother getting the beat up in front of his face and his little sister face, he didn't get any extra time he did his work, why should she get more time? The administration asked me to reconsider and even sent this same student back to my room to ask if she could make up a different assignment on the second to last day of school! (Interview, April 5, 2018).

This leads us to a conversation about what has changed since she was in high school. She is teaching at the same high school from which she graduated; therefore, she can provide insight into how her school has changed and how things have changed in general. This high school has an excellent reputation, with the high test scores and other student achievements, such as college scholarships and a high graduation rate. There are many high achieving students in this school; along with that often comes high pressure from parents for their children to succeed.

**Coach Kincaid:**

Oh, kids have changed to some degree. Kids actually have not changed that much, it is the expectation of the kids has changed a bit. They still have to come and do what they're supposed to do. The parental involvement has been the biggest change I can tell you and it's not even, its there it's over involvement. It's being able to like for the kids to be able to call, I mean the parents to be able to call shots which enables the kids to feel like they have some type of authority over me and the whole idea of the teacher is the teacher has completely gone out the window. I've had freshman say my grade is supposed to be this and you made a mistake, even when I didn't. They just expect an inflated grade. I have

made some mistakes in grading, but you know the audacity I guess and I don't know, what you'd call that. It's shocking. I guess the proper way to handle that even if the teacher did make a mistake, which we probably make mistakes, is to approach the teacher with respect, not entitlement. There's a way to do that with tact, and that's completely not evident in a vast majority of students.

I think these changes started a few years ago, I'd say about the time where you start to see the emergence of multiple platforms of social media that gives people a whole lot more information, power and a sense of importance. It is atrocious and is what's driving so many people out there. I've had multiple conversations with teachers who are so blown away. And to be quite frank with you it seems like, my pastor put it this way the other day - that teachers are afraid of administrators, administrators are afraid of the superintendent, the superintendent is afraid of the board, the board is afraid of the parents, the parents are afraid of the kids.

Giving this power to them is not doing the students any favors. I don't really know what the purpose is in that because to me it's setting them up for failure. They're never going to learn that when they don't do something, there's a consequence for that action or not acting I'll tell you this too. I'm floored oftentimes on the first day, first few days of school we talk about why are you here? What is the purpose of secondary education? Why don't you have to take a history class and kids have never ever thought about that and they've been presented that question. And you know our job here is to make good citizens I mean like here's what your purpose is. This is what a goal is, it may change but at the end of the day you need to be a good worker with good habits because you're going to have to provide for someone at some point in your life you know, and at some point, you will not

live with your parents. So, the habits you create today are going to benefit you in the future you know. It's not it's not a bad idea to go and start good habits work (Interview, April 5, 2018).

I concluded the interview by asking if there was anything that could make her return to teaching. Her response is an appropriate point to conclude her narrative and common complaint amongst teachers.

**Coach Kincaid:**

At some point, if I ever decide to come back, it will be because we have the authority to tell kids and parents, “This is my classroom, and these are my rules and my objective is to teach the whole class. I have all of these other kids to take care of, your child is not the number one priority when it comes to matters like, ‘oh, my child didn't bring his homework today, can he turn in tomorrow?’” Then you have a freshman parents asking that question without the student ever talking to me that's not okay. The student doesn't ask, doesn't check their grades, their parents do everything. It is helicopter parenting creating entitled kids at its finest. And it is unbelievably prevalent right now. It drives me insane (Interview, April 5, 2018).

It remains to be seen if Coach K returns to the classroom. Her disillusionment kept growing and then the perfect opportunity presented itself in the form of a position with the FCA. To her, this seemed almost ordained by God himself. She will continue working with young people and coaches- two of her favorite groups of people.

### **Bradley James**

*So, if someone had told me that I was going to end up teaching, especially back when I was fresh out of high school, and then during the first couple years of college, I would have said you were crazy.*

That statement began our interview about Bradley's journey into teaching. However, upon further reflection, he realized it was actually a "not so crazy" notion. Bradley recalled his childhood and his role of a big brother. He recalled how he would help his little sisters with their homework without being asked by his mother. He enjoyed school, he liked his teachers; however, he never really thought about a career in teaching. He even married an elementary school teacher, whom he described as "born to teach" and as someone who always knew she wanted to be a teacher. While in college as a Geology major, earning his Bachelor's in Science, he would help labs and conduct tutoring sessions for other Geology majors. After graduating college, he remained living in his hometown of West Georgia with his wife and commuted to the Atlanta area where he was working as a staff Geologist with a consulting firm. It was a fantastic job, just what he wanted, yet, it wasn't going where he thought it would go. Plus there was the issue with the long commute. The problem was that all the jobs in his particular field of engineering were a long commute; so he was at a crossroads. He wanted more time with his family, he did not want to relocate, so what was he going to do? This is where his wife, the one who was "born and bred to teach," comes in. Bradley discusses their conversation and his ultimate decision to go into education.

#### **Bradley James:**

While I was looking for an engineering job closer to home, my wife said, "Well, in the meantime, while you are looking for a different job, you can teach." I was like, "What do



you mean? I don't have a degree in education." She said, "Well you don't need one because you have a degree in a science field. You could teach high school science. You will still have to get certified and pass all the tests but you can even get broad field certified." I was like, "I have no idea what any of that means." She said, "Well, you get certified to teach all science classes and then literally you can teach any science class at the high school level." I never thought about that but I really do miss teaching. I think I need to give this a try because I would feel like I missed out if I didn't. Growing up I've had many teachers in my family, going to church with teachers and having good relationships with my best friend's parents who were teachers. I really thought about it and I realized that this may sound tedious or cliché, but I saw how teachers were just different. How they impacted people's lives differently than other kids parents and all of a sudden, I thought, "Oh man, if I could actually do this without having a degree in education, I know I can teach!" I got with our local school district and figured out how to get TAPP certified [alternate method of certification] and I got broad field certified. After that, I just jumped in, it seemed like a no brainer because I knew I could do it. I had a passion for people and enjoyed teaching those college labs and tutoring. So, now I'm not either travelling three weeks a month or working 70 hours a week with a long commute. It was an easy decision. I finally thought, "Hey, I can invest in my community. I can be a part of the county that I've grown up in. I can invest in this place." And that is how I became a teacher (Interview, April 18, 2018).

Bradley got his first, and only, teaching job at the high school I was working at. I had been there for three years. We had limited interaction as I was in a different department and he was located in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade Academy across the campus. I do remember him being a very enthusiastic and

hardworking new teacher. He was there in the morning and afternoon tutoring students and he was always one of the first to offer help for any teacher who needed it. My son was in his Earth Science class when he was a junior. It was Bradley's third year at the school. My son loved his class and thought Bradley was one of the "good ones" as he called him. He even considered a going to college to study Geology after being in Bradley's class. My son was not the most academic student in the world, so him enjoying a class like that was something. The one thing I remember the most about Bradley was that he was given the most difficult classes, the ones with a high number of "repeaters," which means the student has taken the course at least once and failed. Even though Bradley was in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade academy, he taught classes that were not only 9<sup>th</sup> grade classes. This practice of giving the new teacher the least desirable classes was fairly common. Bradley recalls his experiences those first few years as slightly different than someone who had gone to college to teach, as their expectations were different.

**Bradley James:**

The first year was terrible and not because, well I guess for most teachers, especially teachers that went to college and have a degree in education. Most of them will say, "Oh! Wow, that first year was hard because I did all that training and I wasn't ready." For me, I didn't have that misconception. Then again, it wasn't like I was just a model teacher from the start but because I didn't have that misconception. I didn't know what it meant to be ready. I didn't know any better. I remember thinking, "If this first year is as hard as it gets, then it must not be that bad." I was like, "Wow, that was really hard, but you know what, I'm ready to do it better!" I didn't realize until my second year, and I mean, this isn't pointed at anyone, but I kind of just got thrown to the dogs. I think the by the middle of my second year, I felt like I had arrived. In my mind I was like, "I can do this, I

feel like I'm pretty good at this. I feel like I'm here and I'm not just here for a paycheck. I'm here because I enjoy being here and this is cool." I'm surprised I didn't think of this before (Interview, April 18, 2018).

When I asked him about what or who made those first two years so bearable and how he ended his second year so optimistic that he made the right career choice, he pointed to the support from his colleagues and one of his assistant principals. The one assistant principal he mentions, Dr. Walden, I can attest to the fact that she is a wonderful woman, who provided all the teachers with positive reinforcement. I remember my first year there she would always go out of her way to ask how I was doing and to tell me that she was so happy I was working there. This positive support is one element that teachers' recall as being something that helps them build their confidence. He also mentions a very special teacher that worked in my department, Lee Morgan, that went out of his way to spread kindness and support others, both students and teachers. He was an interesting man- he had a long, braided ponytail, looked like he stepped out of the 1970s, told great stories about the past (he was a history teacher after all) and always had a good laugh with whoever he was with. He worked especially well with the troubled students and the students that other teachers did not want. Bradley discusses how these two made him feel welcome and built up his confidence.

**Bradley James:**

The first couple of years Dr. Walden definitely supported me the most. She was just, I don't know, so positive. You know, sometimes people mean well but a pat on the back seems a little patronizing, you know? Dr. Walden was never patronizing, she was always so sincere, and she would also help as much as she could. And then there was Mr. Morgan. Mr. Morgan was my U.S. History teacher in high school. Now, as a teacher, it

was one of those things where we didn't teach near each other and we didn't talk to each other a whole lot but we kind of had that connection. I just kind of would see him in the break room or I'd have parking lot duty with him or something like that and he just helped me understand that you don't have to act a certain way to be a teacher. You don't have to be a certain way to be a teacher. You need to be yourself, you need to bring that to the table because the students don't want another generic teacher. They want to know that you're a person too. He really helped me understand that. So, Dr. Walden was there for encouragement, and Mr. Morgan just kind of helped me learn the ropes. My department was great, don't get me wrong, they helped me and we all helped each other as the years went by. But there is still a lot of introspective thinking that you do those first years. I learned really fast that a lot of teachers are going to give you a lot of advice your first year but the problem is none of it matters, none of it makes any sense because you haven't done it yet. Even if a teacher says, "Hey, here is a great idea on how to do your grade book or how to take attendance or how to do classroom discipline." It just doesn't make a difference because you have never done it. So even if you are trying to do it, you don't know if its working out or not. By year four, things were going great and I had a good reputation. Some of the assistant principals would come to me and say, "Hey, we would like you to, on your own, to mentor the new teachers with things like classroom discipline because you do that really well and things like that." My department was really coming together and we were doing some great things. I really felt like I was part of something really special with our science department. The county office was telling people about us, we just busted our butts and became a model to other schools and other departments and all that kind of stuff. Between the praise I was getting from Dr.

Walden and the recognition of my department, I was on cloud 9. I was like, “Man, I like this teaching, you know, I’m really making a difference in the world.” I can tell you if I was there for a paycheck I wouldn’t have made it past my first year. But because I genuinely wanted to do it and I knew I could do it. That is what kept me going because now I wasn’t there just trying to fill some space between jobs, I thought I might be able to potentially do this for the rest of my life (Interview, April 18, 2018).

Here we have a teacher that is feeling great about his choices, his career and his ability as a teacher. So what happened in his nine years of teaching to make him leave his job in the middle of the school year? Things started going downhill at the end of year four, when he began investigating his options for moving up in the district. As someone who was not a graduate of a teacher education program, he did not know a lot about certification fields and how one needs to earn higher degrees to get paid more and move up into different positions. He explains how naïve he was.

**Bradley James:**

I began investigating different paths my career could take and possibly one day moving up to administration. I thought that I could keep investing more in my classroom ability but then still have the ability to move up. When I asked our county office about what was needed to move up to administration they said I would have to have a Master’s in administration or leadership. If I had a Master’s in Science or Secondary Science it wouldn’t matter because that was not acceptable for a leadership position. I could never move on to a position at the county office because I don’t have a Master’s in blank, that kind of thing. It wasn’t a bad thing but somewhere around year 4, beginning of year 5

that when I was like, “Well, I’m not going to through all that just for a pay raise. I’m just going to stick around here in the classroom and do what I do because I can do this.”

I totally understand now how it works but at the time, the fact that I didn’t come from an education background, it kind of broke my brain. On top of that, I began to feel trapped to some degree. I don’t want to say trapped but I almost felt, it wasn’t a bad thing necessarily, but by the end of year 4 I started getting a little angry about it. I started realizing that it doesn’t matter how much you contact parents, it doesn’t matter how much you work with the students, it doesn’t matter how well you do your after-school tutoring or your after-school detentions or any of that kind of stuff. It didn’t matter how well I did my job. There was literally nowhere else to go and that wasn’t necessarily a negative thing but in my mind, it was getting to the points where I was thinking about being a counselor or maybe a principal, I think I could really do things different around here. It didn’t matter how good of a teacher I was, if I wasn’t willing to go back to school, get a whole new degree, maybe two degrees, stuff like that. If I wasn’t willing to do that there was nowhere to go. Not only was I broad field certified, not only could I teach any class that they could throw at me, not only was I killing it at classroom discipline and making good relationships with parents, not only was I doing all that very well, it didn’t matter because next year you just do it again. It’s not that was the bad part but that kind of started eating away at the back of my mind (Interview, April 18, 2018).

He reconciled his lack of options for the future and focused on his teaching. He continued for fairly happily for the next two years because he took on a new assignment that raised his confidence even more- collaborative teaching. He explains this jolt of excitement to his job.

**Bradley James:**

Years five and six I had a super high amount of special needs kids in my classes. I had two great collaborative special education teachers working with me and I had fallen in love with the collaborative setting. Like in my mind, I was thinking, “This is how I always thought it would be.” So, it had become my personal goal, a new challenge. I told the counselor, “Look, give me all the 9<sup>th</sup> graders, give me all the special ed kids. I’m telling you right now I will get their grades up, I will get their scores up, not because I am such an awesome teacher but because I know how to reach these kids.” It was just the little things. I knew that I could reach the kids on their level because I didn’t have a typical education background and I knew I could explain science to these kids. Around year three, man, I feel like I really hit my groove and that was one of those things where I thought, “You know, I think this is good. This is really good and I think regardless of all the circumstances and all the politics and all that kind of stuff. I’m so happy where this is going” (Interview, April 18, 2018).

Now Bradley had a new goal that kept things fresh and challenged him. He did not know this at that time, but this would be the peak of his career. It was in year seven that things start the downward spiral that caused him to leave in the middle of year eight. For the remainder of the interview he details all of the issues that piled up and got too much for him to deal with and caused him to leave.

**Bradley James:**

Year seven, that’s when it hit me. I started having a lot of issues, personal issues. I lost my dad suddenly, just out of nowhere. So, all of a sudden, I just had all this stuff on my plate and that’s when I realized that in seven years I think I had missed two days of work

or something like that. Right, and in 7 years other than the breaks, right? I realized that I had gotten to the point to where I was losing sleep not because of what happened in my personal life, but I realized year 7 that I was losing sleep over my job. I was, on the weekends. You know, Sunday morning on my way to church and I'm stressing out about work. I'm on my way home just finished up, for instance, an awesome day of finals or something. You know how we'd have kind of those, the days where we'd have block schedule and stuff. Great scores, students were in a good mood everybody behaved great day. You can just see that you are really impacting these kids and the way home I'm just stressed out about it. On the way to work there was a couple of mornings that year that I didn't understand. I was on my way to work and I was so stressed. I was almost stressed to the point of tears. You know, on one hand I'm mentoring new teachers, and all that kind of stuff. Like I'm mentoring them, I'm like man, I'm training these teachers this is so awesome. But I could not turn it off. I couldn't turn it off. Literally the last, the last three and a half weeks of summer break. It bothered my wife so much I would just lose it. I was stressed out about school. I was freaking out about pre-planning. To the point to where, I want to say it was probably second semester. Second semester of year 7 if I remember correctly. So, I don't what year that is but like for the first time in my life I was at school and policing the halls and all that normal kind of stuff. I felt like I was having a panic attack. That was also round about the time year seven where we really started getting a lot, like catching a lot of the drugs and that particular year I think I personally broken up like six fights. There was a fight at the end of our hall. Or it got a sucker punch and there was blood everywhere. I mean everywhere, and blood doesn't bother me, but I think all those things compiled and I thought I was having a panic attack.



I went to the nurse, she checked me out and she said, "I don't think you are but you need to get a doctor about this." For the first time in my life my job, do you know I knew I could do it. My job was stressing me out so bad that I had to get antianxiety medicine. Despite all this stress, I felt like I was doing better than your average teacher, especially for many years that I've taught, but I just didn't hold it together. That's when I started looking again, just not like I got to get out, but I'm starting looking again, like maybe my time teaching is just done and maybe God is just calling me to do something else, I don't know. So, I just started to put my feeler out and everything, I mean it was still one, another 2 years before anything even came of other jobs or anything like that. I was open with everybody. I told my department chair, I told my department, I told the principal and everything, like look, I'm not trying to run away, I'm not trying to quit my job and I'm just letting you know that I may at least put my feelers out, because I just got to test this. I got to make sure that I'm in the right place for the right reasons and to be fair after that year the stress never went away. Not that the stress was unbearable but the effects of the stress I guess were beginning to get to me.

I mean the classroom stress was enough as it is, but my class was the only thing I could control really and you know, we always joked around about how the top hall and Ninth Grade Academy I would look around and I would see so many things going on, as in students doing things they shouldn't be doing and I would watch teachers literally turn a blind eye to it. Because again it's too, it's not even worth the trouble because they're just stressed out the more as I am, right. my was my hall which now it's like. I think this is what it came out to be perfectly honest. So, so many teachers turn a blind eye to blatant, obvious things, and I saw, and I heard so many students say, you know, this teacher saw

me do it or you know, or Coach so and so, lets us do that, you know, and stuff like that. That kind of stuff started piling up and I just started getting so frustrated that I think I became hyper-vigilant. I mean I would like to think I was already vigilant to start with but I think I became hyper-vigilant. So, it was one of those things where I got to where, when the bell would ring in between classes, about this, in the morning. I would be sitting at my desk getting ready, and I would feel like I was about to have a heart attack. Counting down the clock until that first period bell would ring or that first release bell would ring. Then in between class, the bell would ring for next period and I would have this feeling of dread, oh! No, I got bathroom duty. Oh! No, you know, I confiscated this phone from someone. Oh! No, someone told me such and such students got stuff on them or whatever, you know. It's like I just became like I would just dread leaving my classroom. So, I would definitely sit and I think, I would say number one this stress of trying to take up for the teachers around me, and I'm not, I don't mean to point fingers but to take up for the teachers that were intentionally not doing, not policing their area right. So, the same reason that I was being hyper-vigilant, they were being hyper-perceptive I guess. It was just, you know, that and the, at that point the system in its place. Not the fact that we have to call parents and keep a lot, not that stuff, but just the fact that there is, I guess around that same kind there has been some teachers getting in trouble in at our school and in our county and of course you know, you see that stuff on the news (Interview, April 18, 2018).

This is when the conversation takes a turn to something that many teachers worry about- student accusations of misconduct. Male teachers tend to worry about this more than female teachers. Though, all teachers are told to be smart and protect themselves. Teachers are told not to drive

students home from school, which is more of a concern for coaches, to not allow themselves to be alone in a classroom with a student with the door closed, and to be mindful of physical contact with students. High school students are not likely to hug a teacher as elementary or middle school students, however, it is something all teachers are told to be mindful of. Bradley explains how this affects him and impacted his decision to leave the profession.

**Bradley James:**

I think that's when I realized that the only thing we have control over is our own classroom. All it takes is one lie or one angry student or one angry parent and then your 7 years of integrity and hard work doesn't mean anything. Because surely the principal says, I've got your back, I've got your back man. But the system does not. You're not innocent until proven guilty, it's this parent is pissed and so you're on trial now, and that kind of thing. So, anyway, it all just kind of hit it once and it was, it didn't have anything to do with me wanting to teach. It had everything to do with the fact that my job was making my personal life miserable at that point (Interview, April 18, 2018).

Bradley then continues to discuss the affect that the stress had on him and how he tried to manage the stress, along with some advice he was given by colleagues that helped him make peace with his decision to leave the classroom. He concludes with the lasting affect teaching and the decision to leave teaching has on him.

**Bradley James:**

After I had to start taking anti-anxiety medicine I wondered if I was going crazy, or just being a baby, like what's wrong with me? As I started was still supported by my colleagues, then I didn't feel supported by administration, then as things changed at our school, I felt plenty supported by administration but that was when I was trying to kind of

explain earlier, was that you watch a principal, who has to have a passion for what they do or else why would they be going through all the trouble, right? You watch your principal to the extent, most of their career becoming the principal and they don't have time, they don't even have time to do their own job much less trying to micromanage 150 teachers. But it was just one of those things where I didn't feel like our principals were getting the support from the county that they needed, even though they were being "trained". I didn't feel like the school was getting the support from the county even though they were spending their summers making tests, doing this, doing that, they are our advocates, right. But in the end, it's like every time you turn around you know, you've got both hands tied behind your back, and one foot, and then the county is the one that's always sliding your leg out from under, you know. I think that was one of the things I became very disillusioned with is like, no one actually got time to do anything, and so what ends up happening is a lot of teachers just end up doing their planning/whatever you want to call it at home. They do the grading at home and that's the point, now I had gotten to the point where I wasn't grading at home, I wasn't bringing work home, but I couldn't turn it off. I watched the assistant principals, I've seen them outside of school and it's like a Saturday morning at Martins or something, you know. They're not enjoying their morning with their kids, they're stressed out about school or either that or they're going to spend their whole weekend at baseball for the duty or football duty or, you know what I mean it's like? Right, and that's when I started realizing because at first time I was, it's just me, I'm just being whiny, like I'm just a big baby, I don't even know why I'm so stressed out, but I started looking at the administrators, like what's the principal stressed out about? They can't even really do

their job, and I'm not the only teacher that's stressed out. Mrs. Murphy, man, Mrs. Murphy and I had so many great conversations. About that time, I had been very open about how I was feeling with Mrs. Murphy and Mrs. Hastings and stuff like that. Mrs. Hastings told me, one day and just me and her talking and she said, what's, you know, she's like, don't tell me out loud but think of your dream job, and think of like your top 5 dream jobs. I said okay, and she said, is teaching your first one? I said, honestly no, it's not. She said, is it in your top 5? I said, honestly no, it's not. She said, then you need to find whatever you think in your mind is going to be the job that you really want. She said because you can obviously teach but its, if you're teaching for someone else, if you're investing in someone else and you're stressed out for the sake of someone else, she's like there's a certain point you're not going to want to do it anymore. She said, you know, if your amount of doing hard work is x amount of years then also it's okay because you're getting these kids so many good years of teaching. She said, don't be the teacher that just sticks with it and gave 10 good years and 15 terrible years. She said, don't be that person, and she's like, if you want to keep thinking, you need to be the same teacher you are now 20 years from now and if you don't know if you're going to maintain that or not then maybe you shouldn't do it. So, with her telling me that if she didn't tell me that, I'll be like, oh! I'm not going to teach anymore. You know, it was just that kind of good ranging soul searching that I had to do and at that point again I started putting out my feelers. But even then, when I started having interviews for other jobs, and things like that I mean, I felt guilty and it's so sad, you know, like I can't see my students. Like, who's going to teach them, what's going to happen? But then no matter how bad, how many times I went back and I'm like, okay, I'm going to convince myself I'm going to do this for 20 more

years. There was no way because of the system and looking at where the system of education was going. There was no way, if I was already that stressed and having that much of a time keeping it together, then Mrs. Murphy told me that she was right, you know, she's like I wouldn't tell anybody to consider being a teacher. She said, but because you know, because she taught for 30 years. Then she said, if you, she said, if you had told me that it was going to be like my last 10 years she said, I would have stopped at 20 and doing something else. She said but you're not, it's not what I signed up for and she said, I'm not trying to persuade you, I'm not trying to convince you. She said, but I can tell you what I do now is not what I signed up to do all those years ago. She said, almost the same things have happened is that you've got to find that thing that you can do no matter how bad it gets, and you got to love every second of it. So, I had all of these roaming around in my mind, putting out those feelers for other jobs. Getting more and more disillusioned with this system of education. But it is so weird, because I was doing better and better in my classes, better and better with my students, better and better with my parents. Better and better with my colleagues, but I was so disillusioned with what education was. I can tell that it was becoming more and more compelling to go ahead, and I hate to say I was at the top of my game but to go ahead and move on. But even talking about it now it makes me feel so selfish, you know. I don't regret doing, switching careers, but people ask me all the time, which one do you like better? Teaching or engineering? I tell them the same answer every time, I miss teaching. But I do not miss schooling, not one bit (Interview, April 18, 2018).

Bradley left the classroom due to his disillusionment with the system of education itself. The lack of mobility without getting additional advanced degrees, the lack of support from the

district office and state department of education, and the stress created by the demands of the job all made teaching a less desirable career for him. Bradley left to work in his field of geology for a company in his community. The pay is actually about the same, not the typical pay increase one would expect when a teacher leaves the profession. When I asked him if there was anything that could have made him stay, he responded in length, explaining that he was frequently asked that question.

**Bradley James:**

It's kind of weird that you ask that because I had 2 others, actually 3 other people ask me that exact same question. In my circumstance, no, because by the time I got to the end of year 8, I was to the point where I didn't recognize myself anymore, if that makes any sense. It was getting to the point where I was so stressed out and again not that my job was terrible, because I don't want to come across like it was, but I was so stressed that my wife wanted me to get a new job. I couldn't turn it off, I couldn't stop talking about it, I couldn't stop thinking about it, I'd dream about it. I wake up, you know, like literally wake up on Saturday mornings, it's like, oh my God, I got to make copies, I got, oh! It's Saturday. You know, that kind of thing. Like I'm driving to church on Sunday and all I can think about is the test retakes next week. It just got to where I feel like I kicked butt in my classroom, I still like my students, I felt like I had great relationship with my students, I felt like I truly invested in hundreds and even thousands of students over my length of being in the classroom, providing. There was nothing that could have made me stay because one I kind of come to piece knowing that I did it right. I come to peace with knowing that my wife was asking me to consider doing something else. Also, at a spiritual level I had so much more time that I had ever realized, like I had never had

planned on teaching 9 years, you know, originally. It ended up I kicked butt at it and was great and enjoyed it and then it all just fell apart so fast, I was so disillusioned with the lack of accountability and the lack of structure outside of the school level, that there was nothing you could do to keep me there. Even if you were turned around and said, I'll tell you what, there is a new system in place that you have enough experience, now you can be a principal. Even if they said they would have paid me more I would have said no. I really, really, really thought it over and through and spiritually I don't feel like I left teaching, I feel like I left education. I feel like I still teach just as much as I ever did at my new job and at my church and everywhere I go. I feel like I still teach, if that make sense. I realized that I can teach everywhere I go because I have to be at school, but to this day because I can answer you plainly and say no, there was nothing that anyone could have done to keep me there. To this day that still makes me feel guilty and hard to say it (Interview, April 18, 2018).

He has a job in his field of geology as an engineering analyst. The funny thing about this new job is that he has ended up taking on a new role there as well, that of trainer. He trains all the new engineers. The irony is not lost on him. He concludes the interview with his thoughts on his new job and teaching.

**Bradley James:**

I had only been in my group for 2 months when I started working there, already my manager comes to me and says, hey I would really like it if you would train all the co-ops whenever they come in. Because they're doing engineering rotations, through my company and at Georgia Tech and all that and things like that. My manager comes to me, and says that they would really, really like me to teach all the co-ops and train all the co-



ops when we come in. So, till this day it's, like I said I've never stopped teaching, till this day you know, office complex. I'm the only one in our office complex that has 2 desks in my office. Because I'm the only person that they trust to basically train and have the new co-ops go with me at all times. So, it's one of those things where even though I've left teaching, I'm still in charge of training all the new folks as they come in and you know, people say, "Oh! Well, you're not an engineer," yet, I train the engineers to do what they do, you know what I mean. It's just been really cool and it's one of those things where, I feel like what I do is not that much different than what I did in the classroom, but instead of doing it with 30 kids, 6 times a day. I feel like I'm doing it with 6 people every day. Then like every semester it's kind of starting over. Then I may end up training 100 people you know, within any given say a semester but its interdivisional teaching and training. So, it's very, very different, it's no way to really to compare it to, but it's just kind of hilarious to me that I changed from education. So, that is pretty funny, that is a, you know, the teaching finds you, it's just not, it's something I think that you just have it in you, and they saw that and I'm sure they probably knew you had a background in teaching. But, you know, not everybody can teach as you saw in your experiences. Like you stand in front of a classroom but doesn't mean you're doing what you're supposed to be doing (Interview, April 18, 2018).

### **What Do Their Stories Tell Us?**

These stories reveal the intricate details in the lives of teachers. There are three main themes that these stories share: support, teacher morale, and the physical and emotional manifestations of stress. These themes are all related and form a web that encompasses the lived experiences of teachers. Teacher morale is affected by the support they receive from their administrators and colleagues. If they receive this support, then teacher morale is higher, and the negative physical and emotional manifestations of stress are reduced. The reverse is also true- no support and limited resources often create an unpleasant environment, which leads to lower morale and increased negative physical and emotional manifestations of stress. Both of these situations are evident in the lives of the participants of this study. These stories show us how some aspects of education have changed, such as expectations and parental attitudes, and how some things have stayed the same, such as the treatment of novice teachers. Three of the four participants, Mrs. Thomas, Coach K, and Mr. James, say that they have left the system education but not teaching. Coach K and Mrs. Thomas both still work with young people and Mr James trains new engineers at his job. While these four teachers are all very different individuals, their stories illustrate the commonalities of their experiences.

The experiences of Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Murphy both illustrate life before and after the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era of reforms. Both Marie and Susan began teaching in the early 1990s and both cite NCLB as the catalyst for the negative changes they experienced. Both claimed that the old way of teaching worked and was beneficial for the students, such as the ability grouping, small resources classes for special education. This old way of teaching, to them, provided more individualized attention for all students, both high and low achieving students.

Marie felt that mainstreaming did benefit some of her higher functioning special education students; however, it was a negative change for her lower functioning students because they got lost in the crowd. There is a degree of irony in the fact that NCLB was enacted to prevent students from slipping through the cracks and getting lost in the crowd; yet, that is exactly what happened according to Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Murphy. Coach K also touched on that as well. She also believed that mainstreaming was detrimental to the entire class as it does not provide enough individual attention for the special education student and takes away time from the rest of the students. All three teachers would agree that mainstreaming was simply not beneficial to any of the students. This leads to all of their experiences in the post-NCLB environment. Mrs. Thomas believed that the emphasis on testing ignores the progress students make. If the progress does not meet the benchmark, then it is not good enough and both the student and teacher are labelled as low achieving. Mrs. Murphy found that the emphasis on accountability in general, which was mainly based on test scores, fostered a high-pressure environment and made many teachers, including herself, feel bad about themselves. Mr. James felt this environment had a ripple effect that started from the top, administration, and trickled down to the teachers to create a negative environment. This negative environment affected the students as well, as discipline issues increased and teacher control over those issues decreased. Mrs. Thomas, Mrs. Murphy, and Mr. James all felt that the administrators were too stressed with their own jobs to take care of discipline. The emphasis on test scores hurts high achieving schools, like the one Coach K taught at. Her school was deemed a “School of Excellence” because of their high test scores. These high test scores give students and parents an inflated sense of ego and that trickles down to how they treat their teachers. Coach K experienced a dramatic increase in “helicopter parents” that would take care of everything for their students, including asking the teacher for extensions, make up

work and extra credit. The parental efforts were supported by the administration. She explained that she felt that the teachers are scared of the administrators, the administrators are scared of the parents and the kids are scared of nobody. This is a problem, she believed, that many do not understand because they think her school is perfect due its long-standing reputation of excellence.

All the participants reported being happier and working their best when they felt supported by the administration. There is a direct relation between feeling supported by the administration and teacher morale. Teacher morale was higher when they felt trusted, valued and supported by their administrators. This was most prevalent in Mrs. Murphy's story. She spent 14 years at a middle school where she felt supported, valued, trusted and protected by her principal. She explained that he was a tough principal, with very high standards, and that he did make her cry on occasion. However, he trusted her and valued her, as was evident in the various conferences he would send her to, committees her would place her on, and he would tell parents she was one of his best teachers. This made her confidence soar and she enjoyed teaching there. When he retired and was replaced with an incompetent person, she left as well. Unfortunately, these feelings of support would not occur at her next two schools and over the years her self-efficacy dwindled, and she was miserable for many years. She said that it was like her confidence was left behind when she moved schools. Bradley felt he was supported by his administrators and that it made a big difference in his confidence as a teacher. He felt supported by his department and his colleagues as well, citing many times they offered support, advice and encouragement. While he had no official mentor, one of his former high school teachers worked at his school and took him under his wing and made a big difference those first few years. He is an example of the positive correlation between feeling supported and high self-efficacy. Coach K

is an example of the negative correlation between a lack of support and self-efficacy. She directly states that she felt a lack of support by the administrators and that while it did not affect her opinion of her teaching abilities, it did make her lose confidence in the integrity of her school and school system. It was one of the main reasons she cites for leaving the classroom.

While each story provides examples of the connection between support and teacher morale, Mrs. Murphy and Mr. James's stories illustrate the darker side of low teacher morale and a negative school culture- the physical and emotional manifestations of stress. Each experienced both physical and emotional manifestations of high stress that that remained until they left the classroom. They both described their school climates as negative. Each explained how everyone was stressed, both teachers and administrators. Mr. James explains how he would see his administrators on the weekends and they were busy with school tasks and never had a break. He believed they were under a great amount of stress to meet the many goals set by the district. He could not pinpoint exactly what set off his descent into stress induced anxiety, however, it became debilitating. He could not turn it off and was constantly worrying about school, day and night. He became hyper-vigilant at work and grew increasingly frustrated with the other teachers who would turn a blind eye to the growing discipline problems in the school. It culminated with a panic attack after he broke up a fight. He went to the nurse and she told him he had a panic attack and should see a doctor. He then went on anti-anxiety medication with minimal results. It was this stress and the physical manifestations that made him leave teaching. Mrs. Murphy experienced stress related health problems as well. She had many high blood pressure episodes that her medication could not control and reported feeling worn out. There were some days she could barely make it in to work. It was all she could do to make it to the end of her 30<sup>th</sup> year. Coach K did not suffer from stress, so to speak, but she did get angry and point blank told me

“I’m tired of this crap” referring to all the tasks that take away from teaching such as excessive meetings and testing, and the way the administration caves into the parent. She cited an incident where she was encouraged by the administration to accept work that was over two months late, work that the student said she did not complete because she did not want to, because the parent insisted the child receive a passing grade. While Mrs. Thomas was frustrated with the lack of control she had over discipline and felt they were focusing on all the wrong things such as excessive documenting of problem behaviour, and calling parents over issues administration should handle, she did not report being stressed over this or having these feelings of frustration carry over to her personal life.

Overall, these stories portray what life is like in the classroom, both the positive and negatives. These stories serve as a method to humanize the teacher. They bring to life the statistics we see in the many published reports, the villains and saints reported by the media, and the many memes shared on social media. Teaching is a very misunderstood profession, with competing perspectives. One perspective is that of the teacher-martyr, willing to make sacrifices to shape the future; while the other perspective is that of a lazy, there for the summers off, incompetent loser. The truth, of course, is somewhere in between. These participants, along with most teachers, became teachers because they enjoyed teaching young people and hoped to make a difference in the world. These stories are not unique to these four participants, as illustrated in the stories presented in Chapter 2. I will elaborate on these stories and the commonalities with teachers in the past in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

### REFLECTIONS OF MY INQUIRY

Education is the one experience that almost all people share. Everyone has attended school and while these schools may have varied, along with their experiences, there are some universalities with our educational experiences. As noted in Chapter 3, when people think of a teacher, they usually picture a female. This illustrates how deeply ingrained our ideas about teachers are in our society. While there are plenty of male teachers, we still associate teaching with a female. When one discusses the profession of teaching one of the first things many people say is, “Teachers aren’t in it for the money.” The same thing is not said about doctors or lawyers. Teaching could be considered one of the most important careers out there. Teachers are given quite a momentous task- to educate, to inspire, to guide, and to mold into active and productive citizens. Yet, teaching is considered a lower status profession. The perceptions of teaching and teachers has been fairly consistent from the inception of the public-school system. As discussed in Chapter 1, the perceptions as teachers are mothers, which lead to the teacher-martyr ideal remains a prevalent ideal about teachers. This creates a dual rhetoric of teachers as both saints and villains (Hoffman, 1977/2003; Grumet, 1988; Goldstein, 2014). Teachers are held to a higher standard and are given the important task of preparing the next generation of citizens. Yet, teachers are also blamed for the problems of society, as evident in the responses to Sputnik, the Cold War, and No Child Left Behind. The results of this common rhetoric are teachers who are dissatisfied with their jobs, citing high levels of stress and burnout (Met Life Survey, 2013; AFT, 2017; Herman, Hickmon-Rosa, & Reinke, 2018). Chapters 1 and 3 provide examples of research and an analysis of this research on the topic of teacher support, self-efficacy, and stress.

In this dissertation, I investigate the roots of these perceptions of teachers, along with the socio-political forces that shaped these perceptions. I used narratives from teachers from the past and present, along with a history of the teaching profession and educational reforms, to provide the context in which teaching and the public-school system developed. This context provides a rationale for the lower status of the profession, along with the effects of this status. I posit that the roots of this lower status are found in the feminization of teaching that occurred when the profession and public-school system was established. The feminization of teaching provides the foundation that enabled women to join the teaching force, while keeping them subordinate to the power of those in charge- men. This patriarchal power structure was in place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, therefore, there was no questions when it was instituted to the teaching profession and public-education system. While women made up the teaching force, they did not expect to be the ones in charge. However, this power structure remains firmly in place, fairly unchanged to this day. This study investigates this hierarchal power structure of both the government and the system of education and the effects of this power structure by providing a history of the teaching profession and educations reforms and examining how they are intertwined to provide the context of the socio-political forces that shaped the experiences of teachers in the classroom and contribute to teacher attrition.

Before exploring the relationship between the feminization of teaching and the experience of teachers, it is useful to examine the institution of education's the hierarchy of power. This hierarchy of power is the driving force of the insubordinate status of teachers, past and present. While the 10<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the U.S. Constitution reserves the power of education to the States, the Federal Government still has control over some elements of the educational system. Race to the Top (2010) and No Child Left Behind (2001) are examples of how the



Federal Government uses funding to control the states. The Federal and State Governments set educational policies and establish the curriculum. According to the Center for American Women and Politics [CAWP] (2018), women make up 20% of the seats held in the 2018 U.S. Senate and Congress; with the percentages of women in state legislatures ranging from the highest in Arizona with 40% and the lowest in Louisiana at 15%. Georgia ranks 23<sup>rd</sup> with 26.7% of the seats in the General Assembly held by women. The fact that 80% of U.S. Congress and more than 70% of State Legislatures are male illustrate how the political power held in the United States remains predominately male. Their power extends to the public system of education, which in turn extends to the control over teachers. Next in hierarchy of power are the Local Boards of Education. Those are made up of local citizens that are usually elected by their districts. They control the local policies, approve the budget, personnel decisions, and appoint the Superintendent. In some areas, the Superintendent is elected along with the board. However, the Superintendent still falls under the control of the Board of Education. The Superintendent is over the school-level administrators, including the Principal and Assistant/Vice Principal. Recent survey results from the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) show that about 77 percent of school superintendents are male (“AASA Superintendent,” 2016). According to the latest data from the National Center for Education Statistics 2011-12 School and Staffing Survey (2013), the percentage of female public-school principals was 52 percent overall, with 64 percent in primary schools, 42 percent in middle schools, and 30 percent in high schools. This data illustrates how the hierarchy of power in education, and society, remains overwhelmingly in the hands of men. The feminization of teaching, along with establishment of the public-school system, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was orchestrated by a power structure that was almost completely dominated by men and continues to be dominated by men. This patriarchal hierarchy of power is

the main contributing factor of the lack of power and input teachers have for their profession and their classrooms.

The experience of the teachers in this study illustrate the impact of the feminization of teaching due to the fact that the root of their complaints lie in the decisions made by those outside of the classroom, such as government leaders or those that left the classroom many years prior to become superintendents. Their experiences are not exclusive to only females, they represent many commonalities amongst teachers, both male and female. As a veteran educator with 18 years of experience, I have had similar experiences throughout my career. I sought to discover the root of the shared frustrations of many teachers through these shared experiences. As a social studies teacher, with a degree in History, I understood that my experiences were related to society at large and that teaching, and our educational system, reflected our society. As part of my undergraduate work, I conducted a good deal of social history research, so I was familiar with the role of socio-political forces in shaping our institutions. This is why I started with the history of the profession and where I discovered the concept of the feminization of teaching (Grumet 1988, 2007, 2010; Weiler, 1988; Hoffman, 1977/2003; Goldstein, 2014). My social science background, along with my discoveries from my research into the feminization of teaching, are the contributing factors for my emphasis on the socio-political forces that shaped the process of the feminization of teaching as a starting point for analyzing the experiences of my participants.

The overarching theme of my research is that the experience of all teachers, both male and female, are affected by the feminization of teaching. From the establishment of the teaching profession, when women became the main teaching force, the identity of “woman” and “teacher” became one. This identity became so natural and normalized that this connection between

“gender” and “teacher” remains hidden (Goldstein, 2014; Grumet, 1988). This undercurrent of gender norms permeates society to the point where it is an invisible force. Gender oppression in our society is normal, ordinary, and imagined into our society, which makes it difficult to recognize (Boyle, 2004). These gender norms are an accepted part of our social systems, as well as our political and educational institutions. This is evident by the fact that the majority of those in the U.S. Congress, State Legislatures, school Superintendents, and principals are male. I present the statistics of male leaders in Chapter 2. This affects the teaching profession by excluding teachers in the policy making process that dictates every aspect of their lives as teachers. It bears repeating that the patriarchal power hierarchy of power is the main contributing factor that prevents teachers from having a voice in their own profession and professional practices.

My research question asks, “How do former teachers describe the emotional, social-political conditions that contributed to their exit of their teaching in public schools?” The overarching theme, as discussed in the previous paragraph, is how the experience of all teachers, both male and female, are affected by the feminization of teaching. The experience of my participants and their struggles can be then categorized into three related themes: 1- support, 2- teacher morale, and 3- the physical and emotional manifestations of stress. Each of these themes are distinct, yet, they are all intertwined, with each affected by the other. The level of support affects teacher morale, which in turn, affects the physical and emotional manifestations of stress. The research often examines the connectedness of themes in their studies. Support refers to support teachers receive from colleagues and their administration. This support comes in the form of positive or negative affirmations by administrators and colleagues, resources, and parental and community support. This support creates a positive or negative school climate.

Evans (1997) defines teacher morale as “a state of mind determined by the individual’s anticipation of the extent of satisfaction of those needs which s/he perceives as significantly affecting her/his total work situation” (p.832). Teacher morale is affected by factors that include teacher influence, administrative support, staff relations, student behavior, facilities and safety (Boyd et al., 2011). Herman, Hickmon-Rosa, & Reinke (2018) research the effects of teacher morale on teacher burnout and student achievement. They find that teacher morale is negatively associated with teacher stress and burnout. Their research indicated that teachers who feel more confident in their abilities are more likely to display effective teaching practices and observe positive student outcomes, with the reverse true as well (p. 91). O’Brennan, Pas & Bradshaw (2017) also research the effects of school factors, such as administrative support, on teacher morale, stress and burnout. They examine the link between teacher perceptions of self-efficacy and connectedness, teacher morale, as well as school-level contextual variables, such as student and teacher demographics.

When questioned about what they consider the most influential factor of school climate, most teachers will respond with support (**Theme 1**). Administrative support and a positive school climate are cited as the main factors in teacher satisfaction (MetLife Survey, 2013; NCES 1995, 2010, 2014, 2015, 2016). The reason for this is fairly simple- this factor affects their day to day lives. From the district office, down to the local schools, the level of support provided to teachers can create a positive or negative school climate. Support comes in many forms in the lives of teachers, such as the support from colleagues, parents, or administrators, though most research topics involve the support of administration. The support of the building level administrators is the most influential on the lives of teachers, as reported in the research conducted by He, Cooper, & Tangredi (2015) and Herman, Hickmon-Rosa, & Reinke (2018). These studies found that

administrative report was one of the leading factors of positive teacher morale. Boyd et al. (2011) connect administrative support to everything from teacher moral, teacher influence, staff relations, student behavior, facilities and safety (Boyd et al., 2011). Administrative support is cited as a reason teachers remain in their school and a lack of support is often cited for why a teacher decides to transfer to a different school or leave the profession altogether (Met Life, 2013; NCES, 2010, 2014; NCTAF, 2002). Often times the support from the district office, including the Superintendent, affects the behaviors of the building level administrators. The participants in this study each discussed their administrators, referring to their principal and assistant principals. Coach K explained how she did not feel like she had the support of her administration and this frustrated her. She stated it rather bluntly, “teachers are afraid of administrators, administrators are afraid of the superintendent, the superintendents afraid of the board, the board is afraid of the parents, the parents are afraid of the kids. The kids, in turn, are afraid of no one.” She cited this lack of support as one of the reasons she left the profession. Bradley James felt supported from his one assistant principal, which helped him through his first few years of teaching. While he reported feeling supported for the most part by his building level administrators, he did not feel that they, or he, were supported by the district level administration. He explains his perception of the lack of support by the district/county office,

But it was just one of those things where I didn’t feel like our principals were getting the support from the county that they needed, even though they were being “trained.” I didn’t feel like the school was getting the support from the county even though they were spending their summers making tests, doing this, doing that, they are our advocates, right. But in the end it’s like every time you turn around you know, you’ve got both hands tied

behind your back, and one foot, and then the county is the one that's always sliding your leg out from under you (B. James, interview, April 18, 2018).

Mr. James' feelings reflect a perceived lack of support for himself and the building level administrators from the district level administration and Superintendent. This "from the top" support is an example of the domino effect of the hierarchy of power established with the profession. The threats get passed down, with the teacher feeling the blunt of the force as they have to impose the directives on the students. He illustrates the frustrations many teachers feel when they perceive a lack of support from their district, even when they have the support of their school level administrators. If teachers had a voice in directives and policies, then some of this uneasiness could be alleviated. These ideas are supported by the surveys conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2010, 2014, 2015), the Met Life Survey (2013), as well as the U.S. Department of Education (2011). These surveys ask teachers about their job satisfaction, what they like about their jobs, and what they do not like. Overwhelmingly, teachers respond that they are unhappy with the fact that they do not have a voice in educational policies. They also respond that they have higher job satisfaction when they have support from their administration. For example, if Mr. James had interacted more with those at the district level and received recognition or some type of additional support, such as invitations to present to other schools or attend outside conferences, he may have had a more positive view of those at the district level as opposed to feeling like they are out to sabotage him. Perhaps if Coach K felt she had the support of her Superintendent and School Board to enforce policies, she would hold a more positive view of the state of our current educational system. This lack of power and control is directly related to the feminization of teaching and the hierarchy of power in the system of education. In the hierarchy of the system of education, teachers are at the bottom. Despite the

fact that teachers make up the majority of this hierarchy, they remain at the lowest level. Those at the top, those that make the decision that affect teachers, are those outside of the system of education. These are the politicians and corporate leaders that determine educational spending and policies. As cited in Chapter 2, these corporate leaders established “venture philanthropies,” such as the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, and the Walton Foundation, and pressure the politicians to pass educational reforms that have turned classrooms into factories, with the focus on “evidence-based” outcomes based on “productivity goals,” i.e. standards of achievement. These corporate leaders and politicians are predominately male. The majority of the teaching force remains predominately female; however, that is not as important now as it was a century ago. However, the feminization of teaching laid the foundation in which teachers were left out of the policy-making process of educational policy and reforms. The continuation of the absence of teacher input in educational policy is due to the feminization of teaching. Since teachers were never included in the process, there is no precedent to include them in the process now. Our society lies heavily on tradition, therefore, what the way it has been done in the past remains the way it will be done in the future. We can see this in our system of government, in the fact that we remain a two-party system, we still have the Electoral College, and that the majority of our elected officials are White. Protestant, males. This reliance on tradition in government is the reason that teachers continue to remain essentially powerless in creating the policy that dictate their work in the classroom.

Both participants who taught before No Child Left Behind [NCLB] (2001) was passed reported greater administrative support before NCLB, especially regarding teaching the special needs population. Marie Thomas reported feeling very supported by her administration before NCLB. She explained, “Back then, I would say that the administration was really good with

Special Education, more so than it is now. They really depended on the teacher and said, ‘You’re the expert,’ which they do not as much now.” She noticed a shift in the emphasis on certain benchmark scores as opposed to any growth to show progress. The demands increased, yet the support and resources remained the same. Susan Murphy cited instances where she felt very supported and others when she did not. Her first-year teaching was challenging, to say the least, and she did not feel she had much support from her administration. For example, she was shocked at the amount of profanity she heard from her students and went to her assistant principal about this problem. She recalled his flippant response, “he finally told me, he said, ‘Ms. Murphy if I put every child that you hear say a profane word...I’d have half of the school in there,’ so I had to just kind of turn a deaf ear to all that stuff.” Thankfully when she left that school, she found herself working for a principal that provided her with a lot of support. While he was known for being tough and holding teachers to a high standard, that just made his trust and support all the more meaningful. She felt respected, appreciated, trusted and that support stayed with her for the entire 14 years she worked with him. However, once she transferred to a different school, that support was difficult to come by. By the end of her teaching career, she felt the opposite of supported. She felt like more of a burden, like her status of a veteran teacher earned her respect due to her years in education on the one hand and a lack of willingness to try things the new way on the other. The trust between her and the administration had broken down to the point that she did not feel like anything she did was good enough, she also explained, “I didn’t trust the administrators because they talked about it to the teachers and they had people spy on teachers behind their back. I know they did.” Whether this was true or not is unknown, however, her perception is her reality and this correlates to a perceived lack of support. The very idea that the support of the administrators could “make or break” a teacher goes back to the turn



of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the male superintendents and principals decided what should be taught in schools, what “good” teaching was, and the idea that teachers must be well-trained to follow orders and to do this, they must be kept under the thumb of the (male) administrator. There were many published accounts of the early measures taken to ensure that this heavy-handed school hierarchy of power was followed. Gilbert (1906) observed schools in New York City and portrayed supervisors (male) as moving, “from schoolroom to schoolroom, notebook, and pencil in hand, sitting for a while in each room like malignant sphinxes, eyeing the frightened teacher, who in his terror does everything wrong, and then marking them in his doomsday book” (p. 97). In 1904, Myra Kelly published *Little Citizens: The Humours of School Life* to portray the lives of teachers in the classroom. Her work illustrates the typical power structure in the urban schools at the time. Classrooms were inspected regularly by the intimidating assistant superintendent and principal. These male authoritarians enjoy the power they hold over these young, nervous women, eager to please them with the perfect classroom. She portrays an inspection by the superintendent she dubs “Gum Shoe Tim” because he sneaks up on teachers and compares his inspection to an inquisition of the teacher. The subject of her story, Miss Bailey, is the subject of one such inquisition. She had heard from other teachers that the superintendent Timothy O’Shea, aka “Gum Shoe Tim,” was due there at any time and was on the war-path. This inquisition is different because they do not know when he will be there or what he is looking for. She explains, “The proper procedure had been that of Mr. O’Shea’s predecessor, who had always given timely notice of his coming and a hint as to the subjects which he intended to examine the children” (Hoffman, 1977/2003, p. 266). The predecessor is described as a kind, old gentleman, while Mr. O’Shea is describe as being “adorned by an abominable temper, an overbearing manner, and a sense of cruel humour,” describing his last school visit as a “brisk campaign of eight days, he

caused five dismissals, nine cases of nervous exhaustion, and an epidemic of hysteria” (Hoffman, 1977/2003, pg. 266). As the staff nervously awaited Gum Shoe Tim’s campaign, the experienced teachers kept to their daily routines, while the beginning teachers, just as Miss Bailey, devoted their time and energy to preparing their students for the show. The day finally came, and Tim was on the war path. The teachers came up with an inter-classroom communication system to warn the other teachers. After they were visited they sent word to the other teachers about where Tim was and what he was looking for. The note informed Miss Bailey that Tim and the principal were on the lower floor, heading to their floor next and that Tim’s “lay” is discipline and reading. The note also reassured her not to be too nervous. Once Tim came to her room, the principal gave a nice speech of introduction that made Miss Bailey “flush with quick pleasure,” and she found Tim not as ominous a presence as she made him out to be. Her students performed very well, they sang and did drills and the principal and superintendent were pleased. Then it happened, the inter-classroom communication plan failed. Before the students could perform their reading, the door flew open, with a young boy delivering Miss Baily a note that warned her of Tim’s impending visit. Except Tim intercepted the note and read it. The principal tried to make Miss Bailey feel better by letting her know she was not at fault, and Mr. O’Shea did not appear fazed either and responded to the note, signed it and had the boy return it to the sender. However, the damage was done, Miss Bailey’s spirit was crushed and the children were as well. Even though Miss Bailey was not held responsible for the note, somebody would be. This one item of correspondence between teachers gave Mr. O’Shea more power than he already held. She explains, “he had now added the name of the Principal, who was quick to understand that an unpleasant investigation lay before him” (Hoffman, 1977/2003, p. 268). Kelly’s writing accurately portrayed the fear teachers felt about being dismissed, amidst the powerful men that

they were subordinate to. It also illustrates the coping mechanisms teachers devised to survive in this oppressive environment. Reynolds (1915) and Dodge (1880) also portray supervisors and superintendents in a similar fashion. The portrayal is one of the young female teachers striving to please the male superintendent or supervisor; with great fear of the repercussions of failing to do so. Teachers were subject to unannounced visits, capricious terminations if their students made one small mistake, and other methods of intimidation to endure they understood their place, which was under the thumb of the principal and superintendent. While teachers today have stronger job security provided by the law and their contracts, the fear of visits from the principal and superintendent remain in schools today. Grumet (1988) portrays this power as a “Father has spoken” mentality, which she believes this is the method in which men “reclaim” their children from their mothers and perpetuate the acceptance of traditional gender norms and patriarchy. While there are now many male teachers, the power structure remains unchanged. Men who desire more control over their profession either move up to administration or leave (Mazzoli & Campbell, 2014). This subordination is a continuation of the foundation laid with the feminization of teaching.

While teachers discussed the lack of support they felt by the administrators, they found support from their colleagues to help them cope. Both Susan Murphy and Bradley James reported having a great deal of support of their colleagues. These support networks would become a coping mechanism for each of them during hard times. Bradley felt great support and pride in his department, expressing, “I was so fortunate, I’m going to be honest with you, I feel like because of the group of teachers I worked with and how we clicked so well together.” He tells of how they became models for other schools in the district. He also talked about how his former high school teacher turned colleague supported him during his first year and helped him

develop as a teacher. He also sought out the support of trusted colleagues when he wrestled with the decision to leave teaching. Susan discussed how her colleagues provided support that helped her manage those difficult last years. Veteran teachers helping younger teachers also harks back to the early days of the profession, when older teachers would be encouraged to view the younger teachers as “daughters” and guide them. Reynolds (1915) explains how one particular superintendent believed it was the duty of the “old maid” teachers (those over the age of 28), to provide support to the “young daughters” of teaching. This depiction of teachers as “young daughters” aids in the reinforcing the notion of teaching as an extension of mothering, and that these young daughters would one day become mothers of the children they taught or children of their own. This “teacher as mother” myth remains a prevalent belief in our society, as evident in the stories of teachers who stay in the profession due to their desire to “make a difference,” and the fact that teachers will sacrifice their own time and money to support their students (Wooten, 2011; He, Cooper & Tangredi, 2015; Wong, 2015; Will, 2016; Bethel, 2017).

Teacher morale can be viewed as teachers striving to achieve their individual goals and educational goals of the school system and their perception of satisfaction that stem from the total school environment (Govindarajan, 2012, p. 58). High morale can be characterized by interest and enthusiasm for the job. While low morale is characterized by feelings of dissatisfaction and frustration (**Theme 2**). Matthews and Crow (2009) place a high degree of importance on the role of the administrator to monitor the school climate and culture, which affect teacher morale. They find this as integral in maintaining the norms of the school for veteran teachers, novice teachers, and other school constituents; in understanding ongoing professional development needs; and in assessing teacher morale. They also believe it is important for administrators to be able to identify the onset of low morale in the building. High

morale is accompanied by high job satisfaction and performance and the reverse is also true. Teachers with a high sense of moral perform better and are happier with their choice of careers. (He, Cooper, & Tangredi, 2015; Herman, Hickmon-Rosa, & Reinke, 2018) There is a strong relationship between the support a teacher receives and teacher morale. Supported and empowered teachers are more likely to have high morale (Govindarajan, 2012). The two participants in this study where this is most evident are Susan Murphy and Bradley James. During the times when Susan did not have much support, like her first few years and last few years teaching, she was not happy and did not have a lot of confidence in herself. When she did feel supported and respected by her administrators and colleagues, like during her 14 years at the middle school, she was confident and felt self-assured in her teaching abilities. When she left that school, to the one she eventually retired from, she stated, "I was respected as a teacher, new teachers would come in and watch me teach and I had lots of student teachers and it's like the confidence when I left, I don't know, and the reassurance left with me." She never recaptured those feelings at her next two schools. Bradley James likened the support he felt from his colleagues and department to his confidence in his teaching abilities. He felt high degrees of self-efficacy during his entire nine years of teaching. These feelings of confidence and the idea that he was making a positive impact that kept him in the classroom and made his decision to leave so difficult.

Coach K had a strong sense of self-efficacy, something she related to her competitive personality. While she was student teaching she asked her students to critique her and was genuinely interested in their feedback. She also related her high confidence in her abilities to the fact that she had been taught well. She recalls, "I had been taught well in high school, so I knew how to present the information in a way that at least was interesting and entertaining, because

that's how I'd been taught. Thankfully, that was a big part of it.” Marie Thomas also had a strong sense of self-efficacy that did not waver from her early days of teaching. She explained, “The rewarding experience for me was that I knew that I was helping students to reach their potential. I always had high expectations, I was never an enabler. I always pushed them and I always expected the best from them.” She felt this way from the beginning of her teaching career all the way to the end. Mr. James and Coach K each felt in control of how they taught and this gave them each a strong sense of self-efficacy. Their positive relationships with their students also provided them with a strong sense of self-efficacy. These factors have been the hallmarks of the joys of teaching since the beginning. Teachers on the frontier endured poor conditions, absentee parents, and distance from their families; yet, the positive relationship with their students made it worthwhile for them (He, Cooper, & Tangredi, 2015). Their self-efficacy that they were making a difference helped them endure whatever conditions they faced. This idea of the teacher-martyr was a central force in the feminization of teaching (Grumet, 1988) and is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two. The notion of sacrifice for the sake of the children remains a strong motivating factor for teachers to remain in the classroom; which could be a reason that each of the participants struggled with the decision to leave the classroom.

The effects of support and self-efficacy are most evident in the physical and emotional manifestations of stress cited by teachers (**Theme 3**). Teachers citing a lack of support, usually have lower morale and higher physical and emotional manifestations of stress. Positive support equals a more positive school culture, which usually equals higher levels of teacher morale and fewer instances of manifestations of stress. Teacher stress and burnout has become a frequent topic of discussion in educational research. Teaching is considered a stressful profession that can be mentally draining, with many teachers facing serious emotional problems related to the

emotional and mental aspects of their job (Eaton, Anthony, Mandel, & Garrison, 1990; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). This stress from teaching often interferes with personal well-being and can weaken performance (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986). Thomas (2017) reported on the effects of high demands on veteran teachers. He cited one teacher who retired five years early because they were fed up with the demands that took away from teaching. In this study, Coach K complained of the same problem of focusing on the mundane tasks that take away from teaching. While Coach K did not physically suffer from these demands, she told me about one teacher in her school that was under so much stress and anxiety that she had to be prescribed medicine. She tried to quit but the district refused to let her out of her contract, so she remains in the classroom, stressed and medicated. Bradley James explained how he had a panic attack and was under so much stress that he had to be put on anti-anxiety medicine with minimal positive results. Even with the medication he could not stop stressing about his job, worrying about it on nights and weekends and becoming “hyper-vigilant” at school regarding student behavior. He also became resentful of teachers that were not performing their responsibilities, even though he understood they were under the same pressure he was. Susan Murphy described how her health suffered as a result of teaching as well. She suffered high blood pressure, depression, and overall fatigue related to her job. It was not until her second year of retirement that her health began to improve. Bader (2017) told the story of a Wisconsin teacher who was so distressed by her school environment that she went to the board and complained; however, little was done to correct the problems. In Chapter 2, I referenced the story of a Mr. Finkle, a teacher in Florida who experienced depression and anxiety as a result of the pressures of his job. He created a comic strip to portray his experiences. He found that many teachers were experiencing the same struggles, receiving 98 responses to his blog post in just the first day. He found a way

to overcome the stress and recapture the joys of teaching; however, many do not, as is evident in the high teacher attrition rates and the experience of Mr. James. While these stories are becoming more commonplace in the media, including social media, there is little documentation of the actual numbers of teachers who have reported seeking medical attention for their mental health issues. This gap in the educational research is discussed in more detail in the Literature Review section.

The physical and emotional manifestations of stress are not new phenomenon for teachers. The use of the word “stress” and discussing mental health issues openly is more of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century phenomenon. Early teachers faced hardships and complained, and many did leave the profession either to get married or move to another profession, such as secretarial work or nursing; while many did remain and tolerated their circumstances. Hoffman (1977), Grumet (1988), and Goldstein (2014) provide first-hand accounts from teachers from the past and present. These young women, some as young as 14, ventured out of their home for the first time, armed with a sense of idealism and independence. Teaching was their missionary work, ordained by God, therefore, any hardships they experienced were bearable because they were working for a greater good. The teacher-martyr syndrome was there from the beginning and it provided a justification for any hardships these young teachers endured. The first teachers were go out and work in small schoolhouses and board with a family. They would attend normal schools for training, usually while they were working in model schools. In 1847, Beecher and Mann established the Board of National Popular Education. This Board would make Beecher’s vision of a corps of “missionary” female teachers a reality. It aimed to locate well-bred, evangelical young women from the Northeast and send them west to open frontier schools. (Goldstein, 2014, Kindle Loc 610-612). These middle class young women left home and ventured out to the



frontier. They had been warned about the primitive living conditions in the West, and, most importantly, were encouraged to act as “a new source of moral power” in frontier communities. The young women were sent to Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, Kentucky, and Tennessee. They faced terrible conditions and 21 died. They also were not received as they imagined and many communities were too poor to build school houses. One recruit became the only teacher in a rural school serving children aged five through seventeen. “Not one can read intelligibly,” she lamented in a letter to Beecher. “They have no idea of the proprieties of the school-room or of study, and I am often at a loss to know what to do for them.... Though it is winter, some are without stockings and no shoes” (Goldstein, 2014, Kindle Loc 621-624). Another recruit reported, “I am teaching forty-five students in a “small log house... The people here are very ignorant; very few of them can either read or write, but they wish to have their children taught” (Goldstein, 2014, Kindle Location 626-627). While they suffered hardships, many remained grateful for the opportunity. However, it is important to note that most of these young women did not consider teaching a long-term profession, as they were required to quit once they were married.

Susan B. Anthony taught for 10 years before she left the profession. In 1848, she wrote home to her parents, that she now considered teaching a “penance... A weariness has come over me that the short spring vacation did not in the least dispel. I have a pleasant school of 20 scholars, but I have to manufacture the interest duty compels me to exhibit. I am anxious they should learn but feel almost to shrink from the task” (Goldstein, 2014, Kindle Locations 683-686). By the end of 1848, Anthony left teaching and returned home. Lucia B. Downing began her teaching career at 14 years old. She kept an extensive journal of her education at the University of Vermont in 1889 and her first year teaching in a small farm village before

marriage. She relished in the responsibility of teaching and molding the young people in her charge, though somewhat nervous about the same challenge of disciplining older students. She described the perils that faced many young female teachers, “I really did not look very old, and my chief anxiety was to acquire the appearance that for many years now I have made to avoid!” (Hoffman, 1977/2003, p. 61). She had a good experience with her “host” family and was considered an honored guest, she relished in the title of “Teacher.” Once teaching, she experienced what most teachers do, some failures, or “falls to her pride” as she calls them. She tells of one experience with an older pupil, “Then there was on big boy who was peeved because I would not allow him the same privilege as the little ones who always wanted to kiss ‘Teacher’ goodnight.” (Hoffman, 1977/2003, p. 64). She complained of little resources, such as textbooks. Her most arduous task was “keeping the register,” which was somewhat complicated. She also had some choice words about parents, claiming, “Parents, what few there were, I suppose were glad to be relieved of the care of their offspring, and no one ever suggested shortening of the hours” (Hoffman, 1977/2003, p. 64). She taught until she married and always remained nostalgic about her first-year teaching. Each of these women were very young and faced a variety of circumstances that most would agree are stressful. However, their sense of purpose kept them going and helped them endure.

These physical and emotional manifestations of stress and the feminization of teaching are connected. Teaching has always been a very emotionally taxing profession. When the profession was established, young girls like Lucia Downing would leave home for the first time and teach. They had little or no training and were armed only with their idealism. This is why the idea of the teacher-martyr emerged and teaching was established as a “calling”, and an extension of mothering (Hoffman, 1977/2003; Grumet, 1988; Wooten, 2011; Goldstein, 2014). The

rhetoric surrounding women as “born” and “natural” teachers espoused by Beecher (Hoffman, 1977/2003; Goldstein, 2014) and Mann (1841) elevated teachers to a status that rose beyond their typical domestic work. Nursing and social workers would use a similar rhetoric to attract women to their fields, both of which remained women’s work as well (Flexner, 1915). When a teacher would complain about their unpleasant conditions, or attempt to gain higher status, more pay or benefits, they would be reminded of how they are there for the kids and that alone could help them endure the hardships. This is another reason that teachers are demonized when they attempt to advocate for themselves and their students, as evident in Haley’s efforts at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the continued distrust of teachers unions seen today (Goldstein, 2014). This dates back to the early 1900s when teacher unions forged an alliance with labor unions and gained some small victories and continues to occur whenever teachers attempt to advocate for themselves (Hoffman, 1977/2003; Goldstein, 2014).

### **Concluding Thoughts**

One afternoon I was sitting at my desk during my planning period writing my lesson plans for the next week. As I was typing in the standards and my learning objectives, I asked myself who decided that these were the standards I was required to teach. Did a group of teachers decide on these standards? Were they approved by practicing classroom teachers? While they may have been written by teachers on a curriculum committee for the state, they were provided guidelines. These guidelines were provided by some government agency and these standards would need to be approved and passed by the state legislature. The majority of the state legislature are male and they most certainly not teachers. The only commonality they share with the teachers who carry out these standards is that they all attended school in some form, either public or private. This is one example of how powers that are so far removed from the

classroom control what I, an educated and licensed professional, teach in my classroom. These powers control what I teach and even how I teach it. All schools have some required elements for instruction, based on what some person in the district determined was “good teaching.” The teaching profession is one of the only professions where teachers do not determine the what and how of their practice. While there are some instances where teachers are given some control over their teaching methods, those methods are still scrutinized and ultimately approved by their administrator on an evaluation instrument developed and approved by the government. This is the reality that teachers have accepted. Teachers make the best of the standards they are provided, utilize many teaching methods to best suit their students and hope these methods fit in the correct boxes on their evaluations. This is the life of a teacher - working with the constraints of their profession to meet standards set by others outside of their profession and/or far removed from the classroom. This is why I chose this topic to study, I wanted to investigate the roots of these constraints, to see where it all began. This led me to the establishment of the teaching profession and the public education system, which in turn led me to the concept of the feminization of teaching.

This subordination of teachers is a continuation of the foundation laid with the feminization of teaching. The feminization of teaching laid the foundation of both the profession and public-school system by cementing the patriarchal power structure that remains today. The few occasions throughout history teachers try to unite and publicize their struggles, they either get little media attention, like the 2018 teacher strikes in Oklahoma and Kentucky, bad media attention, like the in Chicago in the early 1900s (Hoffman, 1977/2003; Goldstein, 2014), and are demonized as selfish and greedy, liberals, un-American, and reminded that they should be “focusing on the children.” This dates back to when the first teachers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century saw

teaching as missionary work, ordained by God, therefore, any hardships they experienced were bearable because they were working for a greater good. The teacher-martyr syndrome was there from the beginning and it provided a justification for any hardships these young teachers endured. The teacher-martyr ideal remains and is used to justify teaching's lower status and subordination to the men in power. As Grumet (1988) explains, educational policies are final, along with the demands placed on teachers, which are, in a sense, the way men maintain control, by relaying to teachers "Father has spoken," and like dutiful daughters, teachers must obey these orders without question. This goes directly back to the feminization of teaching, with the notion of taking order without question was a characteristic of women throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and even today to some degree. Grumet (1988) and Weiler (1988) both describes experiences they had while teaching where their male administrator expected them to take orders without question and were chastised for questioning them. Grumet (1988) explains that she was favored by her principal until she questioned a directive. It was then he told her she was the "pretty and smart one" and he was surprised she questioned him. Teaching continues to be viewed as an extension of mothering, and that women were "natural" teachers, with teaching being their "calling." These notions of self-sacrifice and the common statement, "teachers aren't in this profession to get rich," remain with the profession, enabling the stronghold of the patriarchal power structure in both the system of education and the system of government, which controls education, to remain.

This power structure oppresses teachers and prevents the profession from elevating its status. While the U.S. has made many social advances, a patriarchal power structure remains firmly in place within our government and corporate world due to the continued affirmation of the subordinate status of women in our society. As noted at the start of this chapter, this

affirmation is evident in politics, as well as the corporate world, with men holding the majority of positions of power in corporations and in both the U.S. Congress and State Legislatures. Even with the current dialogue regarding sexual harassment with the #metoo movement, the relationship between gender and teaching remains absent from the landscape. This is due to the fact that while women continue to make up the majority of teachers, most people do not link the subordinate status of women with the low status of the teaching profession, including the teachers themselves. These socio-political forces form the context of our public-school system, where teachers attempt to cope with the conditions that continue to disrespect and disempower them. When there is an acknowledgement of the flaws of the power structure, there can be hope for change. This change would include providing teachers are voice in developing educational policies. Empowering teachers to control what they teach and how the teach would be the first step in making changes to the power structure that control the system of education. Electing more women into the U.S. Congress and State Legislatures, which is slowly occurring, is another broad method to enact changes in the power structure that controls the system of education. The 2018 Midterm elections offered some hope. There were 90 women elected into the U.S. House of Representatives, one of whom is the first Native American woman elected to Congress. (Cooney, 2018). Educators are getting involved in politics as well. In the 2018 Midterm elections, Oklahoma elected 16 educators to the state House and Senate. As referenced in an earlier chapter, Oklahoma has a teacher shortage and was the site of teacher walkouts and protests over educational funding and policy in 2017.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The teaching shortage is a reality and continues to increase (Riggs, 2013; Aragon, 2016; Flannery, 2016; Heim, 2016; Sucher, Darling-Hammond, Carver-Thomas, 2016; Thornton,

2017; Watson, 2017; Westervelt, 2016a). Every state has some teacher shortage areas, whether it be in a certain region, or subject area, such as special education. Strauss reporting for the Washington Post (2017), believes the increase has occurred in recent years “as the profession has been hit with low morale over low pay, unfair evaluation methods, assaults on due-process rights, high-stakes testing requirements, insufficient resources and other issues” (para 3). Strauss reports on the measures taken by some states to hire more teachers, some more drastic than others. In Oklahoma, Utah and Arizona, teachers can be hired without formal training. Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey (R) signed a new law a few months ago allowing people who have never been trained as teachers to go into schools and teach, as long as they have a bachelor’s degree or five years of experience in fields “relevant” to the subject. This is similar to Georgia’s The Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GA TAPP), which has been in place for many years. Bradley James, from this study, was a product of the TAPP program. There is an emphasis on attracting more people to the field, especially those already working in the private sector seeking a second career.

While there is an emphasis on attracting more people to the profession, there is a great emphasis on retaining those already in the profession. I recently accepted a teaching position in a new district. My new principal completed his dissertation about teacher retention. This led to a conversation on what he believed were the most effective methods to retain teachers. His goal is to retain 100% of the teachers he hired. He responded that in his research and experiences, the top three methods were to provide a positive mentor, to promote a positive school culture/climate and to provide positive support from administrators to teachers (Thibodeaux, M. Labat, Lee, & C. Labat, 2015; Herman, Hickmon-Rosa, & Reinke, 2018). He purposely added the term “positive” before each of the methods because of the dramatic effect negativity can have on

teachers and the school culture. Negativity spreads fast and can quickly consume teachers and create a negative school environment (O'Brennan, Pas, & Bradsahw, 2017). His methods align with the main topics of research into increasing teacher retention. These methods are based on the common complaints of teachers, which are a lack of support, which leads to high stress, which leads to a negative school culture. Instituting a mentorship program for new teachers is a low-cost method to provide the support and help new teachers not feel overwhelmed by the demands placed on them. There are many incentives and leadership programs designed to help school leaders in developing a positive school culture within this era of accountability. This rests on the type of support provided by the administration and with how much power an administrator is willing to share with their teachers. It will require research to convince many administrators that providing teachers with leadership opportunities will create stronger teachers, which in turn will create a positive school culture.

Low pay is a well-known drawback of teaching. Yet, it is rarely cited as the main reason for teachers leaving the profession. Dee and Goldhaber (2017) created a policy proposal as part of the Hamilton Institute that addresses the teaching shortage and proposes methods to increase teacher retention. They researched the effectiveness of monetary incentives to increase teacher recruitment and retention. They found that the monetary incentives need to be very substantial to affect teacher retention. They posit that monetary incentives should only be offered in the areas in which there is a shortage, which is not an across-the-board raise or incentive for all teachers. They also touch on the idea of merit pay, which would reward teachers in high-need areas with compensation that is related to student achievement. Many states, such as Arizona, Colorado and Georgia are experimenting with tiny houses for teachers to help their teachers with living in the districts they work in. For Colorado and Arizona, the need is for housing in their rural



communities. The lack of housing makes it difficult to attract teachers. In one Georgia community the issue is that teachers cannot afford to live in the area. Time will tell if housing incentives will reduce the teaching shortages and retention rates for these districts.

While these measures implemented could improve the lives of teachers, they do not seek to elevate the profession of teaching. In an interview for NEA Today (2015), Richard Ingersoll, a leader in teacher attrition, names the barriers to improvement. He states,

Improving many workplace conditions, giving teachers a voice, treating them as professionals doesn't have to cost money. It's a management issue. Now, it may not be expensive, but that doesn't make it easy. This is not Singapore or Finland or Korea.

Teaching is not held in high esteem in this country (p. 2).

There is little chance that these improvements will take place any time soon. The disrespect toward teachers continue to be perpetuated in the media. The public response and limited media coverage of the recent teacher walk-outs in several states, such as Oklahoma and Kentucky, illustrate the dual rhetoric of teacher as villains or saints. The NPR educational division provided a state by state guide of teacher walkouts and outlines the issues and responses for each state. There was very limited coverage of this by the mainstream media, with much of the coverage being local or on social media among teachers and parents. The majority of the headlines spoke of the teachers complaining about low pay; however, that was not their only complaint. They were upset about the spending on education in general and the poor working conditions they faced. This was in addition to their lack of influence in the policies passed by their legislators. There was minimal coverage on these other complaints, instead the reports focused on the low-pay, which was not a primary complaint. When the teachers were granted a small pay raise of 6%, which amounts to maybe \$150 a month, the media hailed it as a victory and ceased their

coverage. Once again, the real issue, which was a lack of resources due to poor education funding, was glossed over. There needs to be an increase in the research on how to shift the public's mindset about education and the issues facing teachers. It will take something drastic, such as a shortage of teachers in the white, middle-class schools, to wake up mainstream America to unite with teachers and implement the reforms that will actually benefit both teachers and students.

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### **Appendix A: Interview Protocol**

My participants are former K-12 teachers. The participants are divided into 2 subgroups- those who retired early and those that left teaching after five years for work in the private sector

**Topic: Motivation to go into teaching.**

*Lead off question:* Tell me about why you decided to become a teacher?

*Follow-up question:*

1. Were there any experiences in your life that made you want to become a teacher?
2. Did you consider any other career choices?

**Topic: Meaningful experiences while teaching.**

*Lead off question:* Tell me about some pivotal moments in your teaching career?

*Follow-up questions*

1. How did these moments affect your perception of yourself as a teacher?
2. How did these moments affect your perception of the educational system?
3. How did your job changed since you began?
4. What effect did these changes have on you and your students?

**Topic: Reasons for leaving the profession.**

*Lead off question:* Tell me about your decision to leave the profession?

*Follow-up questions*

1. How long did it take you to make your decision?
2. Was there one incident that you can describe that made your mind up?
3. Was there anything that could have convinced you to stay in the profession?