

WHY STAY? RETAINING VETERAN TEACHERS IN PREDOMINANTLY MINORITY,  
LOW-INCOME, RURAL SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Veronica Keyosha Bradley

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of veteran teachers who teach in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools across South Carolina. This study also emphasized the motivational factors that participants attribute to remaining in rural school districts for five or more years. Lastly, this study looked at how participants describe the attribution of Maslow's hierarchy of needs in their perseverance, and how participants perceive social injustice as having an impact on retaining teachers in rural regions. The conceptual framework that guided this study was Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory proposed by Abraham Maslow and the critical race theory of education developed by Derrick Bell. Ten K-12<sup>th</sup> grade public school teachers took part in this study using criterion sampling for qualitative study. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews, written letters, and a photo narrative. Data analysis of this transcendental phenomenological research included the following: epoche/bracketing, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and textural and structural composite descriptions. The researcher also analyzed the data using open coding and visual representations including comparison tables. Emerging themes developed that showed why teachers persisted in rural locations for five or more years after data analysis. The themes were: (a) teaching is a calling, (b) everlasting relationships with students, (c) student growth and academic success, and (d) a sense of belonging and feelings of home. Recommendations for future research included replicating this study in an urban or suburban school district, research on principals' perspective on teacher retention and recruitment, and a quantitative study on teacher retention and persistence.

*Keywords:* rural, low-income, veteran teachers, phenomenology, social injustice, motivational factors, minority

## DEDICATION

It is my genuine gratefulness and warmest regard that I dedicate my dissertation journey to my family. You all have watched me over the past three and a half years immerse myself in a tremendous amount of work day after day. Thank you for believing in me and encouraging me to never give up. Thank you to my father, Alphonso Bradley. Thank you for raising me to think things through. A special thank you to my mother, Mary Simon Bradley. There has never been a time that I could not count on you. You have always been my support system, my foundation, my everything. Thank you for your wisdom, your strength, your endurance, your sacrifices, and your motherly nature. I want to share these same characteristics as a mother.

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**List of Abbreviations**

Socio Economic Status (SES)

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

South Carolina (SC)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

Retaining teachers in rural schools is a nationwide concern (Taylor, 2013). The problem is that recent research (Dupriez, Delvaux, & Lothaire, 2016; Kaden, Patterson, Healy, & Adams, 2016) has explored teacher turnover within the first five years, yet minimum research has looked to determine what factors veteran teachers attribute to remaining in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools (He, Cooper, & Tangredi, 2015; Maranto & Shuls, 2012). The importance of this research was to give veteran teachers a voice as they described the phenomenon of persisting in the most challenging locations. This research served as a steppingstone to give district personnel, school administrators, veteran, and novice teachers strong insight on how to recruit, retain, and sustain teachers in hard to staff, rural schools and districts that serve predominantly minority, low-income students.

Chapter One served as an introduction to the research of study. This chapter provided the research background including the historical, social, and conceptual context followed by the situation to self, including philosophical assumptions and the chief motivation for conducting the study. Additionally, Chapter One discussed the pertinent information including the problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, and an explanation of terms used in this study. Chapter One concluded with a focused summary of the entire chapter.

### **Background**

This study addressed the gap in retaining veteran teachers who work in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools. It is more difficult to keep teachers in rural schools in comparison to their urban and suburban counterparts (Goodpaster, Adedokun, & Weaver, 2012). Low teacher salary, poverty, resource shortages, and feelings of isolation are all major factors

contributing to the hiring of teachers in rural communities (Azano & Stewart, 2016). The remoteness of a rural community is also a barrier in retaining teachers (Redding & Walberg, 2013). Other factors causing teacher attrition are the lifestyle of a rural community, learning about the nature of working in rural communities, and preparation time (Goodpaster et al., 2012). Research on influences that encourage teachers to remain would provide support for principals and teacher educators as they consider retaining teachers (He et al., 2015).

Although there are teachers who remain in rural districts for a number of years. There are others who leave shortly after they begin teaching (Goodpaster et al., 2012). After five years, between 40-50% of teachers leave their jobs (Lloyd & Sullivan, 2012). Furthermore, when given the chance, these teachers choose to leave schools that serve greater proportions of low-income, low-performing, and minority ethnic group students (Lynch, 2012). Therefore, the focus of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of veteran teachers who remain in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools. The motivational factors attributing to veteran teachers' perseverance in these schools deserve in-depth research. This study gave these teachers a voice about their lived experience. Additionally, this research sought to help school and district administrators retain more veteran and novice teachers in the most challenging rural schools.

### **Historical Context**

During the 1950's, many teachers, particularly African American teachers, in southern states had their teaching careers' end abruptly; some of their careers ended by force and others willingly ended their own teaching careers (Oakley, Stowell, & Logan, 2009). This was due to the 1954 Brown vs. Board decision where all schools had to desegregate to allow African American students to attend the same schools and use the same facilities as their Caucasian

counterparts (Oakley et al., 2009). Teachers who had been teaching for a long period of time and who wanted to stay could not stay because black teacher retention was not protected under any law; therefore, approximately 38,000 teachers and administrators lost their jobs after the Brown decision (Oakley et al., 2009). The hostility and discrimination that black teachers experienced resulted in many of them leaving their jobs and seeking a career outside of teaching (Oakley et al., 2009).

Although there has been some progress in retaining African American teachers, schools remain filled with Caucasian teachers as African American teachers enter and then leave (Moss, 2016). The Brown vs. Board of Education case is also important to this study because many equities in 1954 that minority students did not receive are still common today (Harrison, Harrison, & Clark, 2016; Straus & Lemieux, 2016). For example, the equities that minority students in southern rural districts are currently denied are proper funding, satisfactory resources, up-to-date buildings, and qualified teachers (Harrison et al., 2016; Straus & Lemieux, 2016). The lack of resources can potentially impact teacher retention because these teachers do not have the appropriate tools to effectively instruct students. This research focused on schools that served 60% or more of nonwhite students and are living in poverty. According to Suber (2012), school districts that are considered high-poverty in southern states such as South Carolina (SC) are usually located in rural areas. These districts have many students on free and reduced-price lunch. The schools in these districts are viewed negatively by the media, community members, and even fellow educators because of poor performance on state testing (Suber, 2012). However, veteran teachers persist despite the injustice that the students endure every day. These veteran teachers are witnessing firsthand how history is repeating itself as minority students struggle to compete with their Caucasian counterparts.



Past school reforms such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) that Congress signed into law over a decade ago, aimed to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers in every classroom, yet did not meet the goal (Perrachione, Peterson, & Rosser, 2017). For instance, since the *Brown vs. Board of Education*, plaintiffs in South Carolina once again has challenged the state in the *Abbeville vs. South Carolina* lawsuit. This case began in 1996 and recently ended in 2014. The case addressed inequitable school funding and was brought on behalf of poor, rural school districts in SC (Hubbard, 2014). The court ruled in a 3-2 vote that the state had failed in its duty to provide what it says is a *minimally adequate* education to children in the state's poorest school districts (*Abbeville vs. South Carolina*, 2014). Rural school districts face many challenges which seem to be an ongoing occurrence evident in this historical context. Veteran teachers who teach in these locations had an opportunity to share their lived experiences and why they remain despite the challenges of teaching in some of the most dilapidated buildings with a lack of resources available to make a significant impact on student achievement.

### **Social Context**

The students from rural, low-income school districts come from families with low socio-economic status (SES) and these students need assistance in and outside of school (Suits, 2012). Redding and Walberg (2013) claimed that families of students who attend rural, low-income schools do not perceive education as a vehicle for advancement. When a child is born and raised in a family and community with little or no regard for academic achievement, his or her reservoir of interest for education or perseverance in school may not exist when the child enters school (Redding & Walberg, 2013). Life in many rural communities deal with generational poverty including government neglect and oppression (Azano & Stewart, 2016). Poverty plays a significant role in almost every rural education challenge from retaining teachers to maintaining

adequate facilities for students (Silvernail, Linet, & University of Southern Maine, 2014).

Teacher attrition is the most common in high-poverty or low-income areas where students are more likely to have novice teachers (Rumschlag, 2017). Furthermore, schools with the highest proportions of poor, non-white and low performing students tend to employ teachers with the weakest credentials such as certification, experience, or college ranking (Rivero, 2015). Students in rural communities do not aspire to attend colleges or universities because these degrees are not needed for the job opportunities in rural industries (Silvernail et al., 2014). Family expectations and norms also prevent young adults from moving away to pursue a postsecondary education. Therefore, these youths abstain from attending college to maintain close family ties and the connections to the community (Silvernail et al., 2014). In rural locations, the community plays a significant role in many decisions made by families which can impact how the student perceives education.

### **Conceptual Context**

Currently, there is a gap in the literature exploring why veteran teachers remain in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools. It is important that these teachers were given a voice in hopes of giving principals and district personnel insight on how to retain veteran teachers. Maslow's (2013) hierarchy of needs theory and the critical race theory will provide a conceptual framework for this study. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory is pertinent to this study because it helps determine what motivates individuals. Teachers enter the profession for many reasons. This theory aided in explaining what factors inspire them to stay. Maslow believed motivation inspired humans to achieve certain needs and some needs are more important than others. This theory is a five-tier model of human needs often depicted as hierarchal levels within a pyramid (Maslow, 2013; McLeod, 2016). This study originally

focused on the esteem component of the theory which is the fourth level on the hierarchy. Characteristics that describe esteem include achievement, mastery, independence, status, dominance, prestige, self-respect, and respect from others (Maslow, 2013; McLeod, 2016). However, through the voices of the participants, it was evident that the veteran teachers in this study relied on the third level of Maslow's (2013) hierarchy. Maslow's (2013) third level on the pyramid highlights the need to feel loved, the need to give love, and the need to feel like part of a group. The participants revealed that they are remaining due to belongingness and love needs.

The critical race theory (CRT) is the second theory that guided this study. This theory is perhaps the most dominant theory used to explain race and its role in society as it relates to social justice and oppression in the education arena (Bell, 2013; Harrison et al., 2016). The recognition of CRT in education is important because race has been under-theorized and unacknowledged beyond data that proposed that students of color were not as successful as their White peers (Bell, 2013). The CRT served to enlighten individuals on the inequities in education such as funding, desegregation, and curriculum and instruction (Bell, 2013; Harrison et al., 2016). For example, studies by Adamson and Darling-Hammond (2012) and Zhang and Campbell (2015) have found that students of color in low-income schools are three to 10 times more likely to have teachers who are uncertified, not fully prepared, or teaching outside their field. Inequities such as qualified teachers may explain the achievement gap between high poverty vs. low poverty and minority vs. majority students. The CRT is vital to this study because it helped explain how inequalities that students do not have impact veteran teachers' retention in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts in South Carolina.

### **Situation to Self**

There are various factors contributing to the researcher's desire to conduct research on veteran teachers who persist in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts. I am a product of a rural school district, and I can relate to the students because many of my teachers did not challenge me to my full potential. This is probably because they did not have the appropriate tools and strategies to teach at high levels. This became apparent when I entered college. I struggled with writing well-developed papers, I needed extensive tutoring in math, and I had to drop a biology course because my critical thinking skills needed sharpening. I succeeded as a student only because I was intrinsically motivated. I knew that I wanted to teach since I was in the third grade, and this strong desire to help others like myself kept me determined and motivated. At the end of my freshmen year in college, I made the Dean's list and I continued to make high marks throughout my undergraduate and graduate degrees. I knew that God had blessed me with following characteristics that I needed to succeed as a college student: resilience, determination, commitment, and humbleness. He continues to bless me for remaining committed to my goals.

I taught at a school that served 98% African American students, and it was 100% free and reduced lunch. I have witnessed many teachers enter the school year excited to teach only to leave before Christmas, or never return the next year. Hence, in this study, I wanted to capture the lived experience of veteran teachers who persist in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts.

The philosophical assumptions that led me to my choice of research are methodological, ontological, axiological, and epistemological that align with a qualitative perception on research as discussed in Creswell (2013). These philosophical assumptions are important in shaping how

researchers formulate their research questions to study a problem (Creswell, 2013). For example, the procedures of a qualitative research will require me to meticulously study the topic within its context. I must understand that research questions will change sometimes in the middle of the study to better reflect the type of questions needed to understand the research problem. Ontological assumptions are important to qualitative research because these issues connect to the nature of the reality and its aspects (Creswell, 2013). When studying participants, qualitative researchers conduct a study with the intent of reporting various realities. This researcher interviewed multiple veteran teachers for this study and they had the opportunity to share their experience about teaching in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools. Creswell (2013) explained that all researchers bring values to a study, but qualitative researchers make their values distinct in a study which is known as the axiological assumption. I will acknowledge that research is value laden and that biases will be present. I am closely related to the study and understand that I will bring certain biases to the research. I taught at a predominantly minority, low-income school for seven years; in addition, I attended a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district throughout my educational years. The epistemological assumption means that the researcher tries to get as close as possible to the participants being studied (Creswell, 2013). As the researcher, I presented subjective evidence from the participants. To that end, I built a positive, trusting relationship with the participants in hopes of them being completely open and honest about their experiences.

The paradigm I bring to research is social constructivism. This paradigm does not use research to prove anything. In contrast, my goal was for individuals to describe their experiences. As the researcher, I constructed meanings with human beings as they engage with the world (Creswell, 2013). My focus was on the perspectives of the individuals. The

worldview that helped shaped this study is Biblical. I believe that all students are valuable and should be afforded the best educational setting so that they are able to prosper in this society. As adults, we are responsible for our youth. Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring as a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court (Psalm 127:3-5, NIV). Good teachers are needed to help produce successful, young people. I was motivated to understand why veteran teachers persist in predominantly minority, rural, low-income schools.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is that veteran teachers do not have a voice to share their experiences with the phenomenon of teaching in predominantly minority, low income, rural schools in hopes of retaining teachers in these difficult to staff locations. Research has extensively examined why teachers leave the profession, yet there is minimal research conducted to determine what factors contribute to veteran teachers remaining in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools (He, Cooper, & Tangredi, 2015; Maranto & Shuls, 2012). Dupriez et al. (2016), Hentges (2012), and Kaden et al. (2016) have explored the causes of teacher turnover within the first five years, finding that the main causes for teachers leaving the profession are little support from principals, the inability to voice their concerns, and a lack of instructional planning time. Lloyd and Sullivan (2012) explained that after five years, between 40-50% of all teachers eventually leave their posts due to some of the stressors listed above. Furthermore, when given the chance, these teachers choose to leave schools that serve greater proportions of low-income, low-performing, and minority ethnic group students (Lynch, 2012). Opportunities of students succeeding diminishes when schools with a high-turnover of teachers are not able to create a stable learning

environment for students causing schools to lose their instructional capacity when good teachers leave (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011). Although rural schools function under the same laws and with similar expectations and goals as their urban and suburban counterparts, few scholars are studying rural education issues (Hodges, Tippins, & Oliver, 2013). The importance of this study was to provide insight to district administrators, principals, and teacher educators as they consider retaining teachers and persisting in the field of education (He, Cooper, & Tangredi, 2015).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of veteran teachers who teach in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools. For purposes of this research, veteran teachers were teachers who have taught for five or more years in the same location. Rural schools are located outside of cities and towns; rural schools are remote, isolated, and they have a low population density (Redding & Walberg, 2012). Low-income students are identified as those who need the most support in and out of school. They are usually more likely to have developmental issues and low achievement, fall behind in school, and fail to graduate from high school or attend college (Suits, 2016). For purposes of this study, predominantly minority schools are those schools with 60% or more non-white students.

The setting for this study took place in two rural school districts across South Carolina where most of the student population is low-income and nonwhite. According to the U.S. Census Bureau report (2016), nearly half of all people living in rural areas are in the South region. In S.C., 15.3% of the population live in poverty and the median household income is approximately \$47,000 (U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts: South Carolina, 2016). Data from the US Census also revealed that 15.5% of the population in the rural south do not have a high

school diploma, 50.8% of the population in the rural south have a high school diploma, and 33.7% of the population in the rural south hold higher degrees. As stated earlier in the research, students in rural districts are at a disadvantage because of their remote locations, the narrow scope of curriculum in their schools, instructional practices, and their lack of access to resources and programs (Redding & Walberg, 2012). The two theories that guided this study were Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the critical race theory in education. Teachers tend to remain in education when they feel a sense of achievement or accomplishment (Hughes, 2012). The critical race theory focused on the social justice aspect of education in rural districts including race, power, inequity, politics, and the impact on retaining teachers (Henry, 2014; Leonardo, 2013).

### **Significance of the Study**

Studies have explored why educators leave the profession (Dupriez, Delvaux, & Lothaire, 2016; Kaden, Patterson, Healy, & Adams, 2016). For example, Ingersoll (2012) studied teacher turnover and retention for many years and has over 100 publications related to why teachers leave the field within the first five years. This study was conducted in hopes of uncovering why teachers remain for five or more years in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools and districts. The conceptual significance of this study was two-fold. First, the findings from this research added to Maslow's (2013) theory. The discoveries described how veteran teachers employ the characteristics of Maslow's (2013) theory to remain in the teaching profession in low-income, rural areas beyond five or more years (He et al., 2015; Maranto & Shuls, 2012; Maslow, 2013). Secondly, the conclusions from this study added to the critical race theory. This study described how race, inequity, power, and politics influence the retention of veteran teachers (Bell, 2013; Henry, 2014; Leonardo, 2012). Many educators do not know how to cope



with the hardships of teaching, so they leave. The conceptual significance can help both novice and veteran teachers, school administrators, and district administrators better understand the obstacles veteran teachers face and the factors that cause them to persist. This study can help school and district administrators better understand how to support teachers so that teachers will have longevity in the education arena.

The empirical significance of this study provided information for understanding what it takes to retain teachers beyond the first five years of teaching. Veteran teachers who have told their story will share their experiences of teaching in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools. Rural schools may experience high teacher attrition, with their teaching staff consisting of an uneven number of newly certified teachers who replace educators who move on (Redding & Walberg, 2012). Many teachers begin teaching in rural areas without understanding the characteristics that make rural schools unique. They often do not understand how to relate to a rural community's families or students. The results from this study can help novice teachers and veteran teachers who may be teaching in a rural district for the first time, understand the dynamics of rural areas such as the community, family values, and challenges rural schools and districts face.

Finally, the practical significance of this study was for schools and districts to use this information to gain deeper insights on retaining veteran teachers in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts (He et al., 2015). The results from this study can provide support to both novice and veteran teachers in a variety of areas such as how they persist through classroom management, instructional strategies, instructional resources, or lack thereof, and more. For example, pre-service teachers currently enrolled in teacher preparation programs express concerns with issues such as classroom management, organization, and curriculum

implementation (Mee & Haverback, 2014). In the case of classroom management, Kwok (2018) claimed that veteran teachers tend to be better classroom managers, and with frequent mentorship from school faculty or veteran teachers, novice teachers can be effective as well. The teachers in this study were not actual mentors, but they can provide valuable information about their experiences and how their experiences enable them to remain in the education field despite daily obstacles. Doney (2013) conducted research on fostering resilience where four novice teachers were the participants in the study. The conclusions from the study revealed that time-tested advice offered to novice teachers by teacher preparation programs, administrators, and other educators, need to be adjusted to align with what is taking place in the education field. Changes in advice should include ways to employ protective factors or coping strategies that will counteract stress due to challenging or difficult situations. Novice teachers can enter teaching with a solid plan of action by reading about the experiences of teachers who have overcome adversities while teaching.

## **Research Questions**

### **Central Research Question**

How do veteran teachers describe their experiences working in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts?

The goal of this question was to explore the experience of veteran teachers to develop a deeper understanding of their shared experience teaching in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts. Research shows that teacher turnover is higher in rural districts compared to their urban and suburban counterparts (Carter-Blocker, 2012; Kaden et al., 2016). The prediction is that by 2020, low-income school districts will continue to struggle the most in retaining teachers (Rumschlag, 2017). Therefore, it is important to research and explore in-depth

the lived experiences of veteran teachers who persist given the high attrition rate of teachers in rural, low-income school districts. The responses to this inquiry will provide valuable insights into this matter.

### **Sub-Research Questions**

1. How do participants describe motivational factors as a role in their persistence in teaching in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts in South Carolina?

The lack of state funding to assist rural, low-income school districts, poverty, teacher burn-out, and emotional distress are all significant factors in teacher attrition (Rumschlag, 2017; Silvernail & Linet, 2014). However, there are certain motivational factors that attribute to veteran teachers' persistence to remain in these areas. Making a difference, building relationships, fulfillment, lifelong learning, and dynamic work environment are intrinsic factors that cause veteran teachers to remain. This suggests that teachers do not stay in the profession for money or other reasons such as weekends off or long vacations (Battle & Looney, 2014; Taylor, McNaney-Funk, Jardine, Lehman, & Fok-Chan, 2014). This question revealed the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, if any, veteran teachers describe as explaining why they are persistent in teaching in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts.

2. How do participants describe the attribution of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in their perseverance in teaching in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts in South Carolina?

Teachers tend to remain in education when they feel a sense of achievement or accomplishment (Hughes, 2012). Teachers remain in rural, low-income school districts because of relationships with students, safe environments, recognition of a job well-done, support from

parents, and the challenge of the teaching position (Ulferts, 2016). The motivation of some people is to achieve certain needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory has five levels and once achieving one level, the more desirable the next level becomes (Maslow, 2013; McLeod, 2016). This question revealed the source of veteran teachers' motivation to sustain teaching in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools.

3. How do participants perceive social injustice as having an impact on retaining teachers in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts in South Carolina?

There is an unequal distribution of certified teachers in low-income school districts which can account for the achievement gap between affluent school districts and low-income school districts (Goodpaster et al., 2015; Rivero, 2015; Zhang & Campbell, 2015). Schools with the highest proportions of low performing, poor African American or nonwhite students most likely employ teachers with the weakest credentials such as inexperience, certification status, and undergraduate or college ranking (Allen, Burgess, & Mayo, 2012). Students of color in low-income schools are more likely to have teachers who are uncertified, not fully prepared, or teaching outside their field (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Ulferts, 2016). Rivero (2015) claimed that there is empirical evidence indicating that a teacher makes the choice of school based on the school's socio-economic status. Teachers tend to select schools with higher SES. When vacancies remain unfilled in rural districts, schools cancel planned course offerings and assign administrators or counselors to teach the classes (Goodpaster et al., 2015). Teachers who are already unqualified may have to teach multiple subject areas because of vacancies (Goodpaster et al., 2015). Veteran teachers in these schools have seen a revolving door of teachers entering only to leave. Yet, veteran teachers remain despite the influence social injustices may have on retaining teachers in rural, low-income areas.

## Definitions

This section assists the reader with detailed definitions, and abbreviations of terminology pertinent to the study.

1. *Achievement Gap* – A break in academic performance, particularly in reading and math between Whites and their nonwhite counterparts and low-income and affluent students (Baker, Farrie, & Sciarra, 2016).
2. *Extrinsic Motivation* – Derived from the influence of external incentive, distinct from the wish to engage in education for its own sake (Gultekin & Acar, 2014).
3. *Intrinsic Motivation* – Refers to the motivation necessary to engage in an activity because that activity is enjoyable and satisfying. Intrinsic motivation involves internal, personal factors such as needs, interests, curiosity, and enjoyment (Gultekin & Acar, 2014).
4. *Low-income students* – Students who come from families with low socio-economic status and the students need assistance in and outside of school (Suitts, 2016).
5. *Motivation* - A general term that can be related to a complex series of physical and mental behaviors. Motivation is an internal state that activates, guides, and maintains behavior. It is a condition that facilitates the development of high achievement (Gultekin & Acar, 2014).
6. *Rural Schools Districts* – A low population density together with family isolation and community remoteness that uniquely characterizes rural areas (Redding & Walberg, 2013).
7. *Social Injustice* – The unfair treatment of humans including a quality education that will undoubtedly hinder individuals from participating in the economic, political, and social life of the community (Collopy, Bowman, & Taylor, 2012).

8. *Socio economic status (SES)* – Students from families with either poor or affluent financial background (Morales, 2014).
9. *Veteran teachers* – As used in this study, a veteran teacher is one who has taught for 10 or more years.
10. *Predominantly Minority Schools* – As used in this study, predominantly minority schools are those that have 60% or more of nonwhite students.

### **Summary**

Rural school districts struggle to retain veteran teachers because of lack of resources, funding, burnout, and emotional distress. Moreover, many principals have no choice but to hire teachers who are underqualified, out-of-field, or inexperienced to fill vacancies. Teachers with weak credentials play a significant role in the achievement gap between minority students, including African American or non-white students, and their Caucasian counterparts. Veteran teachers in this study remain due to certain motivational and intrinsic factors. While research exploring teacher attrition has occurred extensively, there is a gap in the literature exploring why veteran teachers remain in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts. In the upcoming chapter of this dissertation, a discussion of the conceptual framework including Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory and the critical race theory will take place. The conceptual framework above was used to determine what factors of Maslow's theory veteran teachers attribute to remaining in the aforementioned school districts, and how the components that make up the critical race theory impact veteran teachers' decision to remain. In addition, Chapter Two will further discuss literature related to rural schools.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

Teacher attrition is more prevalent in rural areas compared to schools located in metropolitan districts (Sutton, Bausmith, O'Connor, Pae, & Payne, 2014). Veteran teachers face several obstacles they must overcome to remain teaching in predominantly minority low-income, rural schools (Goodpaster et al., 2012). There is a lack of resources available for teachers and students. In addition, teachers face below-average salaries compared to urban and suburban schools, and teachers feel isolated due to the locale of rural districts (Azano & Stewart, 2016). These teachers all share the same experiences that could possibly give school districts and principals insight on retaining teachers who leave soon after they enter. Given that there is minimum research giving these teachers a voice, this research gave veteran teachers an opportunity to describe their lived experiences with the phenomenon of teaching in rural, low-income school districts.

A review of the literature in Chapter Two focused on several key segments. The discussion of the conceptual framework included Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory and the critical race theory, which frame this research. Next, the literature will delve into the following key segments: (a) teacher attrition, (b) principal impact on teacher attrition, (c) rural schools, (d) influences on rural students' educational attainment, (e) achievement gap, (f) teacher influence on achievement gap, (g) importance of highly qualified teachers on student outcomes, and (h) motivational factors of teachers. Lastly, the review of the literature will end with a summary.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual model that underlies this study came from two theoretical frameworks: Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Maslow, 2013) and the critical race theory (Bell, 2013).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory was pertinent to this study because teachers are leaving the profession soon after they enter, and almost half of teachers leave within the first five years of teaching in high poverty areas (He et al., 2015). Maslow's (2013) theory uncovered characteristics that motivated veteran teachers in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts to remain for five or more years in the same location.

Maslow's theory was developed in the United States during the 1950's and it has been one of the most widely referenced theories for the past 46 years (Bouzenita, Boulanouar & Maslow, 2016). This theory has been used in various arenas such as psychology, education, economics, marketing, management, sociology, political science, and many others. The hierarchy shows how human motivation is the process of satisfying needs placed lower in a hierarchy (Gobin, Teeroovengadum, Becceea, & Teeroovengadum, 2012; Maslow, 2013). The pictorial of the pyramid is the most popular symbol of the theory which begins with the basic needs at the bottom such as food, water, and shelter. The most difficult to reach needs are at the top of the pyramid such as esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 2013; McLeod, 2016). The pyramid that depicts the needs is significant because it provides a theory for human motivations by categorizing each need (Bouzenita et al., 2016; Maslow, 2013).

The hierarchy of needs centers around three principles pertinent to the theory. The first principle is known as the deficit principle. When a need goes unmet it begins to dominate people's actions as they seek satisfaction (Bouzenita et al., 2016; Maslow, 2013). Tension may arise as the person searches for ways to satisfy the unmet needs. The need to fulfill unmet needs will become stronger the longer the needs remains unmet (Maslow, 2013; McLeod, 2016). Next, is the prepotency principle. The needs at the bottom of the pyramid must be met in the correct order before the needs at the top of the hierarchy are pursuable. Lastly, is the progression



principle. This principle describes the necessity for the basic needs for survival that must be met first before a person is comfortable enough to move up the pyramid (Bouzenita, et al., 2016; Maslow, 2013). It is important to know that all persons have the potential and the desire to move up the pyramid to the highest level. Disruptions throughout life may cause some people to fail to fully *self-actualize*, getting stuck in the lower levels of the hierarchy (Maslow, 2013; McLeod, 2016).

The five levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs are noteworthy in understanding what motivates humans as they move up the pyramid seeking to fulfill more of their needs. The first level on the pyramid is the physiological needs. These are the most basic needs for survival such as air, food, water, shelter, warmth, intimacy, and rest (Maslow, 2013; Zakaria, Ahmad, & Malek, 2014). Once the person satisfies these needs, he or she will attempt to accomplish more. All other needs become subordinate until fulfilling the previous needs.

The next level on the hierarchy is safety. People need to feel safe and secured (Maslow, 2013; Zakaria et al., 2014). Security needs are vital for humans to thrive in this world. However, the need for safety can only occur if the need for survival happens first (Zakaria et al., 2014). Safety needs include a reliable source of income, a safe location to reside in, and shelter from the environment.

The third level on the pyramid is social or belongingness and love needs. This includes intimate relationships and friends (Maslow, 2013; McLeod, 2016). Humans need love, affection, and acceptance. Relationships such as family, friendship, romantic/intimate, religious affiliations, or social groups help fill the void for companionship (Maslow, 2013; Zakaria et al., 2014).

The fourth level is self-esteem needs. During this level on the pyramid, individuals experience prestige and a feeling of accomplishment (Maslow, 2013; McLeod, 2016). This is also the level where individuals experience success or status from self or others. However, to effectively achieve this level, individuals must feel comfortable with their accomplishments throughout the earlier stages (Maslow, 2013; Zakaria et al., 2014).

The final stage of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is self-actualization. At this point individuals are concerned with their personal growth. They are less concerned with the opinions of others (Maslow, 2013; Zakaria et al., 2014), and have achieved their full potential.

The esteem needs, found in the fourth level on Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid, are prevalent in the workplace because these needs are motivators for performance. Performance is the best result that humans can produce on the job (Abrudan, 2016; Maslow, 2013). Performance is measured individually where the person is continuously improving, or as a group. In a group, there is one champion no matter how much an individual has exceeded their own growth (Abrudan, 2016; Maslow, 2013). Individuals' motivation occurs both when they are competing in a group or against themselves. Motivation is what rejuvenates, guides, and sustains behavior (Gobin et al., 2012; Maslow, 2013). Sources of motivation can include goals, morals, need for success, biological needs, and affiliation, among many others (Gobin et al., 2012; Maslow, 2013). The fourth level is where individuals become more competitive. There is a need for recognition and obtaining status or respect (Abrudan, 2016; Maslow, 2013). There is a strong desire for respect from others. People want to live in such a way that they achieve self-satisfaction as well as approval from others. Self-esteem is not only about the perception of others but also self-perception (Gobin et al., 2012; Maslow, 2013). Accomplishment, mastery, individuality, rank, domination, self-respect, and respect from others are all aspects that describe

esteem (Maslow, 2013; McLeod, 2016). Educators tend to persist in their careers when they feel successful (Hughes, 2012). Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory helped to determine why veteran teachers remain in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts. This study originally sought to focus heavily on the esteem portion of the hierarchy because this is where humans become competitive to gain a sense of prestige as they work their way up the pyramid to self-actualization. However, the veteran teachers in the study revealed that they are persisting in their environment because of love and belongingness needs. They are remaining because they feel valued and they feel a sense of belonging from students and colleagues.

The critical race theory also framed this transcendental, phenomenological study (Bell, 2013; Henry, 2014; Leonardo, 2012; Morton & Martin, 2013). The CRT was significant to this study because teachers are remaining in the profession despite the obstacles they must overcome daily. The CRT was also important because it acknowledged the inequalities in education as it relates to African American students and other students of color (Bell, 2013). Research took place in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts where students may not get an adequate education, and teachers are left to teach with little resources not great enough to make a substantial impact on the children's academic success (Goodpaster et al., 2012; Rivero, 2015). The teachers in these districts realize that the students do not have a fair chance at success, yet the teachers persevere. The CRT uncovered the injustices in education including race, power, inequity, politics, and the impact on teacher retention.

Bell (2013) is one of the founding fathers of the CRT (Theune & Braddock, 2016). The CRT was developed in the 1970's after scholars became concerned about the lack of racial reform in education despite the rulings of historic cases such as *Brown vs. Board of Topeka Kansas* (Bell, 2013; Theune & Braddock, 2016). The purpose of the CRT is to expose and

address the inequalities that disadvantaged people suffer due to the legacy of historical practices (Bell, 2013; Berry & Candis, 2013). The CRT is used to understand school phenomena as inseparably connected with race structures (Bell, 2013; Leonardo, 2012). Race and racism are important components of the critical race theory because racism is institutionalized and serves as a significant component of racialized social systems, and people within racialized social systems or organizations may contribute to the replica of these systems through social practices (Bell, 2013). Ethnic and racial identities are not fixed units, but rather they are socially created phenomena that are constantly being revised based on a group's own self-interests (Bell, 2013; Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Freeman, 2010).

A uniqueness about the CRT are the narratives or storytelling approach to support the claim that racism is an eternal factor of American life and that it plays a leading role in American civilization (Bell, 2013; Leonardo, 2012). Bell (2013) and Leonardo (2012) explained that CRT recognizes that minority students suffer higher rates of attrition, study in run-down buildings and lack suitable resources. The reporting of this type of data is in narrative format for two reasons. First, schools that encompass predominantly minority students have evolved because of the stories surrounding the lives of their student population and what they deserve in terms of resources (Bell, 2013; Leonardo, 2012). Second, there are material differences between underperforming and over-performing schools causing African American and Latino students to fall behind their Caucasian and Asian counterparts (Bell, 2013; Leonardo, 2012).

Another critical component of CRT is the referencing of legal case studies and their racial consequences reported in narratives (Bell, 2013; Leonardo, 2012). The law is supposed to be unbiased and correct racial discernment; however, Alexander (2012) brought awareness to two court cases involving racism to show that racism does not only exist in the educational arena, but

in politics as well. The first court case was the Dred Scott Case (1857), where an enslaved African American man was taken to a free state by his owners. Dred Scott attempted to sue for his freedom, but in a 7-2 vote the court denied his request (Alexander, 2012). The second court case where racism was apparent was Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896). Alexander (2012) explained that Plessy (1896) authorized the principle of separate but equal and allowed Louisiana and other states to separate lawfully African Americans and Caucasians. This decision legalized unfair treatment of African Americans (Alexander, 2012).

As stated before, the CRT is prevalent in education and spills over into society and politics as well (Bell, 2013; Morton & Martin, 2013). The CRT is present in education and society to uncover the inequities in resources afforded to students of color in impoverished communities (Bell, 2013; Villenas, Deyhle, & Parker, 1999). Schools in poor communities with predominantly minorities have a lack of resources such as technology, instructional or academic materials, funds for building renovations, and money for the arts, and the people in these communities do not have the political power to force change at the state and local levels which leads to generational poverty (Bell, 2013; Villenas et al., 1999). Furthermore, Gillborn (2013) explained that interest-divergence is a major component of the CRT. White power-holders gain more power from inequalities between races. Minorities struggle to keep up both academically and economically (Gillborn, 2013). Teachers in these areas faced with a decision to leave or remain as the struggle for justice for minority students continues.

The integration of both Maslow's theory and the critical race theory are necessary for this study. Both theories were used to determine why teachers remain in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts. Both theories each have unique but different components that impact veteran teachers' decision to remain in rural school districts. For instance, this study

originally focused mostly on the esteem portion of Maslow's pyramid because this component is prevalent in the workplace (Maslow, 2013). Esteem needs are met when individuals feel accomplished, respected, or successful. These same qualities may be attributed to veteran teachers' retention. Yet, data revealed that the teachers are remaining due to belongingness and love needs. These needs include relationship, love, and the need to belong. This is the third level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Furthermore, the setting for this study is in schools that are mostly populated with students of color. The critical race theory emphasizes the injustices in education to African American and Hispanic students such as politics, race, and power. Veteran teachers may either stay or leave depending on the motivational factors from Maslow's theory and how well they are able to cope with and overcome the inequalities in the education system. Figure 1 shows a visual representation of how both theories frame this transcendental phenomenological study.

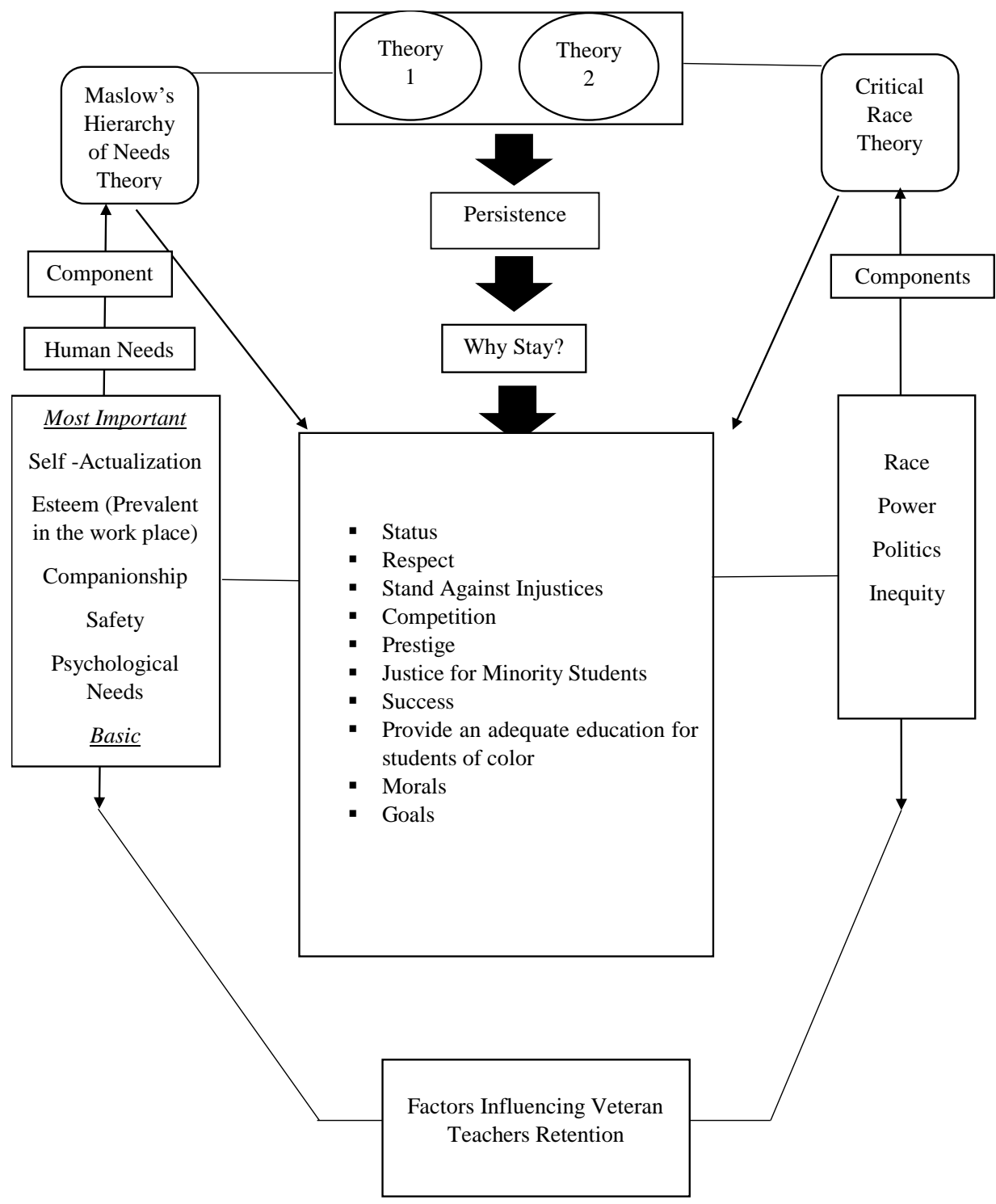


Figure 2.1. Conceptual Framework

### **Related Literature**

The related literature section focused on recent research pertaining to the topic of study to provide an overview of the ideas, theories, and significant literature currently published on teacher retention in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts. It is important to critically review recent research to determine the gap in the literature on retaining teachers in the above area. Teacher attrition began the related literature section to highlight why teachers are leaving the profession, and the section ended with literature emphasizing factors that motivate teachers to remain in hard to staff schools and districts.

### **Teacher Attrition**

Teachers enter the teaching profession through a variety of pathways. However, soon after they enter many tend to leave; this is a significant concern across the nation (Ulferts, 2016). Five-50% of teachers exit the teaching profession each year, and this percentage includes a high number of young teachers (Schaefer, Downey, & Clandinin, 2014). One-third of teachers leave the profession after three years and almost half of teachers leave after five years of teaching; sadly, 9.5% of beginning teachers resign from their positions before the school year ends (Ulferts, 2016). By 2020, the need for kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade teachers will likely increase by 17% for K-8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers and 7% for high school teachers (Rumschlag, 2017).

Teachers are opting to exit the teaching profession due to stressors that they cannot cope with. Some veteran teachers who have many years of experience become too overwhelmed with the pressures and challenges of teaching, and leave the profession as well (Lynch, 2012). Lynch (2012) also claimed that teachers, both those who are new to teaching and those nearing retirement, show a similar trend in high turnover and dropout rates. International research showed that the first years of teaching are important in determining if a novice teacher will



remain in the profession or leave because these years are demanding (Tiplic, Brandmo, & Elstad, 2015). The stressors causing teachers to leave the profession are numerous. Studies on teacher attrition showed that teachers are leaving the profession due to poor job conditions that include, isolation and a lack of support, cultural transition from pre-service to in-service, and working conditions such as salary, workload, classroom management, teaching out of the field, and poor teacher education programs (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Buchanan, 2012; Gallant & Riley, 2014; Mee & Haverback, 2014). Beginning teachers without effective training leave after their first year at more than double the rate of those who have had student teaching and rigorous preparation (Guha, Hyler, & Darling-Hammond, 2017). All the stressors combined lead to teacher burnout. Freudenberger (1974, as stated in Rumschlag, 2017) explained that burnout is a combination of emotional depletion and a lack of motivation and commitment. According to Casey (2016), burnout is recognized in most all countries and is often connected to all stages of beginning teachers' professions. This directly influences the choice to freely sustain their careers. Once teachers reach this level of frustration they leave.

Veteran teachers who persist have effectively dealt with the daily challenges that teachers endure; however, this is not common for all teachers as indicated by the turnover rate for teachers nearly at half a million per year (Lynch, 2012; Rumschlag, 2017). The ineffectiveness to handle daily obstacles result from teachers unable to meet their basic needs on the job. Basic needs must come first before individuals can move up on Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid (Maslow, 2013; McLeod, 2014). The fourth level on the pyramid includes achievement, mastery, recognition, and prestige which is the level that would give teachers great satisfaction (Maslow, 2013; McLeod, 2014) However, if stressors are preventing teachers from moving up the pyramid, they will never meet their greatest need. For example, Rumschlag (2017) explained

that there is an increase in violence at schools causing teachers to become vulnerable and less creative in their teaching. Safety is the second level on Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid and this need must be satisfied if the schools expect teachers to give their best performance every day (Maslow, 2013). A threat to teacher's well-being also includes other factors such as an overwhelming amount of paperwork, and the poor working and job conditions listed previously (Lynch, 2012). It is difficult for these teachers to reach a feeling of accomplishment and mastery when neglecting the lower levels of the hierarchy due to the demands of their job (Rumschlag, 2017). Furthermore, it is important to note that in addition to stressors such as an overwhelming workload, the teachers in this study who serve underprivileged students may experience higher levels of stress due to a lack of funds and available resources needed to provide students with an adequate education (Redding & Walberg, 2013). The job-related stress causes teachers to leave the profession at higher numbers.

The turnover rate can be higher in schools that serve predominantly minority families with low socio-economic status compared to more affluent settings (Kaden et al., 2016; Sass, Flores, Claeys, & Pérez, 2012). Schools with a student population that is mostly African American or Latino and low-income tend to have high attrition rates each year (Karp, 2014). Research showed that teachers who teach in high poverty areas are less satisfied in their positions (Almy, Tooley, & Education, 2012). Although some may believe that teachers are leaving because of the students, this is not the case. Teachers are leaving because of factors associated with the job such as student readiness to learn, parental involvement, and student health (Almy et al., 2012). In addition, teacher attrition increases when teachers in high poverty schools are unhappy with the school culture and leadership (Almy et al., 2012). Teachers also report that high poverty or low-income school districts have a lack of resources that make it

difficult to teach; many low-income schools still rely on outdated books to support instruction (Karp, 2014). Teachers leave in search of more support and better resources.

Teacher attrition is more prevalent in rural schools and districts compared to their urban and suburban counterparts (Goodpaster et al., 2012; Ulferts, 2016). Teachers who begin teaching in rural schools exit quickly; therefore, these schools struggle to attract and retain quality teachers (Goodpaster et al., 2012; Ulferts, 2016). One reason that teachers leave rural schools is because the community is very united. Some teachers who did not grow up in the same community they are teaching in feel isolated and disconnected from the community (Goodpaster et al., 2012). A distrust of outsiders often places barriers between the new teacher and families (Redding & Walberg, 2013). Teachers in these schools also reported concerns about boundaries and always being on call. Teachers who live in the community, parents know where they live, they have their phone numbers, and make numerous unannounced visits to the teacher's classroom (Goodpaster et al., 2012). Furthermore, teachers are fearful that if they have a bad experience with one student, it could destroy their reputation (Goodpaster et al., 2012). Rural communities tend to be small and everyone is interconnected, so if the child does not perform well in a class, that teacher can receive a label as a bad teacher by stakeholders in that community (Goodpaster et al., 2012).

This research gave veteran teachers a voice to describe their lived experiences working in rural schools and districts. Despite the many challenges and high teacher attrition, veteran teachers continue to persist. Their voices can be useful to provide vital information to stakeholders such as community members and struggling teachers who have a desire to remain in education but need guidance and support. There is little research looking at why veteran teachers remain; therefore, the voices of these teachers shed light on the phenomenon of veteran teachers

in rural locations despite the odds that are against them. The next section of this literature review described principals' impact on teacher attrition.

### **Principal's Impact on Teacher Retention**

It is important to acknowledge the role principals play in retaining teachers. Teacher retention remains a continuous challenge for the education field. Each year a greater percentage of teachers are choosing to either relocate to another campus or school district or exit the profession all together (Dahlkamp, Peters, & Schumacher, 2017). Studies show that teachers leave the profession because of a lack of support from building administrators (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Buchanan, 2012; Gallant & Riley, 2014; Mee & Haverback, 2014). In addition, National and local research indicates a teacher's decision to stay at a school largely depends upon the principal and his or her leadership in the school (Brown & Wynn, 2009). Principals play a significant part in improving teacher retention by providing support in areas including: environmental, instructional, technical and emotional (Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015). School administrators reinforce the school's culture by providing guidance and support and offering instructional and institutional resources as the building's instructional leader (Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015). School leaders play an imperative role in shaping building-level factors that can affect novice teachers' attitudes toward the profession and their sense of efficacy as educators (Brown & Wynn, 2009). This can possibly add longevity to novice teachers' career. The next section of this literature review described the aspects of rural schools.

### **Rural Schools**

It is important to acknowledge the characteristics and challenges of rural schools to understand the obstacles teachers must strive to overcome each day to provide students with a safe, adequate, and productive learning environment.

**Characteristics.** Rural schools and communities are removed from the progressive influences of modern life and are located outside of metropolitan areas (Redding & Walberg, 2013). The families in some rural areas still mostly depend on jobs such as farming, mining, and timber work as a primary source of income (Bailey, 2014; Redding & Walberg, 2013). Many of these students' families' face declining job opportunities and population loss which result in such hardships that inevitably impact the quality of living and school performance for rural children (Bailey, 2014). Bailey (2014) explained that the inequalities among children from low-income backgrounds and their counterparts are drastic and challenges for rural children and their families are great. Some of the obstacles that these students and their families face are harsh economic, social, and educational conditions. These hardships put students at an academic disadvantage because the unequal access to an adequate education. Students who attend rural schools are at a disadvantage because of a lack of resources such as technology, poor instructional practices, and little remediation for academic success (Redding & Walberg, 2013).

**Population.** Predominantly minority, low-income rural schools mostly serve African American students and students of color who live in poverty (Jordan, 2015). Most impoverished Americans live in rural locations, and more than 95% of the constantly poorest counties in the United States are rural (Irvin, 2012). Although youth from various ethnic backgrounds in the rural South encounter poverty, African American youth from the rural South tend to experience the most severe and chronic poverty (Irvin, 2012). Jordan (2015) claimed that over 40% of African American students (about 3.2 million) attend a poverty-stricken school and only about 10% attend a low-poverty school. This means Black students are four times more likely to attend an impoverished school than a low-poverty school and over six times more likely than Caucasians students to attend a high-poverty school (Jordan, 2015). Poverty is traditionally

defined as a family or person who has insufficient income to satisfy basic needs such as food, water, and shelter (Misturelli & Heffernan, 2012); however, the meaning of poverty has evolved to a minimum access to capital. This includes physical, financial, natural, human, or social. Poverty rates are rising in some rural schools and their communities suffer from a scarcity of social and behavioral services for families (Redding & Walberg, 2013). Today, 50% of people living in the United States have an income at the bottom one-fifth of the population (Marsh-McDonald & Schroeder, 2012). This means that they are living or remarkably close to living in poverty. Moreover, the students who are attending these schools come from families with low socio-economic status (SES) and they need assistance in and outside of school (Suitts, 2012).

**Challenges.** Teacher quality is a significant factor responsible for student achievement and students not being properly prepared to succeed at a college or a university (Zhang & Campbell, 2015). However, predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools face many challenges that make it difficult for the students to receive an adequate education. Research shows that rural schools consist mostly of novice teachers, under-qualified teachers, teachers outside of the field, and teachers with weak credentials (Azano & Stewart, 2016; Goodpaster et al., 2012; Masinire, 2015; Redding & Walberg, 2013; Rivero, 2015; Ulferts, 2015; Zhang & Campbell, 2015). Staffing of rural schools are usually with young, inexperienced teachers who are less likely to have earned a graduate degree (Goodpaster et al., 2012). Rural schools are frequently staffed with an inequitable number of under-prepared, inexperienced teachers who do not get the proper guidance and support to meet the needs of students (Ulferts, 2015). These teachers are less effective than veteran teachers with years of experience, and they are often in survival mode because they struggle to meet the needs of their students (Ulferts, 2015). The principals are often placed in a position where they are left with little choice but to hire whoever

walks through the doors. Classes have teachers who are underprepared, do not understand the curriculum, out-of-field, and teachers who need drastic professional development. Classes are also oversized because there is a shortage of teachers (Ulferts, 2015).

Some teachers and school administrators in these schools may have lower expectations of students from low income families, which plays into the bias that people who are economically disadvantaged cannot learn, so there is not a pervasive reason for expecting them to succeed (Renth, Buckley, & Puchner, 2015). This is a challenge because the students attending these rural schools do not receive high quality instruction that would allow them to succeed academically. In addition, this unequal access to education is a potential reason predominantly, minority, low-income students underperformed compared to their peers on standardized tests (Zhang & Campbell, 2015). Rural schools typically offer fewer advanced and college preparatory courses and a low percentage of rural students take advanced classes. This is partly because most of the teachers are not highly qualified to teach at the level the students need and they are not qualified to teach advanced courses such as physics and calculus (Silvernail, Linet, & University of Southern Maine, 2014). Therefore, predominantly minority, rural students are at a disadvantage when it comes to receiving a rigorous education.

**Challenges by Population.** Another challenge that is detrimental to rural schools is not receiving adequate funding. Research (Silvernail et al., 2014)) showed that rural schools struggle because of the lower level of state funding to the local school district. State funding includes all state-derived revenues used for the daily operations of schools (Johnson, Showalter, Klein, & Lester, 2014). Approximately one-third of America's students attend rural schools, but their needs are overlooked, and the schools are poorly funded (Strange, 2011). This is because in many states, funding systems created systematically deny rural schools, especially those in low-

wealth regions, of the monetary capacity to provide an education that meets modern-day standards (Strange, 2011). In addition to school finance, other concerns are transportation costs, facility maintenance, and teacher salary (Silvernail et al., 2014). All the above can have a negative impact on student achievement because students are denied quality academic programs and teachers go without sufficient instructional materials and resources.

Historically, students who attend low-income schools and are from families with low SES, have performed poorly in school and on standardized achievement tests when compared to their more affluent peers (Renth et al., 2015). Socioeconomic difficulties represent the strongest and most consistent threat to high levels of student success (Johnson et al., 2014). For example, family income level is linked to the level of preparation for children entering school, while the educational level of adults in a community is linked to both community economic well-being and community support for education (Johnson et al., 2014). Students who are attending predominantly minority, low-income rural schools do not attend college or drop out quickly (US Department of Education [DOE], 2018). These students tend to have lower aspirations for higher education because postsecondary schooling is unnecessary for local job opportunities in rural communities such as the ones previously mentioned (Silvernail et al., 2014). Unfortunately, they are much less prepared for college than their more well-off peers. Those who make it to college attend universities that are undercapitalized, and they graduate at a lower rate (DOE, 2018). According to the US Department of Education (2018), America's ethnic minorities are the fastest growing sectors in the country and they make up a large portion of the economically poor population, tending to their educational needs is in everyone's best interest. This research will give veteran teachers a voice to describe their lived experiences working in rural schools and districts. Little research has been conducted on why veteran teachers remain;



therefore, the voices of these teachers will shed light on the phenomenon of veteran teachers in rural locations despite the odds that are against them.

Veteran teachers teaching in rural schools face many challenges but have effectively learned how to persist despite the frustrations of teaching in a district with many needs. For instance, veteran teachers in these schools display a notably high concern for their students' lives outside of the classroom and take responsibility for supporting their students' academic needs as well as their social and behavioral needs (Redding & Walberg, 2013). The veteran teachers in this study can possibly help school and district administrators recruit and retain veteran teachers who are willing to stay and impact the education of the students born and raised in these communities. In addition, this study can help teachers who are unfamiliar with rural schools and districts understand the community members and their beliefs and values. Teachers will possibly understand the importance of building a relationship with parents and community members. The veteran teachers in this study will share their experiences of how they were able to persist and provide the students in these rural districts with the proper education they deserve. Some veteran teachers will remain despite the obstacles they must overcome such as their students' families' perception and value of education which can have a negative impact on student achievement as well as how far the child decides to pursue their educational goals. There are other barriers or influences that the child cannot control that may cause some teachers to leave while others to remain. The following section addressed the influence veteran teachers have on rural students' academic achievement.

### **Influences on Rural Students' Educational Attainment**

There are several key factors that impact the educational accomplishments of low-income, rural students. These students face barriers that can potentially prevent them from

having the same educational opportunities as their more affluent counterparts, and they encounter barriers that can also prevent them from reaching their greatest potential (Hodges, McIntosh, & Gentry, 2017).

**Race.** Race can serve as a barrier for African American students or any student of color such as Latino. The racial inequalities in education makes it difficult for students of color to achieve their greatest academic potential (Muhammad, 2015). Muhammad (2015) believed that although race is genetics, people's ideas about race is socially constructed, meaning that individuals have certain perceptions about the achievement level or academic success of students of color. As stated earlier in the research, rural schools mostly serve African Americans students and students of color (Jordan, 2014). Many of the rural schools serving the above population of students do not receive proper funding leaving the teachers to go without the proper resources to build a strong educational foundation for their students (Bailey, 2014). In 1896 the Plessy vs. Ferguson doctrine made it legal for Blacks and Whites to attend separate but equal schools (Moody, 2016). This caused African American students to fall further behind because they did not receive an adequate education with quality materials and resources. Moody (2016) furthered explained that in the Brown v. Board of Education case (1954), many schools remain segregated and unequal because of years of legislation and policies that have not favored Black children. The students in rural districts are not responsible for the inequality or social injustices that that they endure. Muhammad (2015) explained that schools are a part of a larger structure of institutionalized racism. Evidence suggested that institutional or systemic racism is rooted in many public policies, which negatively affect the educational outcomes of African American students ("Factors Critical," 2014). In addition to discrimination because of race, these students also find it difficult to move forward because of the location of their school and community.

**Location.** The economy of some rural locations still depends on farming, mining, and timber work as a primary source of income (Beasley & Holly, 2013). Several of these communities face declining job opportunities and population loss due to a lack of employment (Bailey, 2014). Lower wage jobs are more common, and rates of childhood poverty are generally greater in rural communities than in urban areas (Blackstock, Ki Byung, Mau, & McDonald, 2018). Bailey (2014) explained that 48 out of the top 50 American counties with the highest child poverty rates are rural. The economy tends to struggle in these locations, forcing districts to cut staff, curriculum, arts, and technical programs (Bailey, 2014). Cuts even to programs that focused on gifted children and those with special needs have happened because of funding (Bailey, 2014). Reardon (2013) claimed that historically, low-income students as a group have performed less well than high-income students on most measures of academic success such as high stakes tests, grades, high school graduation rates, and college admission and completion rates. Based on the research, these issues are due to unequal access to public education and all it entails such as funding, resources, and high-quality staff. Rural locations struggle to keep up with their suburban counterparts because of its remoteness which means a lack of job opportunities for the local people and a lack of school funding because in these locations families are low-income.

**Family and Income.** There are also major differences within the rural households versus urban and suburban that have a major impact on the child's educational attainment. In addition, factors related to income and rurality have significantly impacted the academic success of students from low-income families (Bailey, 2014). Bailey (2014) explained that 71% of rural white families reported having two-parent households, while only 20% of African American families in rural settings live in two-parent households. The two-parent households were more

likely to have upper income status and higher educational attainment. African American families from remote locations are likely to endure conditions often related with low educational achievement, and they are also less equipped for elementary school settings and to finish high school (Bailey, 2014). Students with low SES are less likely to attend college because rural areas tend not to have a postsecondary institution, have a lack of knowledge about how to apply for college, and have parents who have never attended college (Beasley & Holly, 2013). Rural adults are more likely to be less educated than their urban peers and rural high-school students are less likely to seek a college degree (Blackstock et al., 2018). Although online colleges are popular and is another option for higher education, students from rural, low-income families still lack high-speed internet access (Beasley & Holly, 2013). For example, families in remote locations, particularly low-income ones, are less likely to have their own computers and internet services, making access difficult to online classes (Beasley & Holly, 2013). Children who live in rural areas are affected by economic, social, and educational adversities in learning and cognition particularly those who are minority, and especially, African American. Therefore, the school environment must cater to the needs of these students by involving important stakeholders such as parents and providing job-embedded professional development for teachers so that they are equipped and prepared to provide the educational needs adequately and effectively that students deserve.

**Culture.** Given the constantly evolving cultural and ethnic diversity in the United States and the demographic shift that are changing American schools, it is imperative that schools are more comprehensive and culturally relevant in understanding the school environmental factors that are associated with child academic success among not only White students, but Black and Hispanic students as well (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). Toldson and Lemmons (2013)

explained that an invitation for involvement from members of the school community is an important factor in motivating parents to become involved in their child's education. Parents take an active role in their child's academics and studies, in part, because they perceive opportunities, invites, or demands from the school's environment that requires their involvement. Moreover, parents want to feel included and needed by the school so that they can better aid their child towards academic achievement. An increase in parental participation is most successful when schools engage in clear and open communication and make concerted efforts to work collaboratively with parents (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). This is important because of how some educators perceive children of color and their willingness to learn (Short, 2016). Short (2016) claimed that some teachers want to hold their students responsible for not performing well academically and disregard any impact their family and community may have on a student's academic achievement. Culture differences between home and the classroom have created academic problems because teachers only have a surface understanding of their students' way of life (Short, 2016). Short explained that teachers need to act to better understand the culture of the students of color whom they serve to make certain that students have a rewarding and successful educational experience. This is necessary because the current education system simply does not work for millions of students, most of them Black and Hispanic students and students from families with low SES ("What Matters Now," 2016). Over the past decades research revealed the need for intentional training and assessment about teachers' beliefs regarding their perceptions of cultural diversity and their students within the classroom walls (Mahatmya, Lohman, Brown, & Conway-Turner, 2016). This is because Black students are the most vulnerable for decreased teacher expectations. To combat the negative perception of the educational attainment of Black and Hispanic students, Mahatmya et al. (2016), suggested that

preservice teachers engage in professional development that provide teacher candidates with more opportunities to interact with diverse student populations and address culturally relevant pedagogy in their programs. Teachers are more likely to remain when they are more aware of the diverse population they serve. Teachers are more prepared and better equipped to provide an adequate education for all students including predominantly minority, low-income, rural students through effective professional development which builds school culture. The method to the success of school education is contingent on a good quality school culture (Lee & Li, 2015).

**Teacher Retention.** Low teacher retention in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools which can also influence students' educational attainment. Sawchuk (2018) explained that the teacher-hiring and -retention plight is very serious for the United States' rural, remote districts. Low teacher retention rates negatively impact student achievement especially for students who attend schools with a high poverty rate (Lochmiller, Adachi, Chestnut, Johnson, & Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia, 2016). Minority students who are from families with low SES are more likely to attend schools with less experienced and less effective educators (Lazarev, Toby, Zacamy, Newman & National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, 2017). This is a problem because of the established link between educator quality and student academic achievement (Manzeske & Garland, 2016). Teachers are the most important factor that influences student achievement (Ulferts, 2015). Although this may be true, experienced, and highly qualified teachers are less likely to teach in rural districts because of the location, lower compensation for teachers, and difficulty providing resources to students (Lazarev et al., 2017). Quality teachers are the most precious resource in rural districts because adequate funding does not allow the districts to purchase up-to-date resources that would reinforce instruction (Ulferts, 2015). Sawchuk (2018) explained that if recruited in rural

districts, the challenging part is to retain the new teachers. Once some teachers have gained experience they tend to leave rural districts in search of more attractive places to teach. This constant revolving door of teachers lessens these students' chances of academic success because there is no instructional capacity. Furthermore, these students fall further behind in their academics causing the achievement gap to widen. The succeeding heading will emphasize the achievement gap between minority students and their Caucasian peers as well as factors causing the achievement gap.

### **Achievement Gap**

An achievement gap tends to exist in predominantly, minority, low-income rural schools where some veteran teachers spend most of their careers. This study revealed how the injustices that these students endure impact veteran teachers' decision to persist in the above locations. An achievement gap is defined as, "A significant difference in performance on standardized tests when comparing students of different gender, race, socioeconomic status (SES), and disability" (Ratcliff, Carroll, Jones, Costner, Sheehan, & Hunt, 2017, p. 119). In the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, the courts declared that separate schools and facilities were inherently unequal (Ford & King, 2014). The goal of the *Brown* decision is to give students, regardless of race or ethnicity, equal access to education. However, the goal of *Brown* has remained unfilled for over sixty years after the decision (Ford & King, 2014). The unequal distribution of resources and opportunities for African American students encourages and intensifies educational inequalities, creating a vicious cycle which deprive Black students of access to school programs that are vital to reaching their potential academically, intellectually, socio-culturally, and financially (Ford & King, 2014). In 1963, President John F. Kennedy challenged congress to observe how far we have come in attaining first-class citizenship for all people

irrespective of color, how far we must go, and what further responsibilities remain undone (Apfelbaum & Ardon, 2015). It is time to reassess the state of segregation in the United States and the outcomes of segregation and educational opportunities (Apfelbaum & Ardon, 2015). McGee (2004, as cited in Morgan, 2012) explained that the achievement gap is not about the students who are not passing, but it is about a system that is not providing the educational opportunities that low-income students deserve. Many factors contribute to the achievement gap in the United States, some are more prevalent than others.

**Situational Factors.** The gap in academic achievement between high-income and low-income students and predominantly minority and Caucasian students could be the result of many factors. These factors include parent contribution, cultural perception towards education, and the educational materials and resources accessible at the child's home (Morgan, 2012). The teachers in the school can still make a huge impact on a student's education despite the adversities (Morgan, 2012). The issue of unequal access to qualified teachers has the potential to explain the ongoing achievement gap between high vs. low poverty and minority vs majority students (Zhang & Campbell, 2015). According to the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), a quality teacher would possess the following characteristics: fully certified, possessing a bachelor's degree, and demonstrating competence in subject knowledge and teaching (Zhang & Campbell, 2015). Although the NCLB Act required all teachers to be highly qualified, one of the biggest problems facing low-income school districts is a shortage of qualified teachers (Morgan, 2012). Morgan (2012) explained that veteran teachers often leave these schools and the new teachers who do come, leave to teach in wealthier districts once they get more experience (Morgan, 2012). The constant attrition and the low-quality of teachers leave students with little-to-no access to a highly qualified teacher. Funding is also an important factor that causes the gap in



academic achievement to increase. In some advantaged districts, schools spend over twice as much per pupil than those in the poorest school districts (Burnette, 2017; Morgan, 2012; Lee, 2012). The amount of funding available in poorer school districts is another factor that causes the achievement gap to widen. Sufficient funding is necessary because funding can make a significant impact on the quality of education students receive. Schools and districts with more money undoubtedly have greater capability to afford higher-quality, comprehensive, and deeper educational opportunities to the students they serve (Baker et al., 2016). In the absence of funding, academic programs for students are discontinued, teacher salary is less competitive, and resources are limited making it difficult for students to receive an adequate education (Baker et al., 2016).

**The Role of CRT.** The critical race theory highlights the presence of race and inequality in education and how the K-12 education setting is detrimental, troublesome, and unfavorable spaces for students and communities of color (Aleman, 2009). Aleman (2009) explained that the CRT has demonstrated that educational settings systemically oppress, exclude, and damage students of color. For instance, students and families in these neighborhoods typically fall victim to the politics which are not in the students' and their families' best interest (Bell, 2013). The achievement gap persists because students from these communities and schools encounter poor teaching, a lack of resources, and funding. The critical race theory is important to because legislators play a vital role in providing schools with tools and strategies for use in classrooms. Addressing the concerns of these issues with race and inequality in relation to education more effectively is long overdue (Bell, 2013). Bell (2013) claimed that this deep-rooted problem has long delayed education policy, curriculum and practices that seek to amend injustices in schooling, and these are concerns with race. Correcting inequality means fostering reflective

practitioners who hold an obligation to examining their own beliefs, attitudes, and expectations related to traditionally underserved students (Rosine, 2013).

Veteran teachers in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts are vital in closing the achievement gap. Many of them stay despite the challenges they experience when teaching students who are below the learning curve and are in intensive need for high quality instruction. Teachers who teach at rural schools that are heavily populated with students with low SES, and a high minority enrollment had less job satisfaction. Therefore, they tend to leave at a faster rate (Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2016). The veteran teachers who participated in this study have experienced the same phenomenon of teaching in the above locations. They had an opportunity to share why they remain despite the challenges they must overcome and the despite the inequality they witness their students endure firsthand. It is important that these teachers lend a voice in hopes of retaining teachers in the most difficult-to-staff schools in hopes of narrowing the achievement gap between minority and low-income students and their more affluent counterparts. The next section will discuss more in-depth how veteran teachers influence the achievement gap.

### **Teacher Influence on Achievement Gap**

Closing the achievement gap between minority, low-income students and their more affluent counterparts will require teachers in these schools to sharpen their pedagogy. Closing the achievement gap depends on the knowledge, skills, and the ability of the teacher to deliver relevant and effective instruction. Job-embedded professional development can help teachers in schools such as predominantly minority, low-income, and rural develop the skills they need to close the achievement gap (Mette, Nieuwenhuizen, & Hvidston, 2016).

**Professional Development.** Professional development can benefit all teachers including novice teachers and veteran teachers. Effective job-embedded professional development can help teachers overcome daily stressors that can threaten student achievement, especially for low-income and minority students (Mette et al., 2016). Mette et al. (2016) conducted a study using 73 teachers, and the results revealed that 91% of the teachers agreed that professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy was crucial in helping them reflect on their own biases when instructing students of different ethnicities. The participants in the above study were better able to understand the students as individuals and meet their personal learning needs as the participants learned more about the backgrounds that their non-White students came from. Mette et al. (2016) claimed that the teachers went beyond what their educational preparation programs provided them and challenged their own understandings of race and poverty to help students of color succeed academically. Althaus (2015) claimed that even though SES continues to predict student achievement, teachers can moderate SES with professional development that addresses content and teaching strategies over time. This means that professional development provided by district or school leaders needs to purposefully target the learning needs of low-income, minority students so that the students are receiving an adequate education in hopes of closing the achievement gap.

Too often, there are teachers who have the desire to remain in the education field, but the stressors of teaching outweigh the desire to teach, so they leave (Efron, Winter, & Bressman, 2012). There are cost efficient initiatives implemented in hard-to-staff schools such as predominantly minority, low-income, and rural, to retain not only veteran teachers, but teachers at various points in their careers so that they too can become veteran teachers. In schools that need the most assistance, such as rural schools, effective programs that would influence teachers

to remain are professional development opportunities, mentorship programs, and leadership opportunities (Bennett, Brown, Kirby-Smith, & Severson, 2013). The greater the frustration that teachers encounter and must face alone, the more likely they are to leave the profession (Bennett et al., 2013).

Professional development can have a significant influence on teacher retention when teachers are able to share their expertise on new and existing educational theories and practices, collaborate with their fellow colleagues, foster positive teaching attitudes, and develop new teaching strategies (Chiyaka, Kibirige, Sithole, McCarthy, & Mupinga, 2017). Effective professional development can improve teacher content knowledge, the delivery of instruction, and the student learning process (Chiyaka et al., 2017). To retain veteran teachers, individualization of their professional development must occur. Principals must visit their classrooms often to understand their needs (Vanderhye, 2015). Vanderhye (2015) also claimed that authentic and precise feedback is vital to the success of this process.

In addition to effective and meaningful professional development, mentoring can also influence veteran and beginning teachers to remain longer. Due to the rising numbers of teachers exiting, educational leaders have recognized a great need for teachers to have mentors so that they are able to overcome daily obstacles with someone who is able to guide them (Efron et al., 2012). Mentoring is an effective strategy that can be used to address teacher attrition and shortages because these programs improve teacher effectiveness, increase work satisfaction, enhances teacher's ability to fulfill their role, and provide teachers with support. Teacher turnover is low in schools that empower teachers to make most decisions in their professional lives and receive encouragement to lead (Vanderhye, 2015). These decisions include when and what to teach, student behavior interventions, communications with parents, and the occurrence

and weight of formative and summative tests (Vanderhye, 2015). Vanderhye (2015) made clear that veteran teachers feel compelled to leave because they have spent so much time in the classroom. However, giving veteran teachers more leadership responsibilities will help them feel more professionally fulfilled. The building leader can select teachers to lead or facilitate professional development within their schools to build capacity as well as leaders. Althaus (2015) also claimed that principals who engage their teachers in effective professional development can increase student achievement and narrow the achievement gap.

**Teacher Efficacy.** Malinauskas (2017) defined self- efficacy as one's belief in one's capability to successfully direct one's actions to achieve the set goals and succeed in carrying out a particular task. Furthermore, Malinauskas (2017) explained that self-efficacy refers to a person's perceived ability, as distinct from practical ability, to perform a specific action or course of action. Teacher efficacy stems from self-efficacy and is teachers' belief that they can positively influence student academic achievement or execute courses of actions necessary to impact students' success (Kyung Ryung & Eun Hee, 2018; Malinauskas, 2017). Teacher efficacy in the context of instructional strategies and student engagement is about teachers' self-assurance in their delivery of instruction and their ability to stimulate students, which are both aspects strongly associated to academic achievement (Kyung Ryung & Eun Hee, 2018). Teachers who can effectively engage a diverse group of students in the teaching and learning process can work towards closing the achievement gap between ethnic minority students and their White counterparts. These teachers know that they have the tools and strategies in place to motivate students to want to learn, and most importantly, they believe that they can make a difference (Kyung Ryung & Eun Hee, 2018). Teacher quality is an important factor in student academic achievement, especially for low- achieving students (Mincu, 2015). Mincu (2015) also

claimed that teacher quality has the potential to close the achievement gap in both primary and secondary schools and between minority students who are from low-income families and their wealthy peers. This can be done using effective instructional strategies and approaches including high expectations for all students, quality feedback, structured teaching, and teaching students how to use and develop their meta-cognitive skills (Mincu, 2015). Furthermore, Williams (2013) explained that teachers who deliver high-quality instruction continue to benefit their students at least two years after they have stopped teaching them. The possibility to add value to the education of the most vulnerable students calls for teachers who believe in their ability to teach and teachers who have an in-depth knowledge of the content (Mincu, 2015). Teacher efficacy is important in closing the achievement gap because these teachers have a willingness to teach despite who the students are and the deficiencies they may bring to the classroom. Teacher efficacy and high-quality teachers are needed in hard-to-staff schools such as predominantly minority, low-income, and rural.

**Attrition.** Teacher attrition is costly for districts not only from a financial standpoint, but more as it relates to the overall school quality and academic achievement (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015). It is important to know and understand why these teachers are leaving the most vulnerable school districts and how their leaving is influencing the achievement gap. Approximately one-third of new or beginning teachers are leaving their post within the first five years of teaching, and this is a national concern (Kaden et al., 2016). Kaden et al. (2016) also pointed out that the turnover rate is much higher in high-poverty schools, and the retention rate of high-quality teachers is low. These teachers leave to teach in more affluent districts once they have gained experience (Rivero, 2015). Teachers are also entering the teaching profession in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools with little teaching credentials including

teaching out of the field and a lack of preparation in addition to being new to teaching (Ulferts, 2016). Teachers are leaving these districts for several reasons. Bennet et al., (2013) explained that novice teachers are leaving the field for the following reasons: classroom management skills, teaching is overwhelming, lack of organizational skills, and no mentoring or guidance. Veteran teachers are leaving the teaching profession for the following reasons: a great deal of paperwork and record-keeping, state requirements for teachers, meetings, state assessments, the many obligations, and an insufficient amount of time to devote to the children (Bennet et al., 2013). Student achievement is influenced, and the gap is widened when these teachers do not remain in the same building to build capacity (Ulferts, 2016). All students pay a high price when they are exposed to unproductive teaching, but the highest price is paid by those who can least afford it: the students who start out behind (Adnot, Dee, Katz, Wyckoff, & Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis, 2017). Subsequently, the next section will accentuate the need for highly qualified teachers, especially in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools.

### **Importance of Highly Qualified Teachers on Student Outcomes**

Highly qualified teachers can make a vast difference in the educational outcome of low achieving students (Ulferts, 2015). These teachers are competent and knowledgeable in the subject area they teach, and they have the skills necessary to positively impact student achievement. Schools and districts rely on the expertise of highly qualified, veteran teachers to provide students with an adequate education because rural schools are remote and typically underfunded (Ulferts, 2015).

**Teachers as Resources.** Rural schools have a clear and defined interest in their most valuable resource: their teachers (Ulferts, 2015). According to Ulferts (2015), it is vital that rural schools attract and retain their best teachers since rural teachers exit the profession at a higher

rate than their urban and suburban counterparts. In addition, there is an inequitable distribution of teacher talent in rural schools that serves minority and low-income students (Goldhaber, Lavery, & Theobald, 2016). These schools have more novice and inexperienced teachers. Consistent teachers are necessary in these schools because research showed that a highly effective teacher is the single most important school-related determinant to student academic success (Rosine, 2013; Kanadlı, 2017; Ulferts, 2015). Ulferts (2015) explained that rural schools and rural students cannot afford to not have veteran teachers in the classroom because of the negative effects on students and student achievement. Furthermore, rural districts need consistent teachers because these districts have limited resources; therefore, quality teachers matter if student achievement is to increase (Ulferts, 2015). Quality teachers are those who have profound pedagogical knowledge with high expectations for all their students and who build a rapport with their students at the start of the school year, and they constantly give feedback in hopes of improving the students' academic outcome (Kanadlı, 2017). The expertise of veteran teachers working in schools serving disadvantaged or low-income students are sources of knowledge (Rosine, 2013). Veteran teachers are willing to participate in conversations with educational leaders concerning school initiatives that would engage all teachers in meaningful ways for more effective implementation of change that would benefit teachers and possibly cause them to remain in the education field (Snyder, 2017).

**Teacher Retention.** To retain teachers of all ages, Lynch (2012) uses the term “total compensation” (p. 122). This is a term that goes beyond monetary gains which could explain why teachers, including the ones in rural areas, remain for many years in the teaching profession. Total compensation includes competitive salaries, but more importantly, the teachers feel completely rewarded. They have a voice, they feel valued, they receive support from



administration, and there are mentoring programs to help teachers succeed in education (Lynch, 2012). Masinire (2015) further explained that to retain teachers in rural locations, teachers should receive acknowledgement for their accomplishments. Masinire (2015) also explained that is important to help teachers understand the characteristics that make rural areas unique. Often, many teachers begin teaching in rural locations without fully understanding the culture which lessens their teaching time. Teachers need to be properly trained about rural schools and districts so that they are better prepared for teaching (Masinire, 2015).

It is important that principals know and understand the needs of veteran teachers if they expect to retain them at a high rate. The researcher conducted this study in hopes of veteran teachers providing insight on why they have remained in the classroom for many years. Their voices and experiences will help school administrators become aware of the expectations of their most valuable teachers. Prior research has been conducted on why teachers leave (Dupriez, Delvaux, & Lothaire, 2016; Kaden, Patterson, Healy, Adams, 2016). This study; however, will examine why teachers remain in the hardest-to-staff schools and districts such as rural schools that serve predominantly minority, low-income students. Instead of a revolving door each year of new and inexperienced teachers, the goal of this study is to provide principals with meaningful information on how to retain veteran teachers in hopes of narrowing the achievement gap and increasing student achievement as well as fulfilling the needs of teachers in their buildings so that teachers are motivated to teach. The last section of this literature review will highlight the motivational factors of veteran teachers that may attribute to the longevity of veteran teachers.

### **Motivational Factors of Teachers**

Gultekin and Acar (2014) defined motivation as an inner thinking that stimulates and triggers behavior. You, Dang, and Liam (2016) expanded the definition by adding that intrinsic

motivation is an emotional state that incites learning-related behaviors and determines the direction, level, and intensity of those behaviors. The derivation of motivation means *to move*, and this psychological construct refers to people's wants to act and/or to exert effort; moreover, motivation is an internal construct heavily influenced by external factors (Daniels, 2016). This section will uncover the sources of motivation and how teachers are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated.

Levels of motivation is what causes teachers to remain in the teaching profession or leave the profession permanently; in addition, teachers who report higher levels of motivation are more resilient to the difficulties they face within their occupation (Perry, Brenner, Collie, & Hofer, 2015). Teacher motivation comes from three main sources and each source is associated with teacher retention: self-efficacy, commitment, and engagement. Self-efficacy is an important attribute that causes teachers to be resilient and is defined as the ability to adjust to varied situations and increase one's competence in the face of adverse conditions (Perry et al., 2015).

Commitment is another vital source of motivation for teachers. Commitment is defined as a teacher's fulfillment with their career choice and their belief that teaching is the right vocation for them (Perry et al., 2015). Moreover, commitment is the strength of an individual's identification with an involvement in an organization (Akomolafe & Olatomide, 2014). Commitment concerns the degree to which an organizational member is loyal and willing to contribute to the organization. Being committed to their jobs may protect them against the negative effects of job-related stress (Perry et al., 2015). Low salary, parents' attitudes, inconsistent salaries, students' attitudes, school culture, conditions for teaching, and teaching loads are all factors or stressors that can contribute a lack of commitment (Akomolafe & Olatomide, 2014). Teachers who have a strong desire to teach and who believe that teaching is

their calling have high levels of commitment (Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012). Teachers' commitment to teaching may also be a predictor of their longevity in the field (Thomason & La Paro, 2013). Commitment may be influenced positively by a variety of sources, including real-world teaching experiences, satisfaction with a degree program, and strength of teaching efficacy beliefs (Prichard, 2017).

Engagement is also a contributor of motivation for teachers (Perry et al., 2015). When teachers are not wholeheartedly engaged in the teaching and learning process, there are constraints or minimal student learning (Hoerr, 2016). According to Hoerr (2016), if teachers are not engaged in their own learning, then their classrooms will not be places where students achieve. High quality professional development should be apart and embedded in the school day, teachers should understand why the offering of professional development, and teachers should be included in the decision-making process about their learning. Highly active and more recurrent involvement in professional development should lead to teachers more engrossed on critical behaviors and methods that would help them teach better, and thus help their students achieve more proficiency improving rates for dropouts and college bound (Shaha & Ellsworth, 2013). Schools that employ highly engaged teachers have a better retention rate than schools with teachers who are simply not interested in improving their craft (Shaha & Ellsworth, 2013). Motivation is an important factor that contributes to a school's success (Emiroglu, Guneyli, & Burgul, 2017). Teachers play an important role in facilitating the learning of students. Their motivation level can have a strong impact on student achievement (Akhtar, Iqbal, & Tatlah, 2017). The quality of instruction students receive in the classroom setting guides the process of their intellectual development; therefore, motivation of teachers and student achievement in school are strongly interlaced factors (Akhtar et al., 2017). Student achievement is also

influenced by how students perceive their teachers' motivational behavior (Akhtar et al., 2017). For example, educators may use certain behaviors, such as positive reinforcement and feedback, during their lesson, which may impact students' self-efficacy. In this case, self-efficacy can rise when students feel the teacher's respect and impartiality or may decline when students feel disheartened (Akhtar et al., 2017). Furthermore, there is an increase in students' participation in tasks where students have the teacher's support (You et al., 2016). Recognizing the motivation sources and the types of motivation will be important for teachers in developing their teaching craft, increasing the awareness of their administrators and providing feedback to stakeholders who shape the education structure (Emiroglu et al., 2017).

**Intrinsic Motivation.** Motivation can be either intrinsic or extrinsic. The difference between the two is that intrinsic motivation refers to the motivation necessary to engage in an activity because the activity is fun or pleasing (Gultekin & Acar, 2014). This type of motivation involves internal and personal factors such as necessities, interest, curiosity, and pleasure (Gultekin & Acar, 2014). There are both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that motivate veteran teachers to persist in the education field (Hughes, 2012). Influences that contribute to intrinsic motivation are personal teaching efficacy, working with students, and job satisfaction (Hughes, 2012). Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as a belief in one's own abilities to organize and accomplish the courses of action essential to produce given attainments. Teachers with high self-efficacy are more advanced in their pedagogy and can control management better than teachers with low self-efficacy (Kanadli, 2017; Wagner & Imanel-Noy, 2014). These teachers feel self-assured in their teaching methods and believe in their own ability to perform at high levels and they hold high expectations for each of their students (Wagner & Imanel-Noy, 2014). According to Wagner and Imanel-Noy (2014), these teachers allow their students to take part in

decision-making about the teaching and learning process, and they are more tolerant towards the mistakes made by their students.

Students taught by these teachers tend to have higher achievement including students with learning challenges (Wagner & Imanel-Noy, 2014). Bandura (1977) explained that people need firm confidence in their efficacy to mount and sustain the efforts needed to succeed. Perrachione, Petersen, & Rosser (2008) claimed that teachers with high self-efficacy knew and were confident that they were making a positive difference in their students' lives. Intrinsic motivation associates with teacher longevity; teachers are more likely to burn-out or become overwhelmed with the expectations of teaching if they were not intrinsically motivated (Taylor et al., 2014). Fortunately, teachers feel a sense of pride when they are making a difference in a student's life. This consist of their ability to help build a student's self-esteem as well as achieve academically. Teachers gain satisfaction in seeing students grow and develop personally, which can contribute to teachers remaining in hard-to-staff school where attrition is high (Taylor et al., 2014).

Intrinsic motivational factors that can account for teachers remaining in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts are the enjoyment of working with children and the fulfillment of feeling like they make a difference (Taylor et al., 2014). Furthermore, they feel a sense of pride and satisfaction when they contribute to their students reaching academic success (Taylor et al., 2014). The greatest need for skilled, veteran teachers is in schools with a large proportion of students from low-income or underprivileged households. These schools experience teacher turnover at a greater rate than schools with students who come from wealthy households (Ganchorre & Tomanek, 2012). Schools and districts with the highest level of poverty measured by 75% of students qualified for free or reduce price lunches are more likely to

have greater proportions of Hispanic/Latino and Black students than any other ethnic or racial populations. These students experience inequitable learning opportunities and thus inequitable achievement compared with their more affluent counterparts (Ganchorre & Tomanek, 2012). This stems from the quality of teachers who serve low-income students. Zhang and Campbell (2015) used five broad categories to describe teacher quality: teacher experience, teacher preparation program and degree, teacher certification, teacher course work, and their test scores. According to Ganchorre and Tomanek (2012), teacher quality is an indicator of student achievement. Despite many teachers opting to leave schools and districts that serve underprivileged students, there are many who remain.

Teachers continue to teach in low-income areas because they are motivated, and they have a strong desire to work with young children (Ganchorre & Tomanek, 2012). Furthermore, according to a study conducted by Perrachione, Petersen, & Rosser (2008) working with children was the second most popular reason out of five why teachers are intrinsically motivated to remain in the teaching field. The teachers in Perrachione, Petersen, & Rosser's (2008) study claimed that they love working with children because they enjoy seeing them become proud of themselves when they succeed. Other important factors causing teachers to persist are the desire to contribute to society and a sense of civic duty. It is important to note that when African American teachers go in to teaching their motivation is their belief that teaching contributes to the betterment of society. When culturally diverse teachers pursue and remain in the teaching field, their motivation includes a heightened awareness of educational inequities and social injustices among under-served population, and Caucasian teachers are motivated to bring about social change (Ganchorre & Tomanek, 2012). While some teachers persevere to impact society, Daniels (2016) found that other teachers persist due to factors within the school. Daniels (2016)

conducted a study to determine what motivated teachers to remain in the field, and he discovered that the teachers were deeply committed to their students, had highly supportive administrators, and built meaningful relationships with students. Curtis (2012) added that teachers remain in these areas due to personal fulfilment, the subject area, and the joy of working with young people. In each study, the commonalty is the students. Teachers are motivated to stay and teach in impoverished schools because they have a love for their students.

**Extrinsic Motivation.** Extrinsic motivation is the motivation to do something to achieve some external goal or meet some externally imposed constraint (Hennessey, Moran, Altringer, & Amabile, 2015). External motivation includes earning awards, recognition, and avoiding negative outcomes (Hughes, 2012). Extrinsic motivation involves time off, retirement, competitive salaries, and bonuses (Hughes, 2012). This type of motivation is opposite from intrinsic motivation because it does not come from within. As it relates to the education field, teachers are not concerned about the bigger picture, rather they are looking for immediate gains or rewards (Bennett et al., 2013; Emiroglu et al., 2017). Although some may believe that teachers enter the teaching profession because of the extrinsic rewards such as being off throughout various times of the year, research (Taylor et al., 2014) showed that teachers are more intrinsically motivated because they are more focused on the students' success.

A positive attitude towards the teaching profession impacts the teacher's willingness to stay, and as positive attitude increases towards the teaching profession, teachers are happier in their personal lives (Kanadli, 2017). Consequently, if teachers believe that they have no power to produce results, they will not attempt to make things happen (Bandura, 1977). Teachers with low self-efficacy demonstrate this behavior. In addition, teachers with low self-efficacy tend to avoid activities that exceed their usual contributions toward student success, and they spend less

time enriching their lessons while teachers with high self-efficacy do the exact opposite (Kanadli, 2017). In a professional context, employees who are motivated whether intrinsically or extrinsically display higher integrity and increased output or work performance compared to employees with low motivation (Akhtar et al., 2017). Motivation is the driving force of human beings both in their personal and professional life, and it plays a crucial and important role in improving the performance of any employee (Akhtar et al., 2017). It is crucial that novice and veteran teachers understand the sources of motivation if they expect to have longevity in the field. Their motivation, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, will be what determines if they remain or leave the field of education.

### **Summary**

This literature review indicated that there are several reasons why veteran teachers remain in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools despite the challenges of rural districts (Curtis, 2012; Hughes, 2012; Perrachione, Petersen, & Rosser, 2008; Wagner & Imanel-Noy, 2014). Existing research (Dupriez, Delvaux, & Lothaire, 2016; Kaden, Patterson, Healy, Adams, 2016) has primarily examined why teachers leave the profession, yet little research has been conducted to determine what factors veteran teachers attribute to persisting in low-income, rural school districts (He, Cooper, & Tangredi, 2015; Maranto, Shuls, 2012). Additionally, this literature review underscored the characteristics of rural districts, as well as highlight intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors that influence veteran teachers to remain in education, especially hard-to-staff schools.

Rural districts are located outside of metropolitan areas and they are remote (Redding & Walberg, 2013). Many of the families are low-income and living in poverty because of the scarcity of jobs available or the salary of current jobs (Irvin, 2012). Teacher attrition is prevalent



in rural districts (Karp, 2014). Factors that impact teacher turnover in rural schools that serve mostly minority students are low parent engagement or involvement in the child's education, the low ability levels of students once they enter the schools, student well-being, and the lack of educational resources (Almy, Tooley, & Education, 2012). High rates of teacher attrition in rural districts coupled with inexperience, underqualified teachers contribute to the achievement gap between minority students and their more affluent peers (Zhang & Campbell, 2015). Highly qualified teachers such as veteran teachers are needed in rural districts to impact student achievement (Ulferts, 2015).

Veteran teachers are remaining in rural districts because of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors that influence their decision to stay. Intrinsic factors that are prevalent in the workplace are the belief that teachers can guide their students to success academically, the joy of working with students, and the fulfillment of the job (Hughes, 2012). Extrinsic factors include receiving honors, acknowledgement, and avoiding undesirable consequences (Hughes, 2012). Motivation, either internal or external is a vital determinant in whether teachers remain in education. Chapter Two has outlined a review, and the gap has been recognized in the literature by unfolding the conceptual framework for this research and synthesizing the connected literature.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of veteran teachers who persist in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools across South Carolina. For purposes of this study, veteran teachers were educators who have taught for at least five or more years. There is sparse research that has addressed understanding why veteran teachers remain in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts despite the many challenges.

Chapter Three outlined the research methods for which this study followed beginning with the design detailing why transcendental is the most appropriate approach for this research. This chapter also included a restatement of the research questions along with the setting and the selection of participants. In addition, pertinent information such as the procedures that were used throughout the study, the researcher's role, data collection, and how the data was analyzed are included. Chapter Three concluded with the establishing of trustworthiness including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Finally, a section on ethical considerations and the chapter summary followed.

### **Design**

I conducted a qualitative study using a transcendental phenomenological approach. This study was qualitative because it used a method of inquiry to gain an in depth understanding of the motivations that cause veteran teachers to persist in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts. The transcendental approach was appropriate because I collected data from several persons who had experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In addition, the transcendental approach allowed me to report the phenomenon with a new lens and without bias.

This aspect of the research design was vital because I had the responsibility of accurately describing the essence of the phenomenon in its totality (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology was an appropriate research design for this study because it focused on the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1994) defined transcendental phenomenology as a scientific study of how things appear. The mere appearance of something can make it a phenomenon; however, the challenge is being able to understand the phenomenon and capture the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The essence is the culminating aspect of the entire study that the researcher is responsible for reporting (Creswell, 2013). Once the researcher has identified a phenomenon to study, the researcher is responsible for bracketing one's experiences and collecting data from individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) further explained that the researcher then analyzes the data into pertinent themes. The perception and description of the phenomenon in its totality helps the researcher derive meaning from the experience as well as extracts textural accounts of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The textural account is what the persons experienced followed by a structural description which is how the persons experienced the phenomenon in terms of the conditions, situations, or context. A combination of the textural and structural descriptions or accounts revealed the overall essence of the experience (Creswell, 2013).

The purpose of this study was to better understand the lived experiences of a group of individuals who all shared the same phenomenon of teaching for five or more years in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district. The qualitative research design begins with an assumption and uses theoretical frameworks to inform the study of research ending in a final written report. The framework that guided this study were Maslow's hierarchy

of needs theory and the critical race theory (Bell, 2013; Maslow, 2013). Maslow (2013) claimed that humans are motivated to achieve certain needs and some needs are more important than others. For instance, the feeling of accomplishment is imperative to humans. It is also important to note that every person has the potential and desire to advance throughout the hierarchy. According to Bell (2013), the purpose of the CRT is to unmask and undertake the disparities that underprivileged people suffer from due to ongoing historical practices (Bell, 2013; Berry & Candis, 2013). Teachers in this study have all experienced working in predominantly minority, low-income rural school districts where inequities are present, yet they remain. Maslow's (2013) theory determined what motivational factors veteran teachers attribute to remaining in schools and districts where injustices and inequality are present according to the CRT developed by Bell (2013).

The report included the voices of the participants needed to describe the essence of a lived phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, the transcendental approach requires researchers to identify a phenomenon to study, bracketing one's own experience and gathering data from numerous individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (2013) and Moustakas (1994) suggest that bracketing out one's own beliefs or experiences about the phenomenon is an important component of the research process because it will enable the researcher to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under investigation. Transcendental phenomenology also requires the researcher to analyze the data collected from the individuals who experienced the phenomenon by reducing the information into noteworthy themes and quotes from participants which is then combined into themes by the researcher. With this knowledge from participants, a better and deeper understanding of the veteran teachers persisting phenomenon could help schools and districts retain more of their

educators. This could possibly improve teacher satisfaction, retention, and the quality of education.

### **Research Questions**

There was one central question and three sub-questions guided this study.

#### **Central Research Question**

How do veteran teachers describe their experience working in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts across South Carolina?

#### **Sub-Research Questions**

- 1.** What motivational factors do participants describe as explaining why they are persistent in teaching in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts?
- 2.** What components of Maslow's hierarchy of needs do participants attribute to remaining in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts?
- 3.** How do participants perceive social injustice as a contribution to the phenomenon of veteran remaining teachers in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts?

### **Setting**

The location for this study took place in two predominantly minority, rural, low-income schools across South Carolina. South Carolina ranked number 10 out of the 50 states with the highest priority needs in 2014. Research showed that academic success was much lower amongst rural learners in many Southern states (Sutton et al., 2014). The students from these school districts come from families with low socio-economic status and the students need assistance in and outside of school (Redding & Walberg, 2013). Low-income students can be described as students who are from families that live in poverty in areas where there are little or no resources to assist families with progression (Suits, 2012).

Studies have found that students of color in rural, low-income schools will have more teachers who are novice, uncertified, not fully prepared, or teaching outside their field (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Therefore, the participants in this study were veteran teachers who have taught for five or more years in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts in the same location. The above criteria for this study was vital in helping school and district administrators understand how to retain teachers in the above locations in hopes of decreasing the attrition rate. It is also important for stakeholders such as novice teachers to understand how veteran teachers can persist in some of the hardest-to-staff schools. Pogodzinski (2014) explained that despite the challenges that novice teachers may experience daily, they are more likely to return year after year if they interact with and receive support from more experienced teachers. Novice teachers can receive varying levels of expertise on various topics through their interactions with veteran teachers, and novice teachers are exposed to an abundance of information in a much less structured manner (Pogodzinski, 2014).

The first school district was comprised of four schools that serve PreK-12<sup>th</sup> grade students. Approximately 95% of the student population is African American or non-white. One-hundred percent of the students receive free or reduced lunch. The schools are considered Title 1 schools. According to South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE), Title 1 schools are high poverty schools that receive federal money to reduce class size, provide professional development, upgrade technology, and provide extended learning time through after school and summer school programs (SCDE, 2018). The second school district was comprised of five schools that serve PreK-12<sup>th</sup> grade students. The schools in this district are also considered Title 1 schools and 100% of the students receive free and/or reduced-price lunch. Approximately 94%

of students enrolled in this district are students of color. Approximately 26.4% of persons in this county live below the poverty line.

The selection criteria were the following: (a) 60% or more of the students served in the district were predominantly minority, (b) students had to be from low-income families (high poverty), and (c) school districts were rural. Schools were selected based on high poverty areas and demographics obtained through the SCDE. Pseudonyms were assigned to schools in the study for confidentiality purposes. The participants were identified as veteran teachers who taught five or more years in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district. The interviews occurred in the teacher's classroom or a teacher-selected location to create a comfortable atmosphere for the participants.

### **Participants**

For the transcendental phenomenological research, selection of participants was a criterion sample. According to Creswell (2013), criterion sampling is the most appropriate for this phenomenological study because this research seeks to find individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon. Furthermore, criterion sampling ensures that all cases meet some criterion which is useful for quality assurance (Creswell, 2013). For purposes of this study, veteran teachers who have taught for five or more years in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts was the criteria to participate. Moustakas (1994) explained that each participant must be interested in understanding the nature of the phenomenon, they must be willing to engage in lengthy interviews and even follow-up interviews, and participants must be willing to grant the researcher permission to video-tape and record the interviews and publish findings into a dissertation or other publications. The sample was 10 individuals or until achieving data saturation (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) explained that a guideline for the

sample size in qualitative research is a few participants to collect extensive details about the individuals.

I asked the superintendent of each school district for permission to conduct the research. After receiving permission from the superintendent, I notified principals and then asked for a list of teachers who fit the criteria for the research. Next, I sent an email that explained the research topic to all teachers who met the criteria for the study. Again, veteran teachers who have taught for five or more years in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts was the criteria to participate. For all participants who responded and agreed to participate in the research, I established dates and times to conduct interviews. Out of the 10 participants who agreed to participate in this study, four were males. Out of the four males, one was Caucasian and the other three were African American. The remaining six participants were females; out of the six females, one was Caucasian and five were African American. See Table 3.1 below for a description of each participant.

*Table 3.1*

*Participant Demographic Overview*

| Pseudonym  | Age | Gender | Ethnicity        | Grade Level   | Subject Area                      | Years of Experience |
|------------|-----|--------|------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Suzie      | 30  | Female | African American | 5 <sup>th</sup>                                     | Elementary                        | 5                   |
| Piasadora  | 66  | Female | African American | 3 <sup>rd</sup>                                     | Elementary (All Content Subjects) | 17                  |
| Daisy      | 72  | Female | Caucasian        | 9 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup>                  | Special Education                 | 25                  |
| Grant      | 55  | Male   | Caucasian        | 9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>                   | Biology                           | 33                  |
| Mrs. Meekx | 46  | Female | African American | Kindergarten  | All Subjects                      | 25                  |
| Teresa     | 29  | Female | African American | 5 <sup>th</sup>                                     | All Subjects                      | 6                   |
| David      | 31  | Male   | African American | 4 <sup>th</sup>                                     | All Subjects                      | 5                   |
| James      | 37  | Male   | African American | 9 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup>                  | Automotive Tech                   | 6                   |
| Traci      | 35  | Female | African American | 6 <sup>th</sup> , 7 <sup>th</sup> , 8 <sup>th</sup> | Physical Education                | 6                   |
| Coach      | 41  | Male   | African American | 7 <sup>th</sup> Grade                               | English Language Arts             | 17                  |



Table 1 shows a visual of each participant. The Table shows the participants' pseudonym name, age, gender, ethnicity, grade level taught, subject area, and years of experience teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district.

### **Procedures**

I followed appropriate procedures for this transcendental phenomenological study. First, I requested permission for the study to take place from each identified district's superintendent (see Appendix A). The research did not begin until I received approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix B). Once IRB approval was granted, the principals received notification of the details of the research via email (see Appendix C). I used criterion sampling. All participants taught for five or more years in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school. I solicited participants who met the criteria by sending them a brief email that explained the nature of the study and the interview process (see Appendix D). I emailed each interested participant a screening survey to determine if they met the criteria for the study (see Appendix E). Teachers had to answer questions concerning the demographics of their district and the number of years taught in their district and in the state of South Carolina. The data collection process began after the participants agreed to participate by signing the consent form (see Appendix F).

I gathered data first through face-to-face interviews to begin building a rapport with the participants (see Appendix G). I then emailed all teachers who met the criteria to determine a date and time for the interview which was the first form of data collection. All participants agreed to take part in the interview either after school or during their planning period. All interviews, except for one, took place in the teachers' classroom with the door closed for privacy.

One of the interviews took place at my place of work because it was more convenient for the participant. This was my first interview and it took place in a vacant classroom. The interviews took approximately 20 minutes to complete. All interviews were voice recorded only and transcribed by me. The last part of the interview process consisted of me emailing each participant a typed transcription of the interview for member checking. Data analysis allowed the me to code the interviews into themes and report them.

A written letter to new teachers was the second form of data collection (see Appendix H). Participants were notified verbally and through email the expectations of the letter to novice teachers after the first form of data collection. Participants wrote the letter approximately one week after the interview to allow time for reflection. Participants wrote letters during their leisure. Teachers responded to the following prompt, “What advice would you give to a new teacher to persist and thrive in the environment in which you work?” There was no limitation on the length of the letter. Teachers submitted their letters to me via a private Google Classroom and via email.

Lastly, I had teachers engage in a photo narrative (see Appendix I). The participants took five pictures of their work environment over a week’s time and then they explained why each picture captured their experiences in their environment and the meaning they derived for the work they do. The photo narratives allowed participants to make meaning of the significance of their work place. It also allowed them to describe their work environments and what made them persist and provide students with an adequate education. In addition, the photo documentation served as a confirmation from the interview responses and emerging themes in the study (Casey, 2016). The photo narrative process took place a week after writing the letters. The expectations for this assignment were given verbally after the interview process and via email. The

participants submitted their photo narrative via a private Google Classroom and via email. Storage of the data was in a secured location to protect the rights and privacy of all participants. All participants used pseudonyms to protect their identity as well.

Data was triangulated using the three forms of data collection including the interview, letter to novice teachers, and photo narrative to understand the essence of the phenomenon. I engaged in bracketing to prevent personal biases and to view the phenomenon with a fresh, new lens (Creswell 2013 and Moustakas 1994). I am close to the phenomenon because I have taught in a similar environment and I grew up in one as well. Bracketing took place via journaling where I recorded my own reasons for persisting in my environment and the motivational factors that contributed to my persistence. This allowed me to focus on the common themes that were derived using the three forms of data collection. The themes from the participants revealed why veteran teachers remain in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts.

### **The Researcher's Role**

As the researcher in the study, my motivation was to describe the voices of veteran educators who teach in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools across South Carolina. There is little research giving these teachers a voice about why they remain despite the challenges facing rural school districts. As a former teacher who has worked in a similar setting, it was important for me to understand that I brought biases and presuppositions to this research. I was the human instrument responsible for collecting and analyzing data. Creswell (2013) explained that bracketing allowed researchers to set aside their own experiences as much as possible to obtain a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under investigation. Moustakas (1994) further explained that epoche is the preparation for deriving new knowledge, setting aside former beliefs, and allowing things, events, and people to enter afresh into the mind and to look

and see them again for the first time (Moustakas, 1994). I conducted research in districts that met the criteria stated earlier in Chapter Three. It was my responsibility to capture the essence of the phenomenon.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection involved three methods to triangulate the information and ensure trustworthiness while gathering, analyzing, and interpreting the data (Creswell, 2013). In triangulation, researchers utilize multiple and different sources to provide corroborating evidence to shed light on a theme (Creswell, 2013). This method provided validity to their findings. The methods that I used in this study were face-to-face interviews, letters written by participants to novice teachers, and photo narratives. I provided a rationale explaining the selection for each data collection method followed by an explanation for the sequencing of each method.

The interview process took place first because it gave me the opportunity to begin building a positive relationship throughout the study with each interviewee (see Appendix G). The participants' answers from the screening survey determined their eligibility to participate in the study. I emailed all teachers who met the criteria to determine the best date and time for the interview to occur. All participants agreed to take part in the interview either after school or during their planning period. I traveled to each participant's location except for one. Again, the first participant agreed to meet at my workplace because it was more convenient for her. This interview took place in a vacant classroom with the door closed for privacy. All remaining interviews were conducted in the teachers' classroom with the door closed for privacy as well. I greeted each participant before the interview by introducing myself. I further explained the details of my study. Next, I allowed the participants to read over each question before the recording began so that they were comfortable throughout the interview process. I asked all

participants if they had any questions before the voice recording began. Interviews took approximately 20 minutes to complete. I thanked each participant at the end of each interview. All interviews were voice recorded only and transcribed by me. The last part of the interview process consisted of me emailing each participant a typed transcription of the interview for member checking. The interview was the chief source of data collection to understand why veteran teachers in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts remain for five or more years.

The next form of data collection was written letters to novice teachers (see Appendix H). The letter was not only written to encourage novice teachers to remain in the field, but it also provided new and other veteran teachers with advice that can help them overcome various obstacles. Such obstacles include an overwhelming amount of paperwork, lack of administrative support, misbehaviors in the classroom, and student readiness to learn which are all reasons why teachers tend to leave the teaching profession in the first five years (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Buchanan, 2012; Gallant & Riley, 2014; Mee & Haverback, 2014). Again, veteran teachers in this study had approximately one week after the interview to begin writing the letter to novice teachers. The teachers were given directions on how to complete the assignment verbally and via email. There were no length requirements of the letter. Teachers responded to the prompt based on their perception of the writing prompt.

The last form of data collection was the photo narratives (see Appendix I). Participants were required to take at least five photos that best represented their experience of teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district using a cell phone, iPad, camera, or any other Smart device. Pictures were work related, school, home, community, family, colleagues, and more. Teachers were instructed verbally and via email to upload their pictures as

a collage to the private Google Classroom or via email. Participants wrote a narrative about how the images impacted their desire to continue teaching after careful examination of the photos in the collage. The photo narratives explained what the participants' experienced, and how these experiences have impacted their decisions to remain in some of the most difficult-to-staff locations. The researcher analyzed the data to determine a common theme from each form of data collection. The researcher looked to find the essence of the experience of veteran teachers who remain in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts for five or more years.

### **Interview**

Moustakas (1994) explained that the long interview is the method through which a researcher gathers data on the research topic and question. The interview consists of an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions (Moustakas, 1994). It was important that I formed a rapport with participants during the interview process to make certain that participants were comfortable (Moustakas, 1994). This allowed participants to share their experience willingly and honestly concerning the phenomena of teaching in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts across South Carolina. Thus, the selection of interviews as the first data collection method began the relationship-building process. Again, teachers were asked to participate in the study after receiving permission from the district's superintendent beginning with the interview process first. The researcher and the participants spent a great deal of time together, so the researcher had to create a comfortable and relaxing atmosphere for each scheduled interview. The interviews took place after school and during the teacher's planning period.

Creswell (2013) explained several steps necessary for the interview process. First, the researcher developed open-ended, general questions that focused on the phenomenon in the

study. Next, the identification of interviewees occurred. For purposes of this study, the interviewees were veteran teachers in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts. Face-to-face interviews were the most practical and useful form of data collection. Participants were open to talking, and they were not hesitant to speak or share ideas (Creswell, 2013). I made each participant feel comfortable by introducing myself and giving each participant more details about the study and the interview process. I had to use appropriate recording procedures. For example, quiet places were ideal to prevent any interruptions from taking place. Each interview took place in a quiet classroom with the door closed to prevent any interruptions and for privacy as well. I obtained consent and then went over the procedures for the interview upon arrival at the interview site. I aimed to finish in the specified time (Creswell, 2013). The specified time was approximately 60 minutes; however, most interviews took approximately 20 minutes to complete. I thanked each participant for participating in the study at the end of each interview. The interview questions pertaining to this study were as follows:

1. Tell me about yourself (where you grew up, your family, background, undergraduate and graduate degrees)?
2. When did you first learn that you wanted to be a teacher?
3. Who or what inspired you to be a teacher?
4. How would you describe being a school teacher?

Prompt: In other words, tell me what it is like to be a teacher.

5. How would you describe being a teacher in a rural, low-income school district?

Prompt: Can you compare teaching in this area to something familiar?

6. What are the challenges and joys of teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school?

7. What have you learned from the challenges?
8. How would you describe what is pleasant about teaching in a rural, low-income school in South Carolina?

Prompt: In other words, can you tell me what it is like to teach in your environment?

9. How would you describe your motivation for teaching in general for five or more years?  
In a rural, low-income school?

Prompt: What impacts your decision to continue teaching in a rural, low-income school?

10. What intrinsic or extrinsic motivational factors contribute to you remaining in a rural low-income school district for five or more years?

Prompt: In other words, what internal or external factors have impacted your choice for remaining in a low-income, rural school district?

11. Did teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income school influence your decision to remain for five or more years? If so, explain how?

Prompt: In other words, did your environment influence your decision to remain in education for five or more years?

12. Why have you remained in this school district?

13. Are any of your needs met by teaching in a rural, low-income school? If so, what are they?

Prompt: What needs such as social, emotional, feelings of prestige, or any other needs have been met while teaching in your district?

14. Is there anything else connected to this experience that you would like to describe?

15. If I have other questions, may I contact you again?



I developed the interview questions to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of why veteran teachers persist in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts. Questions one through three were developed to build a relationship between the researcher and the participants. In addition, by using the above questions, I learned personal information about the participants in hopes of determining if factors in their personal lives contribute to their persistence in rural schools. These type of background questions provide researchers with an opportunity to follow different avenues of inquiry and are more likely to produce added information (Harper & McCunn, 2017).

Questions four through seven were created to understand how participants perceive teaching in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts and to understand the challenges participants face daily. The responses to these questions uncovered why the participants persist despite the struggles they must overcome. The answer to the questions also revealed how veteran teachers can cope with disappointments and remain effective in the classroom. Redding and Walberg (2013) explained that rural schools and districts endure daily struggles such as low teacher salary, a lack of technology, teacher shortages, and student unawareness of possibilities outside of rural communities. Questions four through seven were critical in understanding why veteran teachers persevere.

Although teaching in rural areas can be overwhelming for many educators, the creation of questions eight through 10 were to shed light on the positive aspects of teaching in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts and the motivational factors that influence participants to stay. McLeod (2016) explained that once a level has been satisfied on Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid, humans move to the next level. There are certain situations in life that will cause humans to fluctuate. However, the goal is to continue moving up

(McLeod, 2016). This means that teachers may experience outside factors such as family issues or other personal matters that may cause them to deviate from being an effective teacher. There will not only be school related factors that will interfere with teaching, but home factors as well. However, once the teacher resolves the problem, they can continue moving up the pyramid to fulfill their professional desires because they addressed their basic needs or fixed their problems. Furthermore, teachers are either motivated extrinsically, intrinsically, or both (Hughes, 2012). Motivation is another factor that contributes to teacher persistence and their desire to move forward in teaching. Questions eight through 10 revealed what characteristics contributed to the veteran teachers remaining in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools and the joys they encountered as they live through these experiences. I created question number 11 to determine how the participants perceived injustices. This research employed the critical race theory developed by Bell (Theune & Braddock, 2016) to determine how participants perceive social injustice in education such as race, power politics (Villenas et al., 1999), and the impact on teacher retention. Questions 12 and 13 were generated to inform stakeholders such as school and district administrators on how they can retain and support teachers in rural locations. Questions 12 and 13 were also developed to help novice teachers understand how to successfully overcome hardships throughout their teaching careers. Questions 14 and 15 were in case I needed to contact the participants again.

### **Letter to Novice Teachers**

Next, participants wrote a letter to novice teachers, which is a form of journaling (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of the letter was to gain a deeper understanding of what makes veteran teachers remain. In addition, it allowed the participants to reflect and document experiences related to the phenomenon. The letter was useful in this study because participants

provided a record of their own personal experience and professional development (Mackenzie et al., 2013). I chose a one-week interval after the interviews for the participants to write a letter because it gave teachers an opportunity to reflect after the interview process. I created a private Google Classroom and had teachers join using a secure code to post their letters or via email. I was the only person who could see the letters. The letter assisted participants with gathering their thoughts about the phenomenon. The writing prompt was, “What advice would you give to a new teacher to persist and thrive in the environment in which you work?” (see Appendix H). Participants were not given a length requirement for the letter. They simply had to respond to the prompt according to their experience. The participants typed their letters before submitting them. They were not given any sample letters because I wanted participants to write the letter based on their interpretation of the prompt.

### **Photo Narratives**

Figure 3.1 below shows a sample photo narrative that participants completed as they described their experience of teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district.

### Photo Narrative

**Definition:** A photo narrative is when the researcher shows participants pictures and asks them to discuss the contents of the pictures. The images in this study should relate to veteran teachers in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts.

**Purpose:** As participants in this study you are to explain your emotions and how the images impact your desire to continue teaching. Photo narratives will give you an opportunity to tell a story about your experience using pictures related to the study.

**Directions:** Please take at least five photos that best represent your experience of teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district using a cell phone, iPad, camera, or any other Smart device. Pictures can be work related, school, home, community, family, colleagues, and more. Next, upload your pictures as a collage in the box below (you can expand the box to fit your needs or just put your collage here and delete the box). After careful examination of the photos in the collage, write a narrative about how the images impact your desire to continue teaching. I have provided lines as an example of where to write, but you can just type in your information using as much space as you need.




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\*Photo narrative concept was adopted from .... (Creswell, 2013).

*Figure 3.1.* Photo narrative

A photo narrative was the third data collection method. Photo narratives or photo elicitation is when the researcher shows participants pictures and asks them to discuss the contents of the pictures (Creswell, 2013). This process was modified slightly. The participants were instructed to take at least five photos that best represented their experience of working in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district. Pictures were work related, school, home, family, and more. Photo narratives gave participants an opportunity to tell a story about their experience using a picture related to the study. Participants received directions to write all their thoughts about each photo. This took place approximately one week after the letter, and participants wrote a narrative on each photo per day over the course of five days. Some

participants completed this assignment in one setting. This data collection was chosen after the interview and letter to allow for more reflection about the phenomenon. I directed participants to write all their emotions that arose when examining the photos. Participants were to explain their emotions and how the image impacted their desire to continue teaching. This examination of each photo took place only once throughout the data collection process during the aforementioned time. Participants submitted their assignment to a private Google Classroom or via email.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis used various methods to gain clearer insights of the motivational factors that sustain veteran teachers in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts across South Carolina. Both Creswell (2013) and Moustakas (1994) explained the methods of transcendental phenomenological research include the following: epoche/bracketing, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, composite textural, and structural descriptions. The researcher used each method in this study to develop meanings from the essence of the phenomenon. A discussion of opening coding and visual representation of the data will also follow because of their important role in analyzing the data.

### **Epoche/Bracketing**

Epoche/bracketing are concepts both (Creswell 2013 and Moustakas 1994) defined as setting aside the researcher's experiences as much as possible to take a clear and fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under investigation. In addition, Moustakas (1994) explained that the researcher must be completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon. As the researcher, I am close to the study. I grew up in similar communities and have attended K-12 schools that

served low-income, rural students. I have also taught at a school that served predominantly minority, low-income students. Creswell (2013) explained that bracketing will allow the researcher to acknowledge their own biases so that it does not interfere with the proposed study. It is important that all prejudgments concerning the phenomenon are set aside (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing took place through journaling. Observations from the interviews were recorded as well as a description of the setting, the relationship between the participants, and the researcher's personal reactions. Bracketing was an important component throughout the data collection process because I did not want my own preconceived notions about the phenomenon to interfere with the interpretation of the data. I wrote about my experiences attending K-12 predominantly minority, low-income rural schools. I also wrote about my experiences teaching in the above environment as well as the motivational factors that attributed to my persistence for five or more years. These reflections were written in addition to observations recorded during the interview.

### **Phenomenological Reduction**

Yüksel and Yıldırım (2015) explained that phenomenological reduction occurs when the researcher eliminates overlying, repetitive, and ambiguous expressions. The task is to describe participants' experiences through textual language. The researcher analyzes the data by reducing the information into significant statements or quotes and combines the statements into themes (Creswell, 2013). It is important that the researcher eliminates all elements not associated with the phenomenon (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). This process involves a pre-reflective description of things just as they appear and a reduction to the themes pertaining to the study (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological reduction involves a careful account of the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) explained that the researcher may repeatedly look and describe the phenomenon. With

carefully analysis, something that was not clear may become recognizable, or things may be viewed differently (Moustakas, 1994). Carefully analyzing the data allowed me to reduce the information given by the participants into significant themes pertaining to the study. The figure below shows how the textural language was reduced into themes. The themes were derived from the dominant codes according to the participants' account of the phenomenon. See the Figure 3.2 below.

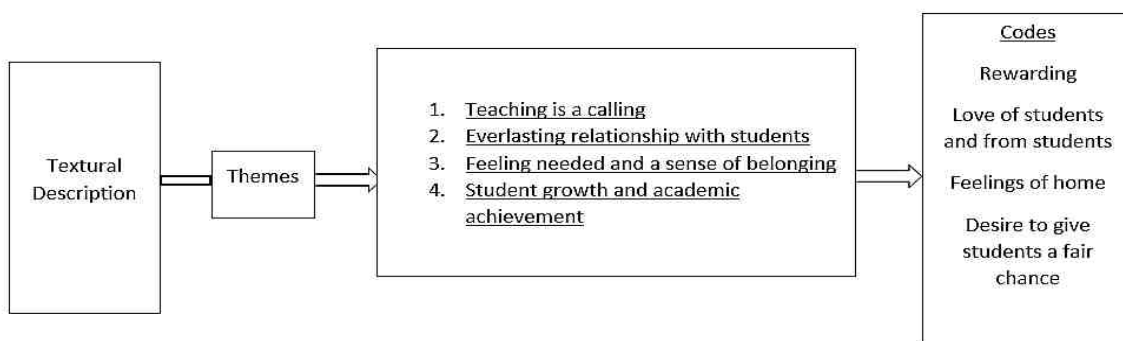


Figure 3.2. Phenomenological reduction

### Imaginative Variation

Imaginative variation depends solely on the researcher's imagination rather than empirical data. The goal is to arrive at structural descriptions of the experience (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). Creswell (2013) explained that a structural description of the participant's experience is how they experienced it in terms of conditions, situations, or context to convey an overall essence of the experience. The process of imaginative variation requires the researcher to seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination and approaching the phenomenon from different perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). Through imaginative variation, the researcher

learns that there is not one way to the truth, but many possibilities intertwined with the essence of the experience. Figure 3.3 shows how imaginative variation was accomplished in this study. It was important to separate my truths and how I experienced the phenomenon versus how the participants in the study experienced the phenomenon. I am close to the study because I have persisted in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district, and I attended grades K-12 in the above environment as well. Figure 3.3 shows three parallel lines of thinking regarding teacher instruction.

| <b>Three parallel lines of thinking regarding teacher instruction.</b>      |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>My pre-understandings:</b>   | <b>My experience</b>                               | <b>Participants' perspective</b>   |
| Instruction should be:<br>engaging<br>relative<br>current<br>research-based | The teaching and learning process was not rigorous | Lack of resources available:<br>supplies<br>technology<br>academic course work |

*Figure 3.3.* Imaginative variation

### **Composite Textural and Structural**

Textural composite is the significant statements and themes derived from the participants' experience. They are also useful to write a description of the experience. Structural composite is a description of the context or setting that impacted how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1994) further added that researchers write about their own experience and the contexts and situations that have impacted their experience. Again, it is important to note that textural description is what the veteran teachers experienced, and the structural description is how they experienced the phenomenon as it relates to teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income school district. Figure 3.4 shows an example of what the participants experienced, how they experienced it, and the theme that was derived from the composite textural and structural description.



| <b>Textural</b>                          | <b>Structural</b>   |
|--|---|
| What was experienced?                    | How was it experienced?   |
| Love from Students                       | Words/Gestures from Students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hugs from students</li> <li>- Students expressing that they wanted to go home with their teacher</li> <li>- Students constantly asking if their teacher was returning the next year</li> <li>- Students returning to visit their teacher</li> </ul> |
| <b>Theme</b><br>Everlasting relationship |   |

Figure 3.4. Composite textual and structural

### Open Coding

The researcher must examine the data for different themes that may appear after the data collection process. Open coding required me to be able to categorize themes. This can occur by highlighting each theme a different color so that the researcher can distinguish one from the other. Open coding is important because it allows the researcher to determine concepts and categories (Creswell, 2013). It breaks the study down into possible headings and subheadings. I highlighted each word or phrase the same color that represented a theme. Themes were determined based on words and phrases that were similar. Figure 3.5 shows an example of how themes were coded.

|                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Student Growth and Academic Success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Get a sense of satisfaction b/c you are helping someone who may not have all the other things that these other districts may have</li> <li>- Wants to support the students</li> <li>- Has the desire to give students a fair chance.</li> <li>- Students need the teachers</li> <li>- The students crave love and support from their teacher</li> <li>- Love teaching students in poverty because she wants them to everything that they</li> <li>- Adequate instruction</li> </ul> |
|-------------------------------------|--|

*Figure 3.5. Coding*

### **Representing, Visualizing the Data**

Representing the data means to produce information found in text, tabular, or figure form. Examples of visual representation of the data include comparison table comparing two or more of the themes or a matrix (Creswell, 2013). This process is important because it shows the organization of concepts and data. Data analysis and the representation of the data started by creating and organizing files. I read notes made when memoing, to begin the initial coding process (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) explained that the researcher will then describe personal experiences through epoche or bracketing followed by a description of the essence of the phenomenon. Classifying the data into codes and themes required me to develop significant statements to group into meaningful units (Creswell, 2013). I interpreted the data by developing a textural description of what happened and a structural description of the experience of the phenomenon by the participants to determine the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2013). The essence of the experience was presented in tables, figures, or discussion. Table 3.2 gives a representation of the theme development through open coding. It shows the dominant codes that refer to each of the themes. The coding process was important because themes were derived based on the similarities of the codes. The themes were revealed through the data analysis process. Each theme aligns with a specific research question.

Table 3. 2

*Theme Development by Research and Sub Question*

| Research Question         | Theme                                   | Dominant Codes   |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Central Research Question | Teaching is a Calling                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rewarding</li> <li>- Satisfying</li> <li>- Hard work</li> <li>- Dedication</li> <li>- Determination/ Persistence</li> <li>- Commitment</li> <li>- Challenging</li> <li>- Love of students and love from students</li> </ul>   |
| Sub-Question One          | Everlasting Relationship with Students  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teaching is a passion</li> <li>- Dedication to the students</li> <li>- Student/Teacher relationships</li> </ul>   |
| Sub-Question Two          | Feeling Needed and a Sense of Belonging | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Feeling needed by the students and others in the district</li> <li>- Relationships with students</li> <li>- Feelings of home</li> <li>- Get a sense of satisfaction b/c you are helping someone who may not have all the other things that these other districts may have</li> <li>- Wants to support the students</li> <li>- Has the desire to give students a fair chance.</li> </ul> |
| Sub-Question Three        | Student Growth and Academic Success     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students need the teachers</li> <li>- The students crave love and support from their teacher</li> <li>- Love teaching students in poverty because she wants them to everything that they</li> <li>- Adequate instruction</li> </ul>   |

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was increased by using qualitative approaches to purposefully address credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the study. Creswell (2013) also referred to trustworthiness as validation of the study. It is a section for being reflexive through personal biography and both ethical and political considerations of the author. Therefore, I used the four qualitative approaches to increase the trustworthiness of the study.

## Credibility

Credibility is the extent that the researcher's interpretations adequately represent the participant's reality (Reilly, 2013). I used multiple and different sources in this study to add credibility and to triangulate the data to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell, 2013) including interviews, a personal letter written by participants to novice teachers, and photo narratives. Memoing ensures credibility. Memoing is when the researcher writes down ideas about the evolving theory. This is important because these are reflective notes about what the researcher is learning from the collection of data (Creswell, 2013). I engaged in memoing to effectively analyze the data. I took notes about why veteran teachers remained in their environment. Some of the responses included a love for their students, seeing students grow and develop, and feeling needed. Memoing can also be achieved through the process of open, axial, or selective coding. I used open coding to achieve credibility during the data collection process. Each data source, including a transcription of each face-to-face interviews, written letters to novice teachers, and photo narratives, were analyzed multiple times to derive themes based on the coding. I highlighted similar words and phrases the same color. Codes were then categorized into themes to determine the essence of the experience.

In addition to coding, I requested member checks from all participants to check for accuracy of the themes that evolved throughout the study. Member checking is vital to the credibility of the study because it ensures truthfulness and authenticity by giving participants opportunities to correct errors and challenge what they perceive as inaccurate understandings (Reilly, 2013). Reilly (2013) explained that member checks provide participants with an occasion to volunteer added or clarifying information, stimulated by reviewing their contributions. I emailed each participant their transcription of the interview. This allowed the

participants to read their responses to each interview question to determine if they agreed with what was transcribed. All participants had the opportunity to correct errors or challenge what they perceived as incorrect.

I also employed peer debriefing to increase credibility and heighten the transparency between the researcher and the participants (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, Johnson, & Frels, 2013). Collins et al. (2013), defined peer debriefing as the reflective and iterative process of gathering information, understandings, and reflections from members of the research team or the researcher about their decisions and their actions during all stages of the research process. I peer debriefed with a personal colleague who did not have any connections to the study.

### **Dependability**

Member checks were also used ensure dependability. Dependability occurs when the data presented is internally coherent (Reilly, 2013). Again, member checks required the researcher to allow participants to review the information to determine accuracy. This process increases the dependability or reliability of the study because the participants agrees that the information presented is reliable (Creswell, 2013). In addition, member checks deepen and extend the researcher's understanding and analysis of the information presented during the data collection process (Reilly, 2013). Reilly (2013) also explained that member checks also afford participants the opportunity to assess the preliminary results as well as to confirm or disconfirm aspects of the data. The dependability of the study relied on peer debriefing and memoing. Again, I emailed each participant their transcription of the interview. This permitted the veteran teachers who participated in the study to read their answers to all interview questions to determine if they approved the transcription. All participants had the chance to correct mistakes or contest what they perceived as inaccurate.

Peer debriefing represents an effective way of making the research process more transparent by motivating the researcher to document the development of the research study to an impartial or disinterested peer who has no personal stake or benefits on the outcome of the study (Collins et al., 2013). Collins et al. (2013) explained that the benefits of peer debriefing include the identification of perceptions that might bias the researcher in his or her conduct of the study, the identification of personal feelings that come to the fore during the questioning, and the appreciation of the vulnerability of participants in the study. Peer debriefing took place at the end of the study. The data was collected and analyzed before engaging in the peer debriefing with my personal colleague. This was an informal discussion which helped me to make certain that my personal beliefs about the phenomenon were not included in the data analysis. The purpose of the peer debriefing was to make certain I presented the data with a fresh, new lens and without bias.

Again, I used memoing to increase the dependability of the research. Memoing allowed me to record reflective notes by writing what I learned throughout the data collection process. I took notes about why veteran teachers remained in their environment. This helped me to gain an in-depth understanding about phenomenon.

### **Confirmability**

Reilly (2013) defined confirmability as the extent to which the theoretical implications are in the data. To reach confirmability, researchers must demonstrate that the results connect to the conclusions in a way that can be followed and, as a process, replicated (Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams, & Blackman, 2016). Audit trails were useful to ensure confirmability. An audit trail begins at the start of the research all the way to end. Each day the researcher collects data and then writes it down. An audit trail is important because it consists of

all the notes taken including research design, methodology, and reporting of the data. I used a notebook to record notes throughout the entire study. When compiling the results, this adds credibility to the study because the records show what occurred throughout the investigation (Creswell, 2013). In addition, epoche/bracketing, member checks, and peer debriefing can all account for confirmability.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is the degree to which the conclusions transferred to other settings, groups, or contexts. It is ultimately the reader's decision as to whether reported results are transferable to another context (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen, & Kyngäs, 2014). Ensuring transferability occurs through a thick, deep, rich discussion of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Deep discussion of the phenomenon allows the researcher to clearly understand and report the essence of the experience. It is important that the researcher provide detailed, objective descriptions of the phenomenon (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). It is important that descriptions are without biases so that the researcher reports true accounts from the participants' experience. Transferability was achieved because I gave an accurate and detailed account of the veteran teachers' experience working in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district.

### **Ethical Considerations**

It is vital that all research follow ethical considerations with the use of human subjects. According to Creswell (2013), ethical issues occur at all stages of research. I used pseudonyms to assure the privacy and protection of all participants in the study. Since this study used human participants, I gained approval from the Institutional Review Board before the research began. The superintendent of the school districts approved this study before I interviewed any teacher in

the district. All adults signed a consent form before participating in this study. All participants understood the interview process before each interview. I conducted all interviews in a secure location throughout the study. Data was collected and stored in a secure location.

### **Summary**

Chapter Three has outlined the methods that the researcher used in this study. The study used a transcendental phenomenological design to include data collection procedures and data analysis most appropriate for this study. This research design incorporated interviews, written letters, and photo narratives as a means of collecting data about the phenomenon under investigation. Coding and visual representations of the data helped analyze the data. I established trustworthiness through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Ethical considerations were an important component of this study to ensure morality and honesty as the researcher completed each stage of the research. The transcendental phenomenological approach gave deeper insights on why veteran teachers in rural, low-income school districts across South Carolina persist for more than five years. The important components of this chapter included the overview, design, research questions, setting and the participants. This chapter also included the procedures for conducting the study, researcher's role, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter Three concluded with establishing trustworthiness and ethical considerations.



## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of veteran teachers who teach in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The goal of this study was to understand the experiences of veteran teachers with respect to why they remain in the education field for five or more years in difficult-to-staff rural schools. Likewise, these teachers openly and richly described what motivational factors played a role in their persistence in teaching in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools, and how these motivational factors assisted them with coping with the inequalities and injustices present in these remote locations. This chapter presents a narrative description of the participants' account of teaching in the above schools. Phenomenology was an appropriate research design for this study because it focuses on the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2013). The results are an analysis of the participants' lived experiences and perceptions revealed through face-to-face interviews, a written letter to novice teachers, and a photo narrative. The chapter concludes with a summary.

The data collection process began after receiving approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board. Next, it was important that the researcher obtained signatures of informed consent from each teacher participating in the study. The data collection process was thoroughly explained to each participant as well as how confidentiality and security would be maintained. All forms of data were gathered and analyzed using the analysis procedure prescribed by the transcendental phenomenological design. The analysis procedure involved coding, categorizing themes, constant review of the data, and member checking. Chapter Four

will present the findings of the three forms of data collection used to triangulate the data including interviews, written letters to novice teachers, and photo narratives.

### **Research Questions**

One central research question and three sub questions were used to determine the lived experiences of participants who teach in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools.

#### **Central Research Question**

How do veteran teachers describe their experience working in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts across South Carolina?

#### **Sub-Research Questions**

1. What motivational factors do participants describe as explaining why they are persistent in teaching in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts?
2. What components of Maslow's hierarchy of needs do participants attribute to remaining in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts?
3. How do participants perceive social injustice as a contribution to the phenomenon of veteran teachers remaining in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts?

### **Participants**

Participants included veteran teachers who had taught for five or more years in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts in South Carolina. Each veteran teacher taught at a Title 1 School. According to the South Carolina Department of Education, Title 1 schools serve students who live in high poverty (SC Dept. of Educ., 2019). The rationale for this selection reflects findings that remote schools with low socio-economic status have a high turnover rate and an unequal distribution of qualified teachers compared to their more affluent peers; furthermore, once teachers get experience teaching in rural districts, they tend to

leave in search of more affluent districts (Rivero, 2015). The participants were selected from two different counties across South Carolina and from several different K-12 schools to provide diversity in the data.

The conceptual framework guiding this study is grounded in Maslow's (2013) hierarchy of needs theory and the Bell's (2013) critical race theory. Maslow's (2013) theory supports research that finds motivational factors to be an integral component of rural teachers remaining in their current teaching locations. Bells' (2013) critical race theory supports research that injustices are present in the education system which impacts students of color and teachers' effectiveness in the classroom. Veteran teachers are remaining in these challenging locations due to certain motivational factors contributed to Maslow's (2013) theory, despite the injustices in the educational system according to Bell's (2013) theory that disproportionately impacts students of color.

Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to protect their identity. Other information that could possibly identify the participants such as the name of their school, district, and county were all eliminated to maintain confidentiality. The researcher generated a table that identified each participant by several demographics characteristics including age, gender, ethnicity, current grade level taught, subject area, and years of experience. The participants' career experience was important to note so that the reader may have some context of the number of years teachers have persisted in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools.

### **Description of Participants**

The following section is a description of each participant. It describes the participants' age, gender, ethnicity, grade level taught, subject area, years of experience and their experience teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district.

**Suzie.** Suzie is a 30-year-old African American female who attended a low-income rural, public school. She was raised by her mother, a single parent, who was also a teacher. Suzie has an undergraduate degree in Elementary Education with a minor in mathematics. She has a graduate degree in Administrative Leadership, and she is currently pursuing another graduate degree in Curriculum and Instruction. Suzie has taught elementary students for five years in two predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts in South Carolina. When asked about her experience teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school, she said:

I think it is rewarding. When you teach in a smaller school district you get a better, well I'm not going to say better, but you get a sense of satisfaction because you know you are helping someone who may not have all the things that these other school districts have, but they can get the same type of education that these other schools offer. When I teach students in these low economic schools, I connect better with them because I came from that same type of environment. (p. 2)

**Piasadora.** Piasadora is a 66-year-old African American female. She grew up in Bronx, New York, and she has two brothers and two sisters. Piasadora spent 20 years in the medical field before she decided to get a degree in teaching. She has an associate degree in Pharmacy because she wanted to be a pharmacist before a teacher. She was accepted to pharmacy school, but she was not happy. She started working for a reading program where she met some teachers who continuously told her that she would make a great teacher. She changed her major and quickly found out that teaching was better for her because it came naturally. She discovered that teaching was her true calling. Piasadora's undergraduate and graduate degrees are both in in Elementary Education. She has taught for 17 years, and she currently teaches third grade

students all content areas. When asked about her experience teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school, she said:

That's hard. It's hard because they are different children. They are not city kids. See I was a city kid. So, I had streets smarts. I had common sense. I could think for myself. I didn't have to have someone say, well try this. And if that doesn't work try this.

Country kids or agriculture kids, I am going to call them agriculture kids because it is the area that we are in. Most of them live a good way from other kids. On the weekends it is just them. They are harder to teach because they don't. I don't know how to say it.

They don't have common sense. They don't have to have the smarts that a city kid has to have. City kids have to have smarts in order to survive. They have to have smarts in order to know how to walk to get on a train, walk to get on a bus. These kids don't experience that, and so when you try to teach them they kind of resist. They don't want to do they just don't. So, you have to be patient and you have to remember that they are just children. They are a product of their environment. That is the only way I can answer that. They don't know their history because their parents don't give it to them. (p. 4)

**Daisy.** Daisy is a 72- year-old Caucasian female. She grew up part of the time in rural, Salisbury, North Carolina and she spent time growing up in Georgia. Her father was a sharecropper, so her family would move from farm to farm which allowed her to experience growing up in the cotton fields. Daisy explained that she grew up understanding the civil rights movement that came in the 1960's. When she was a teenager, her and her family moved to Charlotte, North Carolina. Daisy understood why the civil rights movements came about because she grew up in the fields where everyone was equal, but when she went to school her and her friends went separate ways. And, when she went to town, her friends went to the back of

the bus and she had to sit at the front of the bus. When asked about her experience serving students in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school, she said:

I think teaching in this area, to me you got to understand the cultural, or at least the basis of the cultural. I've seen teachers come who did not understand it and some of them left by December. When you understand that these students have really been isolated. They grew up in a system that kept them in the position that they were in and they didn't see a way out of it. Most of them had been beat down by the educational system, especially my Special Ed. students. So, when I get them, the first thing I got to do is get to know them. Get to know them on a personal basis because if you don't get to know them, they are not going to trust you. And, they have got to trust you. And once they have trusted you, even the ones who think that they are in a gang, and maybe they are here, but not compared to big city gangs, once they begin to trust you and they think that you got their 6's and their backs, they say, they will open up to you. So, I do think that you got to understand that these children have been beat down by the system. Once you start building them up and letting them know that they can get an education, especially my Special Ed. children; when they understand that they can get an education, and that there is a way out of here, you see a difference. Now, they are some hard nuts to crack, but there is some good in those hard nuts to crack. You may not get to the meat of the problem, but there is some good in all of them. (p. 3)

**Grant.** Grant is a 55-year-old Caucasian male. He attended school during the transitional time when integration was taking place. He explained that when he was in the first grade there was not a black student in his class, but that following year in the second grade, he was the only white student in the class. Grant stated, "You know what, it was not a big deal. We

grew up in a rural area. It wasn't traumatic for me. You know kids have always been kids, so it was always good for me." Grant attended all the public, rural schools in his county. Grant initially wanted to be a scientist when he entered college. At the end of his senior year, he realized that he wanted to be a teacher. Grant stated, "Teaching and coaching open itself to me. An opportunity did, so I went ahead and did that. Evidently that was my calling in life." Grant has taught for 33 years. When asked about his experience teaching students in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school, he said:

It is a challenge. What happens is you don't have access to resources, so you have to make do with what you have. Most of the students, they come to your class and they don't read on grade-level, and you have the same expectations for kids that do. One of the things that is really hard sometimes is things that we take for normal, normal for our kids it is not. One of the most common things, family vacations. For example, where did you go for family vacation? Well our kids, family vacations, what is that? Family vacation meant that you watch TV together during the summer and stay in air conditioner. Some of those things make it very difficult. It is hard to talk about, well, the State House in Columbia and you have never been there. So those kinds of things make it a little challenging. Scratch that, make it real challenging. (p. 3)

**Mrs. Meekx.** Mrs. Meekx is a 47-year-old African American female. She grew up in South Carolina. She comes from a family of nine including her six brothers and two sisters. She had a good childhood growing up. Her undergraduate degree is in Elementary Education and she has a master's degree in Early Childhood. Mrs. Meekx also has a second master's degree in Teacher Leadership. She has been a teacher for 24 years in the same school district. Mrs.

Meekx teaches four-year-old kindergarten and five-year-old kindergarten. When asked about her experience teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income school district, she stated:

Teaching in a low-income school district can be very challenging. A lot of our parents, unfortunately, they do not value education. As their teacher, I try to tell them how important education is. Although a child maybe growing up in a low-income environment, I always let them know that their child can be anything that they want to be. I try to inspire my parents and students as much as I can. (p. 2)

**Teresa.** Teresa is a 29-year-old African American female. She grew up in the upstate part of South Carolina. Her family consisted of a two-parent household, a factory worker and a logger. Her undergraduate degree is in Elementary Education, and she has a master's degree in Classroom Leadership. Teresa is currently working on her Ed.S. degree in Curriculum and Instruction. She has taught for six years. When asked about her experience serving students in a predominantly minority, low-income school district, she explained:

Two-times as hard because we do not have all of the resources. We have to modify and adjust the best way we can. Sometimes we don't have the parental support so that also can make things difficult when we don't have the support that we need. Not just from parents but administration, so on and so forth. (p. 2)

**David.** David is a 31-year-old African American male. David grew up South Carolina. He is the oldest of three children. His mother finished high school and his father, he graduated from a technical school. David graduated from high school in 2005. He obtained a bachelor's degree from a local college through the Call Me Mister Program which is a program designed to attract African American male teachers so that they can center on addressing the needs of African American students and Hispanic students as well. David has a master's degree from an



online college in Reading and Literacy. His main objective is to increase the literacy skills in students, particularly African American males because he has noticed that their discipline problems are due to the fact that most of their students do not know how to read. He has taught for five years. When asked about his experience teaching in a predominantly, minority, low-income school district, David stated:

It definitely has its challenges, um most of our students in this area come from impoverished homes and education is not a primary concern because the parents either did not receive a college education, or they dropped out of school. One of the important things I try to convey to the students is the importance of a good education and how education is the key to a successful life or career. It's hard because of the environment that the students live in. Like I say education is not present. A lot of our students don't even have books at home. They don't have the resources because a lot of the parents don't work or can't afford them. So, addressing a lot of the students' physical needs, a lot of our students come to school hungry because of the night before, for whatever reason, parents were not able to provide them with something to eat the night before. As the teacher, before we can address the academic needs of the students we try to, like Maslow, address the physical needs, making sure that the kids have breakfast in the morning, making sure that their hygiene needs are met and things of that nature, and those are some extra tasks that we have to go through being in a rural area. (p. 3)

**James.** James is a 37-year-old African American male. He grew up in rural, South Carolina. James' mother and father got divorced at the age of three, and his parents went before a judge for a custody hearing. James' father expressed to the judge that he could not take old kids into a new marriage, and his mother explained to the judge that she could not afford to take

care of four children. Therefore, James and his youngest sister moved in with their grandmother, so from age three onward, he was raised by his grandmother. James had a love for football. During his senior year in high school, he had six scholarship offers to play football, but he hurt his knee and was not able to run as fast. James then turned to his second love, cars. After graduating from college, he accepted a job as an automotive technician. Not long after James began working as an automotive technician, his former high school automotive instructor contacted him and asked him to take his spot because he was near retirement. James resisted at first, but he eventually decided to accept the position. James has taught for six years. When James was asked to describe his experience teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district he stated:

Like I said, being a teacher in this area, you can't just be a teacher. Being just a teacher in this area, you are not giving the full benefits of your job. Being in a district like this you are also a counselor, you also have to be a parent, I even look at it sometimes as if you are a friend to some of these kids here because it takes that to reach them. You have to reach them to get them to do. You are showing them more love than they actually see at home because you have to realize that they are here for the majority of the day. A lot of times, they don't see it from their parents. So, a lot of times they are looking for that love and stuff from you (p. 3)

Traci. Traci is a 35-year old African American female. Traci was adopted as an infant by two older people who were well in their fifties at the time of the adoption. She grew up in a two-parent home until her father past when she was nine years-old. Traci has an undergraduate degree in Physical Education with a certification in Fitness. She has a graduate degree from an online university in Health Administration. Traci was a substitute teacher before she was

encouraged to pursue teaching fulltime. Soon after, Traci realized that teaching was her calling. Traci has six years of teaching experience. When asked to describe her experience of teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income school district, Traci stated:

I've only taught in rural, low-income school districts aside from when I first started substituting. So, if I had to compare teaching in this area to teaching in my previous district, it is pretty much the same as far as the demographics and the lack of resources.  
(p. 3)

Traci expanded her response by comparing teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district to something outside of teaching that was familiar to her. Traci explained:

I can compare it to, if I have to be honest, I can compare it to church. How can I compare it to church? Well, nobody knows this, but I was into ministry, and the reason I can compare it to that is because I stopped ministering. But, I still have visions because I know that, that is my calling, but I ignored them. This, same thing, if I ignore it, it is just going to keep coming back. (p. 3)

**Coach.** Coach is a 41-year old African American male. He has taught in his district for 17 years. Coach comes from a large family where he is the oldest of five children from his mother and the second oldest child from his father as he explained. Coach completed his undergraduate degree from a local college and further his educational path at several more colleges obtaining graduate degrees and endorsements. Coach has graduate degrees in Curriculum and Instruction, Language and Literacy, and Reading Instruction. He is also a Gifted and Talented Endorsed teacher. Coach described himself as a cozy and relaxed person. He enjoys teaching in his environment. When asked to describe his experience serving students in a predominantly minority, low-income rural school district, Coach stated:

Teaching in a rural, low-income school district, it has its ups and downs, but once you get to know the students, it is about the same as teaching, in a let's say, urban or suburban school district. The only difference is the resources; the kids are limited when it comes to resources, so you have to expand their minds, you have to expand their know how's in trying to expand their minds beyond what they are exposed to. So, I think that is the only difference. It is about the same, we are just limited in the resources and how to connect with the kids beyond what they are exposed to. You just have to try and take what they know and move them forward to what they should know. (p. 2)

### **Results**

The participants' responses from the interviews, letter to novice teachers (writing prompts), and photo narratives were coded into four themes that reflect why teachers remain in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts.

### **Theme Development**

Organizing the triangulation of the data is an essential component of understanding the essence of the participants' experience (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher used memoing and journaling to bracket experiences relating to teaching in a predominantly minority, rural low-income school district to prevent personal bias that would influence the data collecting and reporting process. All interviews were transcribed and returned to each participant for member checking. This allowed for accuracy in the interpretation of the participants experience with the phenomenon of teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews, a letter to novice teachers, and a photo narrative. The data collected was separated into themes after analyzing the data for codes that described the phenomenon of teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district.

### **Teaching is a Calling**

The interviews, letter to novice teachers (writing prompts), and photo narrative revealed that the participants perceive teaching as their calling in life.

**Interview.** The interviews, letters to novice teachers (writing prompts), and the photo narratives revealed that the participants perceive teaching as their calling in life. Many of the participants in this study had other career aspirations before becoming a teacher. Suzie wanted to be an architecture, Piasadora wanted to be a pharmacist and was accepted to pharmacy school, Daisy began teaching in her forties, Grant wanted to be a scientist, James was an automotive technician working in a dealership, and Traci has an undergraduate degree in Physical Education, but she had no aspirations of becoming a teacher. These very same individuals have persisted in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district for five or more years because they realized that teaching was their true calling in life. During the interview Piasadora stated:

It turns out that it is my calling. I am a good teacher. It comes naturally. It doesn't take much effort, I found out that I am an out and out person. I never meet a stranger.

Teaching is better for me. I can talk and laugh and not be away from people. So that is what made me become a teacher...It was really quite by accident. (p. 1)

Grant stated, "I really had no intentions of becoming a teacher...I guess God open the door and that was where I was supposed to be." When Teresa was asked what intrinsic, or extrinsic motivational factors she attribute to remaining in her environment, she explained, "God is keeping me here. He won't let me go. It can't be the money. I am in it for the outcome. Wholeheartedly, I am." David was asked to describe what it was like to be a teacher in general, and he stated, "It is definitely a calling and not a job. There are some things as a teacher that you will have to make sacrifices for." Traci believes that teaching is her calling because she cannot

get enough it; she cannot ignore it because the visions of teaching will continue to come back.

Traci stated:

It is addictive to me, it's like, somebody else would say I am a glutton for pain because I keep going back and teaching and teaching. I love it; I have a passion for it... I like interacting with the students; this is what I think I'm called to do. (p. 3)

Coach expressed that he knew he wanted to be a teacher since he was in the sixth grade. He enjoyed helping his younger siblings with their homework. He always had a love for reading and writing. Coach explained, "If you are a teacher at heart and this is your passion or your calling, then you will survive." When James was asked why he has remained in this district he, stated, "Doing this job for me is not about the money. I used to make way more money, working in a dealership. My salary, you know, I make that in July or August, working in a dealership." James is invested in his students and seeing them succeed.

**Letter.** Daisy began teaching in her forties. She is now 72-years-old and is still persisting in this environment. Daisy explained that during the fifties and sixties, if your parents did not have enough money, then you were trained to go to work straight out of high school. Daisy began preparing for the world of work by taking classes including typing, shorthand, business math, and anything else that would prepare her for the world of work. Daisy got a job after high school and got married a year later. She waited until her last child graduated from high school before she pursued an undergraduate degree (see Appendix J). Daisy wrote:

Also, if you remain in the profession long enough to see students graduate with a diploma when you thought they would be in prison or dropped out by then, you will understand your calling is from a higher power who knew the "whys" in the calling placed on your life. (p. 1)

David explained that teachers cannot achieve the goal of persisting alone and in isolation when there is a calling place on their life to teach. In his letter he wrote:

We need teachers who are going to be there for each other through the good times and the bad. We need to make sure that we have each other's' backs because we are all in this together. This race is not given to the strong or swift, but the one that endures until the end. (p. 1)

Teresa furthered explained the role of teachers when there is a calling placed on their life by writing, "You are about to embark on a journey that is going to change lives forever."

**Photo Narrative.** This data collection process allowed the participants to depict their experience of teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income school district followed by providing a narrative explaining why they selected the pictures. The theme of teaching is a calling was present in the narratives as stated in the participants' responses below. The veteran teachers continued to describe their joys and whys of teaching which is evident of their calling and their desire to remain. Suzie had the following to say about her photo narrative, "These images truly impact my desire to continue teaching... My purpose is to provide these babies with the tools that they need to be successful." Suzie submitted photos that depicted students on an out-of-state field trip. She explained that it was some of the students first time leaving the state. The students even experienced their first time at a movie theater. More pictures from the photo narrative included murals painted on the wall that focused on academics and pictures of her own children. The pictures in Figure 4.1 included students engaging in a science experiment.



*Figure 4.1.* Suzie's photo

David's pictures depicted the joys of teaching and learning (see Figure 4.2). He also submitted photos of an out-of-state field trip and students engaging in academic learning while having fun. David explained, "As teachers, it is important to let students know that we are human too." The relationship with students and teacher interaction with students are affirmative reasons David understands what his calling is in life.



*Figure 4.2.* David's photos

The participants in this study believe that teaching is their calling. This theme was derived based on the words and phrases related to teaching as a calling that was revealed throughout the study and among three forms of data collection.



### **Everlasting Relationships with Students**

The interviews, letter to novice teachers (writing prompts), and photo narrative revealed that the participants perceive everlasting relationships with students as a reason for persisting in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts.

**Interview.** The teachers shared their beliefs for teaching during the interviews, letters to novice teachers, and photo narratives, and indicated that they enjoy the everlasting relationships they develop and maintain with their students. These teachers expressed that students will come back years after leaving their classroom and tell them how much they enjoyed the class and how their lives were impacted by the relationship that was built years ago. When asked is there anything else connected to this experience that you would like to describe, Suzie stated:

I like it when a student, like when you build a relationship with a student, I like it when they, even when they aren't in your class, I like it when they come back the next year and still love up on you the next year the same way. I like things like that. I feel like I impacted their life. (p. 4)

When asked about the joys of teaching in her environment Piasadora stated:

When you see them, and they are yelling your name, and you are looking at them like who are you. They are yelling, "I am in college now!" Or, "I have a son, and I got married!" They are telling you all these things. That's the joy! That's the joy! I have not run into any of my students that have gone to jail or have done something very foolish. (p. 5)

Daisy explained that she continues to persist in her environment because she loves her students. She retired in 2012, the same year her husband passed. She expressed that she was miserable before then because she had missed her students. Daisy returned to teaching that following year

to continue teaching. She has since remained in her environment. Grant also enjoys the everlasting relationships that he forms with his students. Grant has taught in his environment for 33 years. He explained that he is always encountering a former student. Grant stated:

I know even in my own classes, you do something and just off the cuff you just do it, and some kid will come back ten years later, and some kid will say, "That day you did that, that was the most awesome thing!" And I'm like what did I do? And because of that you don't ever quit because you don't know what is making the impact. (p. 4)

Mrs. Meekx also attributes the rapport with her students as a reason for remaining in her environment. She stated, "The children hugging you and telling you that they love you and that they want to come home with you, and I think that is a joy." Teresa explained:

I do have junior and seniors, they come back. They have brothers and sisters here and they will stop by and talk about what is going on and it is just amazes me to see how, because you think the student is still small, but they are juniors and seniors and they have matured. I've had one student come back and tell me, "Oh yeah, you were right about the middle school, so I am glad you told me that." Some of the things I tell them don't fall on deaf ears. (p. 5)

David further added to the theme of everlasting relationships with students by sharing the following experience:

Even seeing your students that you had two or three years down the line and they come back and say, "I thank you for helping me," or, "I thank you for impacting my life," is really the best part about being a teacher.

James also believes in the importance of relationship building with his students. He gets satisfaction in his students coming back and sharing how their experience in his class has impacted their life. James stated:

My motivation for teaching is reaching the ones who go out, leave here, and make something of themselves. They have taken your advice and come back to share that experience with you. It shows how much they appreciated you because they go out and they actually listened to what you said, and that is what drives me to come here every day. Just knowing this may be the day, that I might say something, or do something, that they might listen to. (p. 4)

Traci attributes her decision to persist in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district to the students that she has taught over the years. She is proud of the relationships that she has built with her students, and her students look forward to attending her class. Traci added to the theme of everlasting relationships by stating:

What keeps me going is, I don't want to let them down. You know I feel like they look forward to seeing me. They always ask me, "Are you going to do summer camp this year?" "Are you going to do summer camp?" "Are you going to be here next year?" When they are used to teachers not coming back, they always ask. Well in the beginning when I first got here, it was always, "Are you coming back here next year?" And now, I think because I have been a constant, they can count on me being here. So, consistency, and being someone that they can count on, is a big motivational factor for me being here for five or more years. (p. 5)

Coach explained that there is comfort teaching in his environment because he is teaching his former students' children. This is just one way that Coach builds relationships with his students as well as relate to his students.

**Letters.** The letters continued to reveal the theme of everlasting relationships with students. The veteran teachers in this study believe that the positive relationships with students is an essential factor contributed to why teachers remain in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts. Suzie wrote about the importance of relationship building in her letter. She stated, "Build positive relationships with these students. I can promise you one thing, those relationships that you've built with the students will always reap benefits."

Daisy stated, "Working hard to develop a trustful, respectful, and mutual relationship, (however grudging it is given by the student) makes everything else along the way worth it."

David also added to the theme of everlasting relationships in his letter to novice teachers. David explained:

I am often reminded of the old African Proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." I truly believe when teachers are given the opportunity to work in a positive work environment that includes teachers with a common purpose, that the sky is the limit for a particular school. (p. 1)

David acknowledges that positive student, teacher relationships should be fostered to build the students up so that both the teacher and the student can thrive in their environment. Every adult in the school is responsible for working towards a common goal which is to support the students.

**Photo Narrative.** The veteran teachers believe that the bond they have built with the students they encounter contribute to them remaining in rural locations. Suzie understands the importance of relationships with students because she has children in school as well. Suzie

submitted a picture of her own children and wrote, “I feel that if I give my students at my school everything that I can possible give them, I know the teachers at my children’s school provide them with everything they have to offer.” David wrote, “When you are transparent with students they seem to open up to you as well.” David was referring to the classroom activities and the field trips that he attended with his students that allowed his students to see a different side of him. The experiences outside of the classroom environment gave David the opportunity to further build a positive relationship with his students. See Figure 4.3.



*Figure 4.3.* David's photo narrative selection

The participants in this study enjoy the everlasting relationship they form with students. This theme was derived based on the words and phrases related to everlasting relationships that was revealed throughout the study and among three forms of data collection.

### **Student Growth and Academic Success**

The interviews, letter to novice teachers (writing prompts), and photo narrative revealed that the participants perceive student growth and academic success as a reason for persisting in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts.

**Interview.** The veteran teachers in this study shared their beliefs for teaching during the interviews, letters to novice teachers, and photo narratives, and indicated that they enjoy seeing

their students grow and succeed academically. The veteran teachers expressed the joy that fills their heart when a student or a former student has achieved their goal in a specific content area, or understood a skill, or has graduated from high school and is doing well in life. In addition, it is evident that all participants value the teaching and learning process. The teaching and learning process attributes to student growth and academic success. Suzie stated, “When a teacher misses a day, then that is a day of instruction that a child is missing.” During the interview Piasadora explained:

My joy is watching them blossom. I get them one way, and by the end of the year, they are another way. I get to see growth. I get to experience their failures...I get to see them discover who they are and what they are able to do; they begin to see themselves. That is the best part. (p. 5)

Daisy teaches Special Education at the high school level. Daisy is proud of the growth, both small and big, that she experiences with her students. Daisy stated:

I’ve seen students graduate with a diploma that have kind of been written off, in fact, a couple of them had been put in self-contained classes. The teacher would realize that they could do the general education work, so the teacher put them in resource class and with some extra help, they graduated. That is the reward, seeing students graduate. And also, when the light bulb comes on. No matter how many times you have repeated it, the light bulb comes on and you can just see in their face, and I think that is just great. (p. 4)

Grant has been in his district for 33 years. He has taught many students in the same families and has seen many of his former students grow and develop overtime. When asked about his joys of teaching, Grant quickly replied with the following response:

Of course, I have been teaching a long time. I have so many great stories of students who have applied themselves here, applied themselves in college, and now are good people, successful people, that are living wonderful lives, and are doing cool stuff. I have kids who are lawyers, kids who are doctors, and kids who are in research, kids who are engineers. That is a joy knowing that somehow you have at least added to this person that made them who they are, or at least gave them an opportunity to explore who they are. (p. 3)

Mrs. Meekx has also remained in the district for a long period of time. She teaches kindergarten, so over the course of 24 years, she has had the opportunity to see her students grow from the time they were in kindergarten to their 12<sup>th</sup> grade graduation. Mrs. Meekx stated:

There are so many joys. Just seeing the growth from the beginning of the year to the end of the year... Seeing the students grow and learn and seeing the children come back and want to be part of the district. That is very exciting... I want to see growth. I want to see children become successful. We cannot give up on our children... It is about the children becoming good citizens for the county and the country as well. (p. 2)

Teresa added to the theme of growth and academic success when she stated, "The joy is just watching the students grow throughout the year." David explained, "The ultimate reward, I know, comes from seeing the students' progress from when they first come into your classroom to the end of the year." James stated, "What brings me great joy is to see a student, where they start from and then knowing where they are going to end up with the knowledge and skills that you have given them. Traci and Coach also have a similar experience pertaining to the theme of student growth and academic success. Traci teaches physical education. She teaches the students each year starting from sixth grade to eighth grade. Traci explained that her students are

taller than her by the time they enter the eighth grade. Traci is most proud of her students when, “seeing them grasp a concept after they continuously doubt themselves.” Coach stated, “The joy is seeing them learn. Seeing the light on their face when they are acquiring the knowledge is the joy. Suzie explained, “When a teacher misses a day, then that is a day of instruction that a child is missing.”

**Letter.** Teresa explained that the student growth and academic development will get teachers through the challenges and hardships of teaching. She explained:

There are going to be some days where you feel that your work is in vain, but I promise those day will be outweighed by the growth you see in each student, and how they also grow as a person as well. (p. 1)

Daisy also gave similar advice to beginning teachers in her letter when she wrote, “The joy of seeing the light bulb come on for a student you may not even like very much but have tried to work past the behavior of the student, it will make your day.” Mrs. Meekx explained the importance of self-reflection as a teacher as it relates to improving student growth and academic success. Mrs. Meekx explained that she would have a novice teacher observe a veteran teacher if she had the opportunity to interact with a novice teacher, and then after observing the veteran teacher, she and the novice teacher would discuss what strategies impacted the lesson and other components of the lesson that went well. David explained that teachers must work together to positively impact student growth and academic success. David wrote, “My message to a novice teacher would be that “Teamwork makes the Dream work.” This sounds cliché, but it truly takes a complete and cohesive team to make sure that our students are getting the best education possible.”



**Photo Narrative.** Many of the photos submitted by the veteran teachers in this study depicted student learning taking place. Suzie submitted a picture of a painting on a wall of her school that showcased various teaching strategies that help students with their academics. See Figure 4.4. Suzie said the following about the wall:

When I came here, the school did not look like an elementary school. The walls were white and bare... We hired a muralist to do murals all over the walls... Everything that's on these walls are things that the students have trouble on based on benchmark data over the years. There's no way that a student can walk past these walls every day without getting something from it. (p. 1)



*Figure 4.4.* Suzie's photo

David's pictures also showed learning in action. David explained that learning should be interactive and hands-on because students can better understand the skill or concept. David explained:

All of these photos represent the importance of allowing the students to have an opportunity to explore the world around them. I truly believe that when students can relate a lesson to an actually learning experience then they can really absorb the content efficiently.... The students enjoy learning that is hands-on and relative to them. (p. 1)

The participants in this study get joy and a sense of satisfaction from seeing their students develop and succeed. This theme was derived based on the words and phrases related to student growth and academic success that was revealed throughout the study and among three forms of data collection.

### **Feeling Needed and a Sense of Belonging**

The interviews, letter to novice teachers (writing prompts), and photo narrative revealed that the participants feeling needed and a sense of belonging as a reason for persisting in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts.

**Interview.** The veteran teachers in this study shared their beliefs for teaching during the interviews, letters to novice teachers, and photo narratives, and indicated that feeling needed and a sense of belonging are reasons attributed to the phenomenon of persisting in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district. Six of the participants grew up in the community, one of the participants grew up in a similar community, and two of the participants do not have any connections or ties to the area. Many of the veteran teachers in this study have strong ties to the community where they teach. When Suzie was asked to describe teaching in a rural district and her motivation for teaching in general for five or more years, Suzie stated: “When I teach students in these low economic schools, I connect better with them because I came from that same type of environment. I wanted them to have the same type of opportunities that I was exposed to.” Piasadora was asked her motivation for teaching for five or more years and why she remained in the district where she persists. In the following response, Piasadora is referring to when her current principal asked her to remain after being a long-term substitute teacher. In addition, she knows that her district needs more veteran teachers like herself. She knows that her

district needs her without district officials telling her. She explained, “I feel wanted, I feel wanted, I feel needed... Nobody has said we need you, but I know they need me.”

Daisy believes that it is important for teachers to understand the cultural in the environment where she persists. Daisy explained that during the interview that she has seen teachers who leave before December because they did not understand the cultural. The cultural of teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district is what gives Daisy the motivation for remaining. Daisy stated:

When I first came here, I recognized the cultural, without it being an agriculture cultural, but the cultural in general. It was the cultural that I grew up in. I wanted to stay. I knew the students had the abilities, and I wanted to help them find them. (p. 6)

Grant has spent 33 years persisting in his environment. He believes that he has unfair advantage over other teachers because he is from the area where he teaches. Grant explained all throughout the interview that the environment that he persists in is his home. He is proud that he lives where he teaches. When asked to describe anything else connected to the environment where he teaches, Grant stated:

Every single day that I come to school, I feel like I make a difference in my hall, in my class, and in my school. My students have an opportunity that they would not have had, if I was not there. And what happens is, very few jobs allow that. If you die today, tomorrow, they will replace you, and it is not a big deal. They just replace you, get another person, and move on. Here, it is different than that. You may say they can get another teacher in. Yeah, they can get another teacher, but they won't get me back. So, what happens is, it makes a different...This is home. (p. 7)

Mrs. Meekx further revealed the theme of feeling needed and a sense of belonging. When Mrs. Meekx was asked why she has remained in the district where she persists, she stated, “This is home. Never kind of thought about going somewhere else, but this is home and I just want to continue to make a difference.” Teresa also shared her experience of feeling a sense of belonging in her environment. When asked to describe what is pleasant about the environment where she teaches, she explained, “Close knit. It is very close knit. The faculty and how we support each other, and with some of the parents that are involved and building a relationship with them.”

David is another participant who emphasized all throughout the interview that he was from the community. He enjoys teaching his former classmates’ children and family members as well. When asked why he has remained in his environment, David stated:

Just being from here and making an impact. I can easily go to a district that is already thriving, I don’t want to say that I wouldn’t get any satisfaction out of it, but I want to be a catalyst, kind of like a change agent. I want to be somewhere where I can actually make a difference... I just want to be somewhere where I can actually make a difference and actually see the difference as well. (p. 6)

James is also from the community where he has remained for six years. He revealed several times during the interview that he wants to be a positive role model for his students because he is from the community, and he is successful. He wants his students to know that if he did it, then they can be successful as well. James was asked what intrinsic or extrinsic factors have contributed to him remaining in his environment for five or more years, and he declared:

One of the big factors is that I am from here. That has been really big for me. I have been offered a lot of other jobs in a lot of other districts but like I said, you know being from here, I want to give back. (p. 5)

Traci explained that her students look forward to coming to her class. She has taught many students over her six-year span and was able to build a rapport with the parents and the community. Traci is a consistent face for the students and she does not want to let them down by leaving. When Traci was asked if her needs were met teaching in her environment, she stated:

I would say some needs that are being met by teaching in a rural, low-income school, I feel that I want to say emotional, I am not sure. The reason why I say emotional is because I don't have any children and so I have kind of gotten attached to the kids of the area which is why I am so reluctant, if that is the right word, for me to leave because a lot of them have already had people walking out on them in their lives. (p. 8)

Coach is from the community and he has persisted in his environment for 17 years. Coach explained that he is comfortable in his environment. When asked about his motivational factors for teaching, Coach stated,

What keeps me going is that I am from here. I had the opportunity to be taught by good teachers, so I want that same opportunity for our students... It made a difference in my life and I want them to have that same impact. I want them to receive the best education possible. (p. 4)

**Letter.** The letters further developed the theme of feeling needed and a sense of belonging. These relationships are mutual between the teacher and the students and in some cases between colleagues. The teachers feel needed and they feel like they belong, and the students who they serve need them just as much. In addition, colleagues need the support from

each other to continue persisting in the environment in which they work. Suzie wrote, “These babies need you. These babies need the extra love and support that you have to offer...Even though it can be hard for you, it’s harder for them.” Mrs. Meekx acknowledged the importance of colleagues needing each other. She wrote that if she was given the opportunity to work with a novice teacher she would invite the novice teacher to have lunch with a few more veteran teachers. Mrs. Meekx’s response showed the significance of having a support system. In her own words, she stated, “I would invite the novice teacher to lunch with some more veteran teachers. The veteran teachers would give the novice teacher some advice and the novice teacher would be allowed to ask the veteran teachers questions.”

Teresa acknowledges that first-year teachers will have challenges, but it is important that they speak with other teachers in the building and use them as resources. First year teachers will need a support system to overcome challenges that they will encounter. Teresa stated, “Complaining about a problem doesn’t solve it, I feel that only compounds more problems. It is best to use our energy to collaborate to compose solutions.” David also wrote about how teachers will need each other to add longevity to their teaching career. Longevity does not take place in isolation. David explained, “We need teachers who are going to be there for each other through the good times and the bad. We need to make sure that we have each other’s backs because we are all in this together.” Students need teachers who believe in them as well. Daisy emphasized that sometime students want to give up, but teachers must be able to make them feel like they can accomplish their goals so that they can succeed. Daisy wrote:

Also remember on the really hard days, you may not see your dedication and hard work pay off for years, but you will see it many days with a student who is gaining confidence

and learning after coming from a place of “it is no point in even trying.” So, fortify your determination and endurance, and stay in the world of educating. (p. 1)

**Photo Narrative.** Daisy submitted two photos, one which revealed the theme of a sense of belonging. She submitted a picture of a cotton field. During Daisy’s interview she explained that she grew up in the cotton fields. The environment where she currently persists is surrounded by cotton fields. The scenery reminds Daisy of where she grew up. It gives her a sense of belonging and a feeling of home. Daisy explained that this is the cultural that she grew up in. See Figure 4.5.



*Figure 4.5.* Daisy's photo

All of David’s pictures consist of him interacting with his students in various locations. David understands that he is needed by his students. David explained the importance of building a positive relationship with students so that they are more willing to open-up and be willing to absorb the information presented to them. David’s photos included spending time with the students at various locations such the Space Museum to accompany a unit that the students studied on the solar system. Another picture consisted of an out-of-state trip to Washington D.C. “where the students had an opportunity to not only read about the government in their textbooks, but to live the lesson on the three branches of government.”

Suzie’s photo narrative also consisted of a variety of pictures where she is interacting

with her students. She knows that she is needed to be an advocate for her students because the only time some of the students can travel out-of-state is by the planning and hard work of the teacher. Suzie stated, “It was a great feeling to take these students on a trip that they wouldn’t have had the opportunity to go on without my dedication and love for these students.” Suzie was referring to a trip to Atlanta, Georgia where the students had the opportunity to visit the Martin Luther King Site, The World of Coca-Cola, a robotics class, and various other locations to enhance their educational experience. Suzie explained, “The school that I teach at is a poverty school. A lot of these students wouldn’t have had the opportunity to ever travel out of their little town. On the trip, they were exposed to so much.”

The participants in this study get pleasure from seeing their students develop and succeed. This theme was derived based on the words and phrases related to student growth and academic success that was revealed throughout the study and among three forms of data collection.

### **Research Question Responses**

Four research questions were developed to guide the purpose of this study in determining why veteran teachers remain in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts. The themes that surfaced in the previous data analysis section informed the response to each research question that will be discussed in the following research response section. The answers convey the essence of the experience through textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon. The textural description is what the participants’ experienced and the structural description is how the participants’ experienced the phenomenon of teaching in their environment. In addition, the conceptual framework is evident throughout the research response section.

### **Central Research Question**



How do veteran teachers describe their experience working in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district across South Carolina?

Based on the data gathered from interviews, writing prompts, and photo narratives, it was evident that the veteran teachers described working in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district as their calling. All 10 participants believed that they were placed in their environment for a reason, and many of them referenced God as the reason for the placement. Grant was asked who are what inspired him to be a teacher, and he stated, "I guess God open the door and that was where I was supposed to be." There are numerous challenges associated with teaching in rural locations, but the teachers believe that it was their calling to remain and persist in the environment where they teach.

Several descriptive, sub-themes emerged in this category that also described the participants' experience working in this location. The veteran teachers in this study explained that a career as a teacher comes with both rewards and challenges. First, Coach described the reward when he stated, "Being a school teacher is rewarding, gratifying, and it keeps you learning." From Coach's perspective, being a teacher in his environment helps him to grow and develop as a person. When Suzie was asked how she describes teaching in the area where she persists, she explained that it was rewarding. Suzie gets a sense of satisfaction from helping students who are in need. Many of the students live in poverty, and the rural district where she persists in is not as resourceful as larger, metropolitan districts. Daisy was asked to describe what it was like to be a school teacher and she stated, "I love it." The teachers in this study love teaching and it gives them a sense of satisfaction and gratification. The above sub themes that emerged reflect Malsow's (2013) theory. The teachers are remaining because of the third level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The third level on the pyramid is social or belongingness and

love needs. This includes relationships and friends (Maslow, 2013; McLeod, 2016). Humans need love, affection, and acceptance.

With the rewards come obstacles that make teaching in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts challenging. Based on the three forms of data collection, it was determined that the most prominent challenges include a lack of resources, student readiness to learn, and a lack of parental support. The veteran teachers who participated in this study described the lack of resources available to impact student achievement as a challenge. When asked about the challenges that she faced, Mrs. Meekx stated, “The biggest challenge is not having a lot of materials readily available to you.” Traci furthered added to the sub-theme of lack of resources when she stated, “Challenges, some of the challenges that I face teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income school district is lack of resources.” The veteran teachers remain despite not having a plethora of resources by learning to overcome the obstacles and still excel at teaching. David explained, “So, as teachers we have to kind of get creative with the delivery of the lesson.” David was referring inaccessible and appropriate materials for his lessons to be truly engaging and effective.

The next sub-theme that emerged as participants described their experience working in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts across South Carolina was student readiness to learn. The teachers who persist in this area experience many students who are a grade level or below in their reading and math skills which impacts their motivation and willingness to learn. Coach stated, “They are limited in their ability to grasp new learning, grasp different types of things, you have to give it to them in chunks.” James furthered explained:

I see a lot of challenges where students don't understand the language or the terms because of their reading vocabulary. It is difficult for them to do a lot of hands on

assessment because their math skills are not where they need to be, so their skills are very low. (p. 3)

James has learned to slow the teaching and learning process down by not giving the material to the students too fast to overcome the challenge of student readiness to learn. James stated, “You have to slow everything down and break everything down for them. So, I have learned a lot of different ways to reach them.”

The last prominent sub-theme that emerged via data collection from interviews, written letters to novice teachers, and photo narratives was a lack of parental support. When asked about the challenges of teaching in the environment where she persists, Suzie stated:

My biggest challenge was parental support. When you teach in a low-economic environment parents don't support their students, their children like they should. You rarely get a parent to come in and discuss the things that their child is doing inside of the classroom. (p. 2)

Suzie began contacting parents instead of waiting on the parents to contact her about their child. Suzie explained that there have been times when she would get in her car and travel to visit her students' parents at their home. When asked about the challenges of teaching in her environment. Traci stated, “Some of the challenges I face is a lot of the times, our students don't come from a structure environment, so sometimes it is difficult to get them to comply with expectations.” Traci has a unique way of overcoming a lack of parent involvement. She explained, “I learned from some of the challenges, is that basically they just need love. You know, they just need somebody to show that they care and with that wall being up, it is difficult for learning to take place.”

Some of the challenges participants in this study described reflect Bell's (2013) critical race theory. The CRT was significant to this study because teachers are persevering in the education profession regardless of the impediments they must overcome each day. The veteran teachers in this study described lack of resources and student readiness to learn as difficulties of teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district. The CRT was imperative because it acknowledged the disparities in education as it relates to African American students and other students of color (Bell, 2013). Teachers are left to teach with little resources not great enough to make a substantial impact on the children's academic success (Goodpaster et al., 2012; Rivero, 2015). The teachers in these districts realize that the students do not have a fair chance at success, yet the teachers persist.

As mentioned earlier in this section, the veteran teachers in this study persist in their environment because they believe that it is their calling. It does not matter how great the challenge is, the participants in this study have worked hard to overcome each obstacle so that they can better serve their students. In addition to teaching being their calling, it would not be possible for the veteran teachers in this study to persist if they were not committed and willing to work hard to evoke change.

### **Sub-Research Question One**

What motivational factors do participants describe as explaining why they are persistent in teaching in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts?

It was apparent that everlasting relationships with students was the dominant motivational factor that veteran teachers attributed to persisting in their environment. This conclusion was based on the triangulation of data from interviews, written letters to novice teachers, and photo narratives. The participants in this study understand the importance of

building positive and trusting student-teacher relationships. It brings the veteran teachers in this study joy to have current and former students express their love to them.

**Small gestures.** When asked about the joys of teaching in her environment, Mrs. Meekx stated, “The children hugging you and telling you that they love you and that they want to come home with you, and I think that is a joy.” When asked to describe anything else connected to her experience of teaching in the environment where she persists, Suzie explained that she loved when her students come back and express their love to her, this makes her feel like she had a positive impact on their life. Suzie stated, “I like it when they come back the next year and still love up on you the next year the same way.”

**Strong Bonds.** David’s response to the question on joys of teaching in his environment continued to reveal the theme of everlasting relationships with students when he stated, “My heart is definitely for those students.” David was referring to having the opportunity and the pleasure of teaching students of his former classmates. It made building a rapport with the students easier because he already knew their parents. When asked about the joys of teaching in her environment, Daisy explained the benefits of the bond between a student and a teacher in her letter to novice teachers:

If you decide you are called, you will find once you give yourself time to know your students and they know you as their teacher, not their friend, the frustrations and hardships of student behaviors, the school systems pressures and demands, and the always long list of “to do” compared to the shorter list of “done” will pale in comparison.

(p. 1)

Lastly, Teresa stated, “Building those relationships is key, especially when you are teaching in an area like this because these kids, they don’t trust too many people.” The participants in this

study understand that the relationships that they build with their students early in life, can transform into an everlasting bond. This is evident with Grant who has taught for 33 years in the same district, and he constantly has students returning to him just to inform him of his impact on their life. Again, research sub-question one reflects Maslow's theory. The teachers are remaining because of the relationships that they build with their students. The teachers enjoy having their students come to them years later and tell them about how much their life was impacted by them. This motivational factor reflects Maslow's (2013) third level on the hierarchy which is love and belonging needs.

### **Sub-Research Question Two**

What components of Maslow's hierarchy of needs do participants attribute to remaining in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts?

Feeling needed and a sense of belonging are the dominant themes that answers research question two based on the data gathered from interviews, written letters to novice teachers, and photo narratives. The participants in this study feel needed by their school, and most of all, their students. In addition, the veteran teachers in this study feel a sense of belonging because they are from the area, understand the cultural, or can relate to the students because they grew up in a similar environment. The responses from participants reflect the third level of Maslow's (2013) hierarchy of needs theory. The teachers are remaining in their environment because their love and belonging needs are fulfilled.

**Feeling needed.** I referenced Piasadora earlier in the study when she explained that her principal called her several times because he needed her to work as a long-term substitute teacher; she was eventually offered a contract and she accepted. Piasadora believed her talents would have been wasted if she remained home after retirement. She felt needed which is why

she returned to teaching. Grant explained in his interview that if he left his environment now, his school and district will not get another teacher with the same commitment level that he has. He knows that he is needed because of his experience and commitment to the students. Grant stated,

I make a difference in the building every day that I am there. Every single that I come to school, I feel like I make a difference in my hall, in my class, and in my school. My students have an opportunity that they would not have had, if I was not there. (p. 7)

Research shows that rural districts have a high turnover rate and many rural schools fall victim to a revolving door of teachers (Azano & Stewart, 2016; Goodpaster, Adedokun, & Weaver, 2012; Redding & Walberg, 201). Grant has been a constant for 33 years. He knows that he is needed because few rural districts have experienced this level of commitment or consistency.

Suzie stated in her letter to novice teachers, “These babies need the extra love and support that you have to offer.” Coach advanced the theme of feeling needed by stating, “Most of them need role models... So helping our students, be the best that they can be is one of the reasons why I stay here for so long.”

**Sense of belonging.** Many of the veteran teachers who persist in their environment are from the area. They attended the local high schools, went off to college, and returned to teach in their environment. They feel a sense of belonging and they want to give back to their students and their community as well. David was asked about his inspirations for becoming a teacher and he stated, “I want to give back to my community, the community that I grew up in. I want to make an impact and be a mentor to our students.” Grant also added to the theme of a sense of belonging all throughout his interview by explaining that this was his home. When asked about his motivational factor for remaining in his environment, he stated, “That this is home. In other words, when I go to Piggly Wiggly I see my people in there. These are my students. My

neighbors. So that is a big thing. I feel like I add back to my school.” Many of the veteran teachers in this study are experiencing a deep level of commitment to their students. They have remained to give back to the students because they too, were the very same students who need someone to believe in them.

James explained, “I want to show people from this county that I am from here and look at what I am doing and that you can not only do what I do but do it better.” In addition, James explained that he has persisted in his district for so many years because he wants to give back to his students. Mrs. Meeks was asked why she has remained in her environment for 25 years and she stated, “This is home. Never kind of thought about going somewhere else, but this is home and I just want to continue to make a difference.”

### **Sub-Research Question Three**

How do participants perceive social injustice as a contribution to the phenomenon of veteran teachers remaining in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts?

Student growth and academic success is the dominant theme that answers research question three. This is based on the data gathered from interviews, written letters to novice teachers, and photo narratives. Earlier in the research, participants described teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district as their calling, but there were challenges such as lack of resources and student readiness to learn that can be associated with injustices present in rural school districts. Bell’s (2013) critical race theory highlights the inequities present in districts that consists of predominantly minority students. The veteran teachers in this study recognize that students are not exposed to a plethora of resources like students who attend schools in metropolitan or suburban areas. The participants in this study still



provide the students with the best education within their ability because they love to see their students excel in their academics.

Daisy explained that the students in the environment where she remains have been “beat down by the educational system.” She furthered explained that the students in her environment have been isolated by the educational system which kept them in the position that they were in. Daisy was referring to the lack of resources that would equip students, low performing students, and her special education students with the resources they needed to reach their full potential. She stated, “I try to explain to them that because they didn’t learn it is not always their fault. It can be the system where they are not taught the way they need to learn.” Daisy has the determination to provide her students with the instruction that they need to be successful, despite the flaws of the educational system. When asked about the joys of teaching in her environment, Daisy stated:

I’ve seen students graduate with a diploma that have kind of been written off... That is the reward, seeing students graduate. And, when the light bulb comes on. No matter, how many times you have repeated it, the light bulb comes on and you can just see in their face, and I think that is just great. (p. 4)

Daisy made a profound statement when she was asked what she had learned from the challenges of teaching in a predominantly, minority, low-income, rural school district, “I’ve learned that you can’t write any student off.” Daisy believes that all students deserve a chance at success. Grant also added, “My students deserve as much opportunities as anybody else does.”

The rural districts that serve predominantly minority, low-income rural students are mainly exposed to different experiences through text or from the teachers sharing experiences with them. David explained:

A lot of these students haven't even left outside of the County. They think that their world is what they see right here in the County. Being that I am from the County and I had an opportunity to go and travel, I was able to bring that information back to the County. I try to have them set goals and have dreams and let them know that the sky is the limit... Being that I have done it, and I have been successful, I can show them that there is hope. (p. 5)

David's motivation for persisting in this district is being able to help students see the big picture. He is determined to help them understand the importance of education so that they can thrive beyond the environment that they are currently in by providing them with an adequate education and exposure through his experience. It is important to note that all 10 participants in this study referenced how they love to see students excel in their academics. The veteran teachers understand the students and their plight, but they are committed to their students and moving them beyond their own expectations. Coach stated:

I try to acquire new learning, and any information that I receive, I take it back to my students. I want them to have opportunities because sometimes when you reach out and talk to other people who are not from around the area, and you tell them where you are from, they put a stigma on you like you don't know this, and you don't know that. But when you go out, display what you have learned so that there won't be a stigma. (p. 5)

### **Summary**

This transcendental phenomenological study provided an in-depth investigation of the essence of the lived experience of veteran teachers who have taught for five or more years in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district. The participants included six females

and four males ages 29 to 72. They participated by engaging in a face-to-face interview, writing a letter to novice teachers, and by completing a photo narrative.

Themes were determined via examination of three forms of data collection using Moustakas' (1994) steps of data analysis. The following themes emerged that answered each research question: (a) teacher is a calling, (b) everlasting relationships with students, (c) feeling needed and a sense of belonging, and (d) student growth and academic development. The data indicated that veteran teachers persists because they have a passion for teaching the students in their environment.

In Chapter Four, I gave a detailed and comprehensive discussion of how the research questions were answered based on the data collection from the study. The themes that developed addressed the questions that stemmed from the related literature and the conceptual framework. The themes also explained why veteran teachers persisted for five or more years in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools and districts. The figure below is a profile of teachers who persists in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts.

|

| <b>Profile of a Teacher who Persists in a Predominantly Minority, Low-income, Rural School District</b>  |   |
|--|---|
| Teaching is a Calling  | Everlasting Relationship with Students  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passion for teaching</li> <li>• Find teaching rewarding</li> <li>• Sense of satisfaction</li> <li>• Committed</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build positive and trusting relationships with students</li> <li>• Dedication and love for the students</li> <li>• Can relate to students</li> <li>• Cares about their students</li> </ul>     |
| Students Growth and Development  | Feeling Needed and a Sense of Belonging   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wants to see students grow and become productive citizens</li> <li>• Love seeing students grow and learn</li> <li>• See the rewards of student growth</li> <li>• Desire to see students graduate</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports all students</li> <li>• Understands the cultural and the environment</li> <li>• Collaborate, builds relationships with adults</li> <li>• Provides high-quality instruction</li> </ul> |

*Figure 4.6.* Profile of a teacher who persist

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study sought to gain an in-depth understanding of why veteran teachers remain in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts in South Carolina. This chapter will begin with an overview followed by a summary of this study's findings. Chapter Five will provide a detailed perspective of the practical, empirical, and conceptual implications of this research. Both the delimitations and limitations are discussed as well as recommendations for future research. This chapter will end with a summary of the research emphasizing the conclusions of this transcendental phenomenological study.

### Summary of Findings

This transcendental phenomenological study focused on the essence of veteran teachers' persistence in the education field. I used journaling to continuously bracket so that I was able to clearly analyze and interpret the data as it was presented (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The following central research question and three sub-questions were used to guide this study:

**Central Research Question:** How do veteran teachers describe their experience working in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts across South Carolina?

#### Sub-Research Questions

1. What motivational factors do participants describe as explaining why they are persistent in teaching in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts?
2. What components of Maslow's hierarchy of needs do participants attribute to remaining in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts?

3. How do participants perceive social injustice as a contribution to the phenomenon of veteran teachers remaining in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts?

Responses to research question one revealed theme one, teaching is a calling. All 10 participants in this study believed that teaching is what they are supposed to be doing. In addition, many of the participants referenced God as the reason they were teaching, or the reason for them being in the environment which they persisted in for five or more years. Although teaching is their calling, it does not come without challenges that tests their abilities to remain year after year. The teachers in this study described a lack of resources, student readiness to learn, and parental support as the three most challenging aspects of teaching in a rural school district. The CRT was developed to emphasize inequities in education such as the ones the veteran teachers in this study are experiencing. The veteran teachers in this study overcome the above obstacles in a variety of ways. For example, the veteran teachers in this study stated that they bring new information back to their students based on the new learning they have acquired through their own studies, meeting new people, workshops, and by traveling. This information is used in the classroom to offset the lack of resources or the exposure that the students are not afforded.

The veteran teachers in this study enjoy seeing students learn. Many of the students enter grades below grade level which makes learning difficult for them. This challenge does not deter the veteran teachers in this study from providing students with an adequate education. They address student readiness to learn by gradually releasing the information to students. This requires the teachers to engage in a lot of scaffolding and presenting the information in steps versus overloading them with too much information at one time. The participants in this study

welcome the support of parents. They want to work with parents to help the child succeed academically and as a person. One participant in this study has visited parents at their home to build positive relationships. Other participants recognized that some of the students may not come from a structured home environment, so they offer the students all the love and support that they can give. The teachers in this study have a calling placed on their lives to teach. Despite the challenges of their environment, the dedication and the commitment level that the veteran teachers in this study have for their students is the reason why they remain.

Responses to research question two revealed theme two, everlasting relationships with students. The participants in this study are motivated to remain in the environment in which they persist because of the relationships they build with students that tend to last a lifetime. The participants' responses to question three reflect the third level of Maslow's (2013) hierarchy of needs pyramid which is love and belonging needs. The participants in this study love when their current and former students embrace them with a hug. The veteran teachers feel that they have impacted the lives of their students when the students are able to come back years later and share their success story. This shows that a good teacher is not forgettable. The veteran teachers in this study expressed that their students look forward to coming to their class each day. Although many of the participants in this study are qualified to work in various other districts because of their degrees, endorsements, and qualifications, they choose to remain where they are because they love the relationships that they build with their students. It gives them joy and a sense of satisfaction.

Responses to research question three revealed theme three, feeling needed and a sense of belonging. I anticipated that the participants in the study were persisting in their environment because of Maslow's (2013) fourth level of needs which consisted of esteem needs such as

respect, self-esteem, status, prestige, recognition, and achievement. The responses from the participants using the three forms of data collection which included face-to-face interviews, a written letter to novice teachers, and photo narratives showed the veteran teachers were clearly remaining because they felt needed and they were in an environment where they felt like they belong. The two feelings reflect Maslow's (2013) third level of needs that focuses on love and belonging. The participants in this study feel needed by their school and especially their students. The veteran teachers feel like they make a difference every day they are at work. They know that each day is a new opportunity to reach someone that they did not have the opportunity to reach the day before. The students in this environment need someone who is going to advocate for them, and they need someone who is going to give them a structured environment, so they know what to expect every day. All participants understand the cultural where they persist, so they know that they are needed. Five out of the ten participants are from the environment in which they teach, but the other five participants still feel a sense of belonging because they can connect with the students. The participants in this study remain because they want to give back to community.

Responses to research question four revealed theme four, student growth and academic success. The veteran teachers in this study understand the challenges of teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district. The teachers remain because they want to see their students grow and develop. They want to give their students the same exposure and the same opportunities that other districts are afforded. The veteran teachers in this study get a sense of satisfaction because they are helping students who live in poverty understand the importance of education. The participants want to give students a fair chance. Bell's (2013) critical race theory emphasizes the injustices present in the educational system as it relates to



students of color. The veteran teachers who participated in the study are motivated to stay despite the flaws because they know that they are needed to give their students a fair chance at success.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this transcendental, phenomenological, study was to describe motivational factors that veteran teachers in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts attributed to their persistence for five or more years. This study emphasized the need to continue to understand and uncover how to retain veteran teachers in rural locations.

Teaching is a calling is the first theme that emerged after carefully analyzing the three forms of data collection which included, face-to-face interviews, letter to novice teachers (writing prompts), and photo narratives. The teachers in this study all believe that they are following the career path that was designed especially for them. They all have persisted in their environment for five or more years because they are committed to their calling. Grant stated, “It is a completely different commitment level.” Commitment is an important source of motivation for teachers. Commitment is defined as a teacher’s fulfillment with their career choice and their belief that teaching is the right vocation for them (Perry et al., 2015). Teachers who have a strong desire to teach and who believe that teaching is their calling have high levels of commitment (Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012). Teachers’ commitment to teaching may also be a predictor of their longevity in the field (Thomason & La Paro, 2013). Being committed to their jobs may protect them against the negative effects of job-related stress (Perry et al., 2015). The veteran teachers in this study persist each year because they have a passion for what they do. They do not quit or find another district, but they thrive in the one that they are in because they

have learned to overcome adversities, and they have a strong desire to continue persisting in the environment in which they are in.

Everlasting relationships is the second theme that emerged after carefully analyzing the three forms of data collection which included, face-to-face interviews, letter to novice teachers (writing prompts), and photo narratives. The teachers in this study revealed that they enjoy when their students hug them, ask to go home with them, come back to visit them, or tell them how much their life has been impacted by them. Students feel valued when their teacher shows them that they care. In this case, students' belief that they can succeed can rise when students feel the teacher's respect and fairness or may decline when students feel discouraged (Akhtar et al., 2017). Furthermore, there is an increase in students' participation in tasks where students have the teacher's support (You et al., 2016). This is how relationships are formed. The veteran teachers in this study have learned how to build positive relationships with students and the bond lasts forever.

Student growth and academic success is the third theme that emerged after carefully analyzing the three forms of data collection which included, face-to-face interviews, letter to novice teachers (writing prompts), and photo narratives. The participants in this study revealed that they get a sense of satisfaction when their students succeed in their coursework. Daisy stated, "That is the reward, seeing students graduate. And also, when the light bulb comes on." Teachers continue to teach in low-income areas because they are motivated, and they have a strong desire to work with young children (Ganchorre & Tomanek, 2012). Furthermore, according to a study conducted by Perrachione, Petersen, & Rosser (2008), working with children was the second most popular reason out of five why teachers are intrinsically motivated to remain in the teaching field. The teachers in Perrachione, Petersen, & Rosser's (2008) study

claimed that they love working with children because they enjoy seeing them become proud of themselves when they succeed.

Feeling needed and a sense of belonging is the fourth theme that emerged after carefully analyzing the three forms of data collection which included, face-to-face interviews, letter to novice teachers (writing prompts), and photo narratives. Schools and districts with the highest level of poverty measured by 75% of students qualified for free or reduce price lunches are more likely to have greater proportions of Hispanic/Latino and Black students than any other ethnic or racial populations. These students experience inequitable learning opportunities and thus inequitable achievement compared with their more affluent counterparts (Ganchorre & Tomanek, 2012). The veteran teachers in this study know that they are needed by their students so that their students can have a fair chance at success. David stated, “I just want to be somewhere where I can actually make a difference and actually see the difference.” According to Ganchorre and Tomanek (2012), teacher quality is an indicator of student achievement. Despite many teachers opting to leave schools and districts that serve underprivileged students, there are many who remain.

The four themes including teaching is a calling, everlasting relationship with students, student growth and academic success, and feeling needed and a sense of belonging were all supported by the related literature in Chapter Two.

### **Theoretical Literature**

From the statements made by the participants, it was evident that Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory (2013) and Bell’s (2013) critical race theory was present in the participants experiences of teaching in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district. Maslow’s (2013) theory focused on the sources of participants’ motivation to continue teaching. Data

revealed that teachers in the above locations persists due to the third level of Maslow's (2013) hierarchy of needs, which is love and a sense of belonging. Bell's (2013) critical race theory emphasized the injustices present in the education system as it relates to African American students and other students of color. The motivational factors that cause teachers to move up Maslow's (2013) hierarchy of needs can be attributed to why the veteran teachers in this study have persisted despite the inequities in the environment where they persist. Both theories were used to frame this study.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (2013) has five stages beginning with physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and ending with self-actualization needs. Individuals must comfortably reach the lower needs on the hierarchy before moving upwards to accomplish the next level. Piasadora stated:

They called me last summer and they kept calling me and calling me. We need a sub, we need a sub and my mother was sick and I said, let me take care of this and when this is done I will come, and I came. And then it went from being a sub, to being a long-term sub, and then being offered a contract. I feel wanted, I feel wanted, I feel needed. (p. 7)

Suzie stated that, "I rarely miss days because I do not want my students to get behind. I feel like if I go every day, then it is a possibility that I can catch somebody up who maybe missed something on yesterday." The observations made by the participants serve to support Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (2013) that the need to feel wanted and loved is an important motivational factor for individuals. The veteran teachers in this study persist in predominantly minority, low-income school districts because they feel needed and they feel like they belong in the environment in which they teach.

The participant's behavior also highlighted Bell's (2013) critical race theory which emphasizes the presence of inequality in education as it relates to African American students and other students of color. The CRT may uncover the injustices in education including race, power, inequity, politics, and the impact on teacher retention. Suzie states, "You get a sense of satisfaction because you know you are helping someone who may not have all the things that these other school districts have, but they can get the same type of education that these other schools offer." The veteran teachers in this study are aware that there are larger, more affluent and resourceful districts surrounding the rural districts where they persist, but they realize that they need to be there for the students in rural districts to try and give them an adequate education despite the location. Suzie stated:

I love my students. I wanted them to have the same type of opportunities that I was exposed to. I felt like I needed to be there. I need to love these babies. I don't know. I felt like if I was there, then they could have a chance. (p. 3)

Piasadora stated:

What is it that agriculture kids don't have they that they don't aspire to do anything. I don't get it. There has to be something that a teacher can do to inspire them to let them know that they can do it... Maybe that is why I am in this room from six to six. (p. 8)

The participants' experiences highlighted Bell's theory that inequality is present in rural districts, but the veteran teachers in this study continue to motivate and provide students with an adequate education because they care about the students' success.

### **New Contributions to the Field**

The field currently acknowledges why teachers leave the profession. Lloyd and Sullivan (2012) explained that after five years, between 40-50% of teachers exit the education arena.

Teachers are leaving the teaching profession for the following reasons: a great deal of paperwork and record keeping, state requirements for teachers, state assessments, the many obligations, and an insufficient amount of time to devote to the children (Bennet et al., 2013). This study revealed that although there are many challenges, teachers remain because they have learned how to overcome the stressors due to teaching. The veteran teachers in this study understand that being a teacher does not end at the close of the school day.

**Overcoming paperwork, record keeping, and planning.** An effective teacher is willing to work on weekends, or after hours, David stated, “There are some things as a teacher that you will have to make sacrifices for. You have long work days, you know. The schedule says we get out at 3:30 but it really does not end at 3:30.”

**Overcoming state requirements and assessments.** Piasadora stated:

Being a teacher is more than 9 to 5. Because it is weekends. I work weekends. I just put a big box in my car. I am going to do some things over Christmas break, and it is not just to benefit myself it is to benefit my students. I want to come back prepared with all of my lesson plans. I am going to come back with all of their grades. I am going to be able to come back with data that I am going to sit down and collect so that I know where they are and what I can do for them. That’s what teaching is to me. (p. 3)

**Overcoming the many obligations.** Teresa explained:

Often as educators we are bogged down by the everyday pressures from insiders, outsiders, lack of funding, resources, etc. These factors can cause negative attitudes from all sides. Nothing in life is perfect. I feel with all the issues in the world it is hard to see a positive aspect, but I feel we must always find the positive. Complaining about a problem doesn’t solve it; I feel that only compounds more problems. It is best to use our energy to

collaborate to compose solutions. We are always wanting change, but are we willing to do what is necessary to achieve change and advocate for our students? (p. 1)

The teachers in this study have found methods to cope with the stressors of teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district. It is evident that the veteran teachers in this study are committed to teaching in their environment.

### **Implications**

The findings for this research are important because they give a voice to veteran teachers who teach in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts in South Carolina and why they have remained in these locations for five or more years. I aimed to collect and synthesize data from participants that would uncover the essences of the shared experiences of veteran teachers. This research was important because there is minimum research on why teachers remain in the above locations. This study explored why veteran teachers remain in difficult to staff schools and districts. The implications of this study were important in the following ways: theoretical, empirical, and practical.

### **Theoretical Implications**

To expound on the theoretical literature discussed, Maslow's (2013) hierarchy of needs theory and Bell's (2013) critical race theory show that participants are persisting in predominantly minority, low-income rural school districts because they feel valued, a sense of belonging, and they want to provide their students with an adequate education despite not having the same or as much resources as more affluent districts. This study revealed that participants were not persisting in rural locations due to the esteem component of Maslow's (2013) hierarchy. The esteem needs as discussed earlier, include motivational factors such as accomplishment, mastery, individuality, rank, domination, self-respect, and respect from others

(Maslow, 2013; McLeod, 2016). However, the responses from participants revealed that veteran teachers are remaining not because of any of the characteristic from the esteem component of the hierarchy, but because they feel needed, they feel accepted, and they feel like they belong in their environment. Belongingness is the third level of the hierarchy. Humans need love, affection, and acceptance (Maslow, 2013; McLeod, 2016). The participants in this study receive this feeling from their students. In addition, Bell's (2013) critical race theory highlights the injustices in education as it relates to students of color. The acceptance from students motivates veteran teachers to remain despite the challenges of teaching in rural, low-income school districts. Suzie stated, "I really don't care about the fame. I just want to be there for the kids."

### **Empirical Implications**

As discussed in the related literature, teachers are leaving their post within the first five years of teaching. Five-50% of teachers leave the education arena each year, and this percentage includes a high number of new teachers who just entered the teaching profession (Schaefer, Downey, & Clandinin, 2014). Moreover, remote schools that are located outside of metropolitan areas may experience high teacher turnover, with their teaching staff encompassing an uneven number of novice teachers who replace experienced teachers who move on (Redding & Walberg, 2013). Teachers are leaving because of a variety of stressors that they have not learned to overcome. For instance, these stressors may include less desired job conditions such as loneliness and little support from administration, cultural transition from teacher preparation programs to a first year teacher, and working conditions such as teacher pay, duties and responsibilities required of teachers, classroom management, teaching out of the field, inadequate teacher education programs, and a lack of resources (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Buchanan, 2012; Gallant & Riley, 2014; Mee & Haverback, 2014). The veteran teachers in this



study have learned to overcome the daily obstacles and they continue to persist in the environment in which they teach.

**Challenges.** Studies show that remote locations, such as rural school districts, employ mainly novice teachers, underqualified teachers, teachers who are entering education from a different profession, and teachers with weak credentials (Azano & Stewart, 2016; Goodpaster et al., 2012; Masinire, 2015; Redding & Walberg, 2013; Rivero, 2015; Ulferts, 2015; Zhang & Campbell, 2015). This is a challenge because these teachers are less effective than veteran teachers with years of experience, and they have a difficult time meeting the educational needs of the students in their classroom (Ulferts, 2015). This is a disadvantage for students in rural districts because they are not getting adequate instruction that would allow them to excel academically. Furthermore, rural schools are receiving insufficient funding. Rural schools struggle because of the lower level of state funding to the local school district (Silvernail et al., 2014). Strange (2011) claimed that rural school districts are denied proper funding that would provide an adequate education that meets today's educational standards. Veteran teachers teaching in rural schools face many challenges but have successfully learned how to persevere despite the barriers of teaching in a region with many needs. For instance, this study has revealed that veteran teachers in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts are notably concerned about their students' academic success as well emotional and social needs.

**Motivational Factors of Teachers.** Sources of teacher motivation can either be intrinsic or extrinsic; in addition, these sources whether intrinsic or extrinsic, are factors that cause veteran teachers to remain in predominantly minority, low-income rural school districts. Personal teaching efficacy, working with students, and job satisfaction are factors that can be attributed to intrinsic motivation (Hughes, 2012). Intrinsic motivation plays an important role in

teacher longevity. Teachers are more likely to become overwhelmed with the demands of teaching if they were not intrinsically motivated (Taylor et al., 2014). Extrinsic motivation includes receiving prizes or honors, acknowledgment for achievements, and avoiding undesirable results (Hughes, 2012). Examples include bonuses, recognition for a job well-done, or time-off (Hughes, 2012). This type of motivation is not internally. When teachers are extrinsically motivated, they are looking for instant rewards (Bennett et al., 2013; Emiroglu et al., 2017). Although the extrinsic rewards may be appealing, teachers are remaining in the education field because of intrinsic factors. Studies show that teachers are invested in the success of their students (Taylor et al., 2014). Teachers remain in low-income regions because they are motivated, and they have passion for working with children (Ganchorre & Tomanek, 2012).

### **Practical Implications**

There are practical implications from this study for stakeholders including teachers, parents, administrators, and district personnel. It is essential that teachers understand the dynamics of teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural district upon teaching in these regions. Masinire (2015) explained that often, many teachers begin teaching in rural districts without completely understanding the culture which diminishes their longevity of teaching in these areas. Teachers need more training about rural locations so that they have a solid foundation when entering the teaching profession in rural districts (Masinire, 2015). The responses from participants showed that teachers must be willing to work hard in rural districts to provide students with an adequate education. Piasdora stated, “Being a teacher is more than 9 to 5. There is no such thing as coming in here and not really getting your hands dirty. You got to get things done so that your kids can get things done and learn.” In addition, teachers must believe that teaching is their calling and they must be motivated to give students high quality

instruction every day. Teachers are the most valuable resources at any school, especially in rural schools where resources are scarce (Ulferts, 2015). Suzie stated, “I rarely miss days because I do not want my students to get behind...When a teacher misses a day, then that is a day of instruction that a child is missing.” It is important that novice and veteran teachers understand that teaching is not a career that someone should have to motivate you to love or make you do a good job. It must come from within. It must be a desire. Suzie stated, “It is a passion.”

For parents, it is imperative that they understand the impact of parent involvement. Kaplan and Seginer (2015) summarizes parent involvement as a parent’s educational goals, long-term plans for their children, educational decision-making, support with school work, parental knowledge, and parental participation in the school. Parents play an important role in the academic success of their child. Suzie explained that her biggest challenge was parental involvement. Suzie stated, “When you teach in a low-economic environment, parents don’t support their students, their children like they should. You rarely get a parent to come in and discuss the things that their child is doing inside of the classroom.” The responses from the participants showed that more support from parents can help their students dream bigger so that students understand that education is their pathway to success.

The practical implications for principals are to know and understand the needs of the teachers in their building and to provide them with the proper training or support to overcome the areas they may struggle in. In addition, many of the participants in this study felt needed. It is important that school administrators recognize their teachers and make them feel like a valuable member of the school staff. Masinire (2015) further explained that to retain teachers in rural locations, teachers should receive acknowledgement for their accomplishments.

The responses from the veteran teachers in this study can help district personnel retain veteran teachers in predominantly minority, low-income, rural districts.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

There are several factors that contribute to the delimitation of this study. First, this study used a transcendental, phenomenological research design to capture the essence of the participants' experience. The participants had to be at least 28 years of age with at least five years of teaching experience. This study focused on why veteran teachers remain in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts for five or more years. The above locations were purposefully selected because rural districts tend to experience teacher attrition at higher rates than their urban and suburban counterparts. The aim of this investigation was to understand why veteran teachers remain in hopes of recruiting and retaining more teachers in rural regions.

There are also several factors that contribute to the limitations of this study. First, all the participants were in the same school district, except for one. Next, this study took place in rural districts that served mostly students of color. In addition, urban and suburban school districts were not included in this study. Out of the 10 participants, eight were African American and two were Caucasian, therefore the diversity is lacking. This study excluded novice teachers and focused only on veteran teachers. Lastly, all the schools were public, K-12 schools. After acknowledging the limitations of this study, it is appropriate to state that the motivational factors may not reflect the diverse perspectives of other ethnic groups, novice teachers, and other regions of the world.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study sought to describe the motivational factors that contributed to teachers remaining in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts for five or more years in South Carolina. Future research that would benefit the education arena would be to replicate this study in an urban or suburban school district would also be of interest to the education field. These are school districts located within metropolitan areas. The participants in this study revealed that rural school districts do not have as many resources which makes it challenging to provide students with an adequate education. It would help novice and veteran teachers to know what issues pose as a challenge in urban and suburban school districts, why teachers in urban and suburban school districts remain despite the difficulties, and how they have overcome the barriers to continuing persisting.

Recruitment of rural schools are usually with young, inexperienced teachers who are less likely to have earned a graduate degree (Goodpaster et al., 2012). Rural schools are frequently staffed with an inequitable number of under-prepared, inexperienced teachers who do not get the proper guidance and support to meet the needs of students (Ulferts, 2015). The principals are often placed in a position where they are left with little choice but to hire whoever walks through the doors (Ulferts, 2015). Research on principals' perspective on teacher retention and recruitment and what could be done to retain teachers in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts would also benefit the education field. Principals can share their beliefs on their role and their impact on teacher attrition in the above locations. In addition, it would be beneficial if principals share their challenges, how they overcome their challenges, and why they continue persisting in rural school districts.

Lastly, a quantitative study can be conducted on teacher persistence using surveys, as well as teacher persistence and student outcome, along with teacher retention.

### **Recommendation for Teachers**

In the face of the inevitable challenges of teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district including lack of resources, child readiness to learn, and lack of parental involvement just to name a few, according to the veteran teachers in this study, the joys outweigh the challenges. The participants in this study expressed the deep love that they have for their students and how they just want to be the one who makes a difference in their lives. The participants in this study acknowledge that their students often see them as their parents because they spend a lot of time together. Mrs. Meekx explained that students ask to go home with her at the end of some days, and those simple words give her joy. From the voice of a participant during a face-to-face interview when asked does teaching meet her needs, Daisy stated:

It really meets my soul needs because I feel like teaching is really like preaching. A preacher is going to find somewhere to preach even after they retire, and I feel like teachers are going to teach because God put the calling on their lives, so I think it is really a soul calling. The teachers that are not called don't last very long just like the preachers that are not called do not last very long. (p. 7)

Many other veteran teachers in this study expressed that teaching was a calling from God. It is important that both novice and veteran teachers understand that teaching, and being a good teacher, must be deeply rooted in a person for them to remain in education for a long period of time. James stated, "Being here and reaching the kids is more important than any dollar amount that anyone could offer me." I recommend that anyone entering the teaching profession deeply evaluate why they want to be a teacher. The participants in this study stressed how teaching was

their calling in life. Teachers entering this field must have a passion for teaching, a gift. In addition, teachers must have a love for their students, teachers must be willing to work hard to make certain that their students succeed in their coursework, and teachers must build positive relationships with their students. In addition, teachers must believe in their students. The teachers in this study are overwhelmed with joy from seeing their students succeed.

I also recommend that any teacher who wants to teach in a rural district receive pre-service training in this area, first. Factors causing teacher attrition in rural regions are the lifestyle of a rural community, learning about the nature of working in rural communities, and preparation time (Goodpaster et al., 2012). Teachers entering rural areas eventually leave because they do not understand the cultural. Furthermore, Doney (2013) conducted research on fostering resilience where four novice teachers were the participants in the study. The conclusions from the study revealed that time-tested advice offered to novice teachers by teacher preparation programs, administrators, and other educators need to be adjusted to align with what is taking place in the education field (Doney, 2013). Pre-service training will better help new teachers understand and persist in the environment. The recommendations above will help teachers in the education arena with a solid plan of action to persevere, in rural locations.

### **Recommendations for Parents**

Each veteran teacher in this study expressed the importance of parent involvement and how they value the parents' presence and support. The veteran teachers in this study have acknowledged that parents play a vital role in the academic success of their students. One of the veteran teachers in this study learned through his students how important it is for him to be a supportive parent so that his children can thrive in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district where he teaches. James, explained:

Well one thing that I can say as a father figure, that I have young kids in this district, that I want to grow in this district. But it is also showing me what I need to focus and concentrate on with my kids being so young so that they won't have some of the same struggles that I see here at the high school on the high school level. So, you know, with me being a father, I make sure that we have family time, we have a reading time, and stuff like that. (p. 6)

The veteran teachers in this study have a desire for parents to take more of an active role in their child's education. James understands that he must first develop his children's literacy skills and a love for reading at home. Many of his seniors struggle with reading, and he wants to be able to combat this issue with his own children by taking an active role as a parent while his children are young. This will give his children a solid and supportive foundation where learning is taking place beginning with the leadership and the guidance of their parents.

In addition, Mrs. Meekx, expressed during her interview that her students' parents have contributed to her remaining in her environment for five or more years. When asked, what was pleasant about teaching in a rural, low-income school in South Carolina, she said, "Just meeting the parents. You meet a lot of really nice parents. All through my teaching experience, I have met really nice parents. Just really nice people." The veteran teachers in this study believe that the support and presence of parents are indispensable. Parents are essential to the school. Parents are their child's first teacher.

Suzie explained that her biggest challenge was parent involvement. She stated, "My biggest challenge was parental support... You rarely get a parent to come in and discuss the things that their child is doing inside of the classroom." When Suzie was asked how she overcame this obstacle, she explained, "I reached out to them. Instead of them reaching out to



me, I reached out to them. I've gotten in my car and went to houses." Teacher home visit programs are used by many schools to build relationships with parents to increase parent involvement and, in turn, increase student achievement (Wright, Shields, Black & Waxman, 2018).

There are several recommendations for parents based on the voices of the participants in this study. I recommend that teachers and parents both work together to schedule home visits. This is also revealed in the literature. Parents want to feel included and needed by the school so that they can better aid their child towards academic achievement. An increase in parental participation is most successful when schools engage in clear and open communication and make concerted efforts to work collaboratively with parents (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). Suzie explained that this was her method of contacting parents. In addition, I recommend that parents try to attend each parent-teacher conference and school events. Parents are welcome to the school to speak with teachers, based on the voices of the participants. Lastly, I recommended that parents develop their child's love for reading at home by encouraging them to read daily. James is a high school teacher and he sees the reading deficiencies in his high school students; therefore, as a parent, he incorporates family time in his home where everyone is reading.

### **Recommendations for Administrators**

Five out of the ten participants referenced administrators in their interview in some form. It is important that administrators understand who is in their building, how to serve them, and how to advocate for them as well. Although David's motivation for teaching is mainly contributed to intrinsic factors, he does feel appreciated when his administrator recognizes his talents, his dedication to the school, and to the success of his students. When asked about his external motivational factors, David stated, "Externally, what keeps me here is just the leadership

opportunities that I have been given, recognition from different staff members, and administration kind of keeps me motivated and to continue to make a difference.”

Recognizing teachers by name and by task is a simple method that principals can use to uplift teachers. This can potentially have an impact on their willingness to remain and improve their craft. David further explained that, “I don’t teach for recognition, but when it does come, it allows me to reflect.” In schools that need the most assistance, such as rural schools, effective programs would influence teachers to remain and leadership opportunities (Bennett, Brown, Kirby-Smith, & Severson, 2013). When Coach was asked were any of his needs met by teaching his environment, he stated, “The principals that I have had, I have learned something that I can use if I decide to become a leader one day, and they were great people. So, I have met great people here through these years.” Providing teachers with leadership opportunities is a motivator for teachers like David to remain and Coach if he decided to be a leader. I recommend that principals continue to give teachers a voice and build capacity in their schools by recognizing the leadership abilities in their teachers. Principals are urged to delegate and give teachers leadership roles based on their talents.

Ulferts (2015) suggested that teachers are the most important person in the building impacting student achievement. Furthermore, Ulferts (2015) explained that because most rural school districts have limited resources, effective teachers matter as much, if not more, to rural school districts than to larger suburban or urban school districts. Quality teachers in rural schools are a valuable resource. The veteran teachers in this study know and understand this to be true. When Grant was asked to describe his motivation for teaching in general for five or more years, he said:

One good teacher in this district makes more impact than every administrator. Add the administrators up, add them all up, they don't have the impact that one good teacher can have. If you add them all up. So basically, what happens is, that kind of gives me my motivation for teaching. It is simply I make a difference in the building every day that I am there... Bad administration can hurt teachers. (pgs. 4 & 5)

As mentioned earlier in the research, Piasadora felt needed in the environment where she persists. This reflects Maslow's (2013) theory. The teachers in this study remain because they feel needed. When asked why she remains in her environment, she stated:

Umm when they called me last summer and they kept calling me and calling me. We need a sub, we need a sub and my mother was sick and I said, let me take care of this and when this is done I will come, and I came. And then it went from being a sub to being a long-term sub, and then being offered a contract. I feel wanted, I feel wanted, I feel needed. (pgs. 6&7)

I recommend that school administrators work to create a school culture where teachers feel welcomed and valued. Piasadora came out of retirement because she knew she was needed in her current environment. It helped that the environment where she persists is inviting. Administrators can add to the longevity by recognizing teachers for their accomplishments, by showing them that they matter by giving them a voice, and by recognizing and addressing their needs.

Lastly, Teresa referenced principals in her face-to-face interview. When asked to describe what it was like to be a teacher in low-income, rural district, she stated, "Sometimes we don't have the parental support so that also can make things difficult when we don't have the support that we need. Not just from parents but administration, so on and so forth." The needs of

teachers are different and must be addressed on an individual basis. Principals must visit their classrooms often to understand their needs (Vanderhye, 2015). Vanderhye (2015) also claimed that authentic and precise feedback is vital to the success of this process. I recommend principals conduct needs assessment with every teacher to understand their needs and to help them cope with any frustrations that they are experiencing. The greater the frustration that teachers encounter and must face alone, the more likely they are to leave the profession (Bennett et al., 2013).

### **Recommendation for District Personnel**

All participants in this study indicated a lack of resources that would enable teachers to enhance academic performance and to expose students to various courses that would cause them to expand their career options. Coach explained that, “Technology, academic courses, we don’t have opera, a horn’s class, or different things living in an urban or suburban area that they would be exposed to.” The veteran teachers in this study also expressed that low-income, rural school districts have a difficult time attracting teachers that would allow students to have exposure to various coursework. Students in rural districts are at a disadvantage because of their remote locations, the narrow scope of curriculum in their schools, instructional practices, and their lack of access to resources and programs (Redding & Walberg, 2013).

When asked about the challenges of teaching in a predominantly, minority, low-income school district, Traci said, “You know we don’t have a lot of things to draw teachers to our area, we don’t have a lot of related arts... so they don’t have the opportunity to broaden their horizons.” The veteran teachers in this study think outside -the-box and are creative in ways to give students exposure. Lastly, the funds are not always the greatest in rural locations. It is

difficult for the district to thrive and be successful when there is a lack of funding. David explained:

I think teaching in a community of this sort, low-economic, I think people need to realize, not to say that other teachers don't have challenges, the challenges here are far greater because it feels like we don't have enough support, especially like monetary like other districts do. (p. 7)

Teacher attrition increases when teachers in high poverty schools are unhappy with leadership (Almy et al., 2012). Teachers also report that high poverty or low-income school districts have a lack of resources that make it difficult to teach; many low-income schools still rely on outdated books to support instruction (Karp, 2014). Teachers leave in search of more support and better resources. The participants in this study are invested in their students and seeing them succeed. I recommend that district office personnel stay abreast of educational technology and resources needed to improve instruction. All teachers should have access to resources that will give their students rigorous instruction. In addition, I recommend that district office personnel recruit highly qualified teachers in their field, and related arts teachers that would expose students to a variety of career paths. I also recommend that district office personnel stay connected with teachers in their district to establish a supportive environment throughout the district. Lastly, I recommend that district personnel continue to find funding sources through grants and other programs to generate revenue to retain teachers.

### **Summary**

This transcendental phenomenological study filled a gap in current literature concerning why veteran teachers remain in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools and districts. There is research examining why teachers exit the profession, but there is limited research

revealing why veteran teachers remain for five or more years. With the high attrition of teachers in rural school districts, the findings from this research can assist district personnel with recruiting and retaining their most valuable resource, teachers. The findings from this study can also help other stakeholders including teachers, administrators and parents. Many teachers enter rural schools not understanding the cultural, the hard work, and the commitment level that is required of them due to the limited resources. This study can prepare novice teachers who have a desire to teach in rural locations on what to expect and how to overcome the many challenges that they will be faced with. In addition, this study can help parents understand that they are welcomed by the school community. Teachers want parents to know that they are welcomed by the school community. Lastly, this study can better assist administrators with supporting their teachers.

Chapter Five included an in-depth theoretical and empirical discussions, theoretical, empirical and practical implications, delimitations and limitations, and areas for future research. This study included 10 participants who shared their experience of teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school and/or district. They shared their experiences by engaging in face-to-face interviews, a written letter to novice teachers, and photo narratives. I could identify with each participant being that the researcher had taught in the same environment for seven years. It was important that I did not allow for my bias to interfere with the current study. Creswell (2013) explained the importance of memoing and journaling throughout the data collection process to prevent any bias from taking place.

The essence of the veteran teachers' experience revealed that teaching is a calling, they build everlasting relationships with their students, they feel needed and a sense of belonging, and they focus on student growth and academic success.

There are several key factors that should be taken in to consideration to remain in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district. Teaching must be a calling. Many of the veteran teachers in this study expressed that God had placed them in this position. Many of the veteran teachers indicated that they had not placed themselves in this environment, but God had done it for them which is why they have not only remained but are thriving. One participant, Grant, has thrived in his environment for 33 years because he recognized that teaching was his calling in life. Next, the participants in this study have a passion for the students who they teach and not just a passion for teaching. Teachers must be willing to work hard and make sacrifices. David explained that teaching does not end at the close of the school day. Lastly, teachers must be fully committed.

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## APPENDIX A

### LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT

Dear Superintendent:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is, **WHY STAY? RETAINING VETERAN TEACHERS IN PREDOMINANTLY MINORITY, LOW-INCOME, RURAL SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY** and the purpose of my research is to describe the lived experiences of veteran teachers who persist in predominantly minority, rural, low-income schools. This research is valuable to the educational arena because information will be gathered about why veteran teachers remain and how to support them as well as novice teachers so that they too can have longevity in the education field.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research in your school district.

Participants will be asked to do the following as three forms of data collection: (a) engage in an interview (b) write a letter to novice teachers and (c) engage in a photo narrative. The data will be used to determine why teachers persist in the above locations. My data collection will not disrupt the school day or the learning environment because the data collection will take place outside of school. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. All distinguishable information will be omitted, and pseudonyms will be used to make certain confidentiality for the teachers, schools, and the district. There are no known risks associated with this research. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

For education research, district permission will need to be on approved letterhead with the appropriate signature(s). Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval. Feel free to email ([veronicabradley23@yahoo.com](mailto:veronicabradley23@yahoo.com)) or call me (803-486-0489), if you have questions, concerns, or need additional clarification of the study. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Veronica K. Bradley  
Doctoral Student

## APPENDIX B

## IRB APPROVAL

**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 7, 2018

Veronica Bradley

IRB Approval 3528.110718: Why Stay? Retaining Veteran Teachers in Predominantly Minority, Low-income, Rural Schools: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Veronica Bradley,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP  
*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*  
The Graduate School

**LIBERTY**  
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*Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971*



## APPENDIX C

### LETTER TO PRINCIPAL

Dear Principal:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is, **WHY STAY? RETAINING VETERAN TEACHERS IN PREDOMINANTLY MINORITY, LOW-INCOME, RURAL SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY** and the purpose of my research is to describe the lived experiences of veteran teachers who persist in predominantly minority, rural, low-income schools. This research is valuable to the educational arena because information will be gathered about why veteran teachers remain and how to support them as well as novice teachers so that they too can have longevity in the education field.

I have been granted permission by your district's superintendent to conduct research throughout the district. To get started with my investigation, would you email me the names and email addresses of all the teachers in your building who have taught at your school for at least five years.

Participants will be asked to do the following as three forms of data collection: (a) engage in an interview (b) write a letter to novice teachers and (c) engage in a photo narrative. The data will be used to determine why teachers persist in the above locations. My data collection will not disrupt the school day or the learning environment because the data collection will take place outside of school. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. All distinguishable information will be omitted, and pseudonyms will be used to make certain confidentiality for the teachers, schools, and the district. There are no known risks associated with this research. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Please encourage your teachers to participate in this study. All teachers who have taught for five or more years will receive an email from me. Feel free to email ([vkbradley@liberty.edu](mailto:vkbradley@liberty.edu)) or call me (803-486-0489), if you have questions, concerns, or need additional clarification of the study.

Sincerely,

Veronica K. Bradley  
Doctoral Student

**APPENDIX D**  
**EXPLANATION OF STUDY**

Good Morning,

My name is Veronica Bradley, and I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University. I have been granted permission by your district Superintendent to conduct research in your district. Your principal has shared your name as a possible participant in the study; therefore, I would like to invite you to participate in the study involving veteran teachers who have taught in a predominantly minority, low-income school district. Also, you were selected as a potential participant because (1) you are identified as a veteran teacher, (2) you teach in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district, (3) you have been teaching for five or more years.

This study hopes to hear the voices of veteran teachers in predominantly minority, low income, rural schools in hopes of retaining teachers in these difficult to staff locations. Research has extensively examined why teachers leave the profession, yet there is minimal research conducted to determine what factors contribute to veteran teachers remaining. As a result, I am interested in hearing what you have to share about your teaching experiences in rural school districts and why you remain.

I have an informed consent form for you to read and sign if you agree to participate in the study. Important information concerning the study is explained in depth in the consent form (background information, purpose, significance, procedures, data collection, risks and benefits, and withdrawing procedures). If you would like to participate in this study, I would like to schedule an interview. Also, if you agree to participate in the study, you will complete the following overtime:

1. Meet with me (the researcher) for an initial brief introduction and description of the study via email message or telephone call (10 minutes).
2. Participate in a semi-structured interview where participants will be audio-recorded (1 hour)
3. Participate in writing a letter to novice teachers (30 minutes).
4. Participate in a photo narrative. Teachers will take at least five photos of their teaching environment as well as the surrounding community and write a narrative about the collage pictures (Over the course of one week.) Include how the pictures contribute to you remaining.
5. Participate in member checking, which includes you studying the transcription from your recorded interview for correctness in the clarification of the gathered data (30 minutes).

Thank you. Your willingness to participate in the study is greatly appreciated.

**APPENDIX E**  
**SCREENING SURVEY**

1. How many years have you been a teacher in South Carolina?
2. Have you taught for five or more consecutive years in your current school assignment?
3. Is the school where you teach considered a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school?
4. If I have other questions, may I contact you?

**APPENDIX F**  
**CONSENT FORM**

Why Stay? Retaining Veteran Teachers in Predominantly Minority, Low-income, Rural Schools:  
A Phenomenological Study  
Veronica Bradley  
Liberty University  
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study. You were selected as a possible participant because you have taught for five or more years in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school and/or district in South Carolina. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Veronica Bradley, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to understand the following: (a) How do participants describe motivational factors as a role in their persistence in teaching in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools? (b) How do participants describe the attribution of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in their perseverance in teaching in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools? (c) How do participants perceive social injustice as having an impact on retaining teachers in predominantly minority, low-income, rural schools?

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a recorded interview for 40-60 minutes.
2. Write a letter to novice teachers.
3. Take photos of your environment and explain why it captures your experience of teaching at your school.

**Risks and Benefits of Participation:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits to society include informing novice teachers about the inevitable obstacles they will face in education and strategies they can take to overcome obstacles. This research will also benefit society by uncovering why teachers are motivated to persist in the education field for a decade or more. Principals and district administrators will better understand how to recruit and retain teachers in the most difficult to staff schools and districts.

**Compensation:** Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report, I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Per federal regulations, data must be retained for three years upon completion of the study. Data will be locked and stored in a secluded place where only the researcher has access.
- Recording will only be used for data collection purposes.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Veronica Bradley. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at vkbradley@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. Foster, at lafoster@liberty.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher[s], **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

The researcher has my permission to video record me as part of my participation in this study.

[**Note:** If your study involves audio recording, video recording, or photographing participants, retain the above checkbox and permission statement, leave the appropriate method of recording listed, and remove the method(s) you will not utilize. **If you will NOT be recording your participant(s), please remove the checkbox and permission statement.**]

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Signature of Participant

Date

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Signature of Investigator

Date

**APPENDIX G**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Tell me about yourself (where you grew up, your family, background, undergraduate and graduate degrees)?
2. When did you first learn that you wanted to be a teacher?
3. Who or what inspired you to be a teacher?
4. How would you describe being a school teacher?  
Prompt: In other words, tell me what it is like to be a teacher?
5. How would you describe being a teacher in a rural, low-income school district?  
Prompt: Can you compare teaching in this area to something familiar?
6. What are the challenges and joys of teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school?
7. What have you learned from the challenges?
8. How would you describe what is pleasant about teaching in a rural, low-income school in South Carolina?  
Prompt: In other words, can you tell me what it is like to teach in your environment?
9. How would you describe your motivation for teaching in general for five or more years? In a rural, low-income school?  
Prompt: What impacts your decision to continue teaching in a rural, low-income school?
10. What intrinsic or extrinsic motivational factors contribute to you remaining in a rural low-income school district for five or more years?  
Prompt: In other words, what internal or external factors have impacted your choice for remaining in a low-income, rural school district?
11. Did teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income school influence your decision to remain for five or more years? If so, explain how?  
Prompt: In other words, did your environment influence your decision to remain in education for five or more years?
12. Why have you remained in this school district?
13. Are any of your needs met by teaching in a rural, low-income school? If so, what are they?

Prompt: What needs such as social, emotional, feelings of prestige, or any other needs have been met while teaching in your district?

14. Is there anything else connected to this experience that you would like to describe?
15. If I have other questions, may I contact you again?

**APPENDIX H****LETTER FROM VETERAN TEACHER TO NOVICE TEACHER**

**Prompt:** “What advice would you give to a new teacher to persist and thrive in the environment in which you work?”



## APPENDIX I

### PHOTO NARRATIVE\*

**Definition:** A photo narrative is when the researcher shows participants pictures and asks them to discuss the contents of the pictures. The images in this study should relate to veteran teachers in predominantly minority, low-income, rural school districts.

**Purpose:** As participants in this study you are to explain your emotions and how the images impact your desire to continue teaching. Photo narratives will give you an opportunity to tell a story about your experience using pictures related to the study.

**Directions:** Please take at least five photos that best represent your experience of teaching in a predominantly minority, low-income, rural school district using a cell phone, iPad, camera, or any other Smart device. Pictures can be work related, school, home, community, family, colleagues, and more. Next, upload your pictures as a collage in the box below (you can expand the box to fit your needs or just put your collage here and delete the box). After careful examination of the photos in the collage, write a narrative about how the images impact your desire to continue teaching. I have provided lines as an example of where to write, but you can just type in your information using as much space as you need.

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\*Photo narrative concept was adopted from .... (Creswell, 2013).

**APPENDIX J**

**SAMPLE LETTER TO NOVICE TEACHERS**

