A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS' PERSEVERANCE EXPERIENCE

by

Alison Lee Mellott

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

Grania Holman, Ed.D, Committee Chair

Kenneth R. Tierce, Ed.D, Committee Member

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences which motivated early childhood educators to persevere in their positions at the same early childhood education center, for five or more years, in south-central Pennsylvania. For the purpose of this research, perseverance was generally defined as continuous teaching at the same site for five or more years. The theory guiding this study was Herzberg's (1968) motivation hygiene theory as it addressed experiences which impacted job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, directly impacting perseverance. One central research question and two supporting research questions were used to guide the study. The central question guiding this study sought to determine how early educators of five or more years in the same early learning program described their experiences and reasons for persevering. The research subquestions focused on how early educators described their experiences that caused them to persevere in their position and how early educators who persevered described the coping methods they used to face their challenges in the early education workplace. The sample consisted of 10 teachers from four early learning centers in south central PA. Centers were selected to allow for variation in type of program and quality rating as defined by the state's quality assurance system. Teachers were selected based on program director's advisement with consideration taken to allow for variance in participant demographics. Data was collected through semi structured individual interviews, a focus group interview, and observations. Moustakas' (1994) guidelines were followed for transcendental phenomenological data collection and open coding analysis. The results provide insight into experiences which motivate early education teachers to persevere, which may allow early education programs to increase retention and better support student outcomes.

Keywords: attrition, early education, perseverance, retention.

Copyright Page

Dedication

It is with unfettered gratitude that I dedicate this work, and all accomplishments to God. For he has blessed me in innumerable ways. To my husband, Jayson Mellott, who has acted as a constant encouragement, making me believe in things I never would have attempted independently. To my children, Liam, Alia, Leira and Elliott, for you have acted as my inspiration. It is my prayer that you recognize you can accomplish anything God leads you to and you always rely on his guidance. To my parents, Jerry and Debra Kelley, who placed value in education, encouraged my best efforts, and guided me with a heart for Christ. Thank you!

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I would also like to acknowledge my co-researchers, the early educators who participated in this study. Their stories and experiences were inspiring and their dedication to their profession and the children and families they work with was unmatched. Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences with me.

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Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS)

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Challenges within the field of early education, including low salaries, limited benefits, and unpredictable scenarios have led to low rates of perseverance among early childhood educators (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Hale-Jinks, Knopf, & Kemple, 2006; Porter, 2012; Wells, 2014). Teachers are not remaining in the field for long periods of time (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Hale-Jinks et al., 2006; NSECE, 2015; Porter, 2012; Wells, 2014). A variety of personal and workplace characteristics have been linked with impacting perseverance (Borkar, 2016; Gallant & Riley, 2014; Hall-Kenyon, Bullough, MacKay, & Marshall, 2013; Hoerr, 2017; Wells, 2014). For some teachers, these workplace characteristics have not heavily impacted their employment decisions (Wells, 2014). The teachers who persevere stay within the early childhood education field beyond the average expectancy of attrition (Hale-Jinks et al., 2006; Porter, 2012; Wells, 2014). Chapter One of the present study provides an examination of the study background and the situation of the researcher within the study. In addition, the problem, purpose, and significance of the study is explored. The chapter also includes the three research questions that guided the study and definitions relevant to the study.

Background

Historical Context

It is necessary to understand the history of early education, the impact early childhood education has on society, and the theoretical background of the study to explore the topic of perseverance in early childhood education teachers. The first school serving children under the age of six years old was established in Scotland in 1816 by Robert Owen (Gillard, 2011). The purpose of the school was to provide care and education for children ranging in age from two to

six years old while their parents worked (Gillard, 2011). The school's curriculum was designed to engage children in activities like singing, dancing, and play while teaching any concepts that would be of interest or appropriate for the age group (Gillard, 2011). The call for earlier access to education was made in the United States (Morrison, 2015), beginning in 1830. During that year, a petition was filed with Boston Public Schools from the Infant School Society of Boston. The request was to incorporate infant schools into the Boston Public School system (Morrison, 2015).

As early as the 1700s, people began to study the ways in which young children learn. Theorists developed ideas about how the youngest learners in society should be taught. Men and women like Rousseau (1762), Froebel (1907), and Montessori (1912) devoted their work to developing ways to teach these young learners, offering dignity and respect, years before the idea of early childhood education was popularized.

Rousseau's (1762) focus on natural approaches to parenting translated into current concepts like nature play, authentic assessments, and environmental studies (Morrison, 2015). Froebel's (1907) theory focuses on ‘gardening’ children to encourage them to ‘unfold’ which led to the current practice of play-based learning (Morrison, 2015). Montessori (1912) recognized the importance of the environment on child learning, and her theories translated into center wide approaches of the Montessori method (Morrison, 2015).

Theorists and researchers have been examining early childhood education and its impact on children and society since the 1700s. Petitions have been filed to include early learning as a funded program since the 1800s (Gillard, 2011; Morrison, 2015). In the current educational climate, even with increased research and data surrounding the importance of early learning,

funded programs are only offered to those considered at risk, based on factors such as socio-economic status or developmental delays (DOE & DHHS, 2016).

For the majority of Americans, early learning centers have become a pay-to-play environment as the costs associated with the care and education of young children is most frequently covered by tuition paid by the child's family. The cost to support the programs from purely consumer funding is challenging (DOE & DHHS, 2016). The funding and financial solvency of early childhood education programs comes to the forefront when addressing access to materials or supplies, but most heavily impacts teacher compensation (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; DOE & DHHS, 2016). Parents and communities want and need access to quality early learning, which is correlated closely with teacher training and education (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Harris & Sass, 2011; Roseman, 1999).

Current research indicates teacher compensation and benefits impact teacher attrition (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Porter, 2012; Wells, 2014). Most early childhood education teachers are compensated at a rate that puts them at or below the poverty level (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; DOE & DHHS, 2016). Teachers with the same education and experience earn an average of $30,000 more per year if teaching in a public school, rather than teaching in a preschool (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). This pay discrepancy, along with other elements, creates a situation that makes it challenging for many teachers to persevere in the field and yet, some do (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; DOE & DHHS, 2016; Wells, 2014).

The benefit of teachers persevering in early childhood education centers is significant (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Hale-Jinks et al, 2006; Korjenevitch & Dunifon, 2010; Wells, 2014). Teachers who persevere in the field can form a bond with the child, which promotes learning (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Porter, 2012; Wells, 2014). This perseverance provides consistency for

the student and has been linked to increased language skills and improved social and emotional development in students (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Hale-Jinks et al., 2006; Korjenevitch & Dunifon, 2010). The impact of a positive teacher-student relationship has been well established (Kraft, Marinell, & Yee, 2016; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013; Wells, 2014) and perseverance allows for that relationship to grow and flourish promoting development (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Lang, Tolbert, Schopp-Sullivan, Bonomi, 2016). Teacher perseverance influences outcomes among students in urban schools or students from low socio-economic backgrounds even more significantly than students from rural or high socio-economic backgrounds (Beteill, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012; DOE & DHHS, 2016; Kraft et. al., 2015; Kraft et al., 2016; Pogodzinski, Youngs, & Frank, 2013; Watlington, Shockley, Guglielmino, & Felsher, 2010).

Teacher perseverance impacts a wide range of outcomes, yet the current body of literature offers little insight into experiences which impact perseverance in early childhood educators (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Kaden, Patterson, Healy, & Adams, 2016; Lochmiller, Adachi, Chesnut, & Johnson, 2016; Lochmiller, Sugimoto, & Muller, 2016; Mee & Haverback, 2014). Much of the research concerning perseverance of teachers has been conducted outside the field of early childhood education (Kaden, Patterson, Healy, & Adams, 2016; Lochmiller, Adachi, Chesnut, & Johnson, 2016; Lochmiller, Sugimoto, Muller, 2016; Mee & Haverback, 2014).

Social Context

As indicated in Figure 1, the number of dual-income households in the United States rose between 1960 and 1990 (Rise in dual income, 2015).

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Figure 1. *The Rise in Dual Income Households*

This rise in dual-income families in the United States has created a societal shift in which many children are being raised in households with both parents working, necessitating childcare at a higher rate than in previous generations (Pew Research, 2015; Child Trends, 2018). The rise in dual-income households has increased the number of children enrolled in early learning programs. Therefore, teacher perseverance is impacting more children than in generations past (Pew Research, 2015). Children who were offered a quality early learning experience were more likely to graduate high school, go on to college, and were less likely to be retained in a grade during their K-12 education (Barnett & Masse, 2007; DOE & DHHS, 2016; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2002). Furthermore, these outcomes can be associated with dollar amounts. When children are retained in a grade or fail to graduate high school, the cost for society and taxpayers is high. Depending on the needs of the child and families, for every dollar invested in quality early learning, a savings ranging from $1.80 to $17.07 can be realized (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Karoly et al., 2005).

Children enrolled in early childhood education programs have improved outcomes which benefit the child, the family, and society. (Barnett & Masse, 2007; DOE & DHHS, 2016; Karoly, Kilburn, & Cannon, 2005; Reynolds et al., 2002). Developmental outcomes hinge on teacher perseverance but, in early education, teachers have an average turnover rate of 25-50% (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Hale-Jinks et al.,2006; Porter, 2012; Wells, 2014) with one-fifth of early childhood educators leaving the field altogether on an annual basis (Wells, 2014). In comparison, it takes teachers of school-aged children five years in the profession to reach these percentages (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Wells, 2014). Lack of teacher perseverance is a growing concern among K-12 educators as well; however, these percentages specifically demonstrate the severity of low perseverance rates in the field of early childhood education.

Teacher perseverance impacts the quality of the early childhood education program, which then impacts students' outcomes, with low perseverance rates directly limiting the success students can achieve (Barnett & Masse, 2007; DOE & DHHS, 2016; Hale-Jinks et al.,2006; Lamont et al., 2013; Petras, Masyn, Buckley, Ialongo, & Kellam, 2011; Porter, 2012; Wells, 2014; Reynolds et al., 2002; Wells, 2014). This limitation has a direct impact on society's economic well-being (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Watlington et al., 2010).

Theoretical Context

The theoretical foundation for this research is derived from Fredrick Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory. Herzberg's (1968) research indicated a two-factor theory model in which experiences that impact job satisfaction are different from experiences which impact job dissatisfaction. This two-factor theory will allow for exploration of experiences which impact perseverance among early childhood educators by delineating between experiences which encourage them to persevere and experiences which challenge their ability to persevere.

This delineation of experiences is based upon the research indicating both school climate and personal motivation impact a teacher's perseverance with specific experiences positively or negatively impacting perseverance. (Borkar, 2016; Gallant & Riley, 2014; Hall-Kenyon et al., 2013; Hoerr, 2017; Wells, 2014). Both challenges and benefits impacting the participants' perseverance will be addressed in the study to align with both the current body of literature and Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory.

Situation to Self

When I completed my bachelor's degree in elementary education, I began working full-time at the early learning center I had worked at part-time during college. I maintained my full-time employment there for about a year before moving to a position as a director at another early

learning center. I spent six years working as a director in that program. The most challenging situation I encountered during my time as a director was attrition of teachers. The center at which I worked had higher than average perseverance rates with an average of seven or eight years amongst the teachers, but the program was continually hiring or moving teachers to new positions. The shifting, rehiring, and training of new teachers was a challenge for me as an administrator, the teachers, the parents, and most importantly, the children.

In speaking with other directors in the area, I realized every program had the same problem, and yet, every program also had excellent teachers who persevered in the field. I worked with teachers who had been in the same program for 15 or more years, as did several other program directors within the same geographic region. The qualifications of these teachers ranged widely. Their social lives were different and the age level they taught was different. There did not seem to be an easy explanation for their ability to persevere. My interest in their stories and the value which could be derived from their stories led me to the present study.

My research paradigm was constructivist as I recognized each participant within the study would have different experiences and different views of how those experiences impacted their ability to persevere. The nature of phenomenological research is to examine the lived experiences of the individual (Moustakas, 1994). Constructivism focuses on the reality of the participants, recognizing the reality derived by the individual from experience is their own (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) theorized that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of knowledge, and culture shapes developmental progress and knowledge acquisition.

While I recognize and acknowledge that concrete truth exists, within this study, I was seeking to examine the experiences of individuals participating in the study. I did not employ a

pragmatic approach because the study is transcendental. Therefore, the focus was not on translating meaning from data but presenting the essence of the individual participant's experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018) surrounding the phenomenon of perseverance.

I also adopted a relativist ontology, understanding that multiple realities may have been presented as each participant may have had different experiences with the phenomenon. Within qualitative research, epistemological assumptions required I was as close to the participants of the study as possible to justify knowledge claims and acquire knowledge from the participants of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My interactions with the participants during individual interviews and focus group interviews met my epistemological assumption that I needed to be close to the participants to achieve the ability to present the experience of the participants.

Individual interviews and a focus group interview allowed me to get as close as possible to the participants, as these data collection measures were completed face-to-face. Individual interviews were conducted first with a goal of maximum variation between types of programs and individual experiences. A homogeneous sample of 13 interview participants were asked to participate in a follow-up focus group (Patton, 2015). The homogeneous sample consisted of individuals who had persevered the longest in the same early childhood education program. While a transcendental approach to the research was appropriate because I had not personally lived the phenomenon, as defined by the parameters of this study, axiological assumptions did exist based on my previous experience in the field as an early learning center director and minimal time as a teacher. As the human instrument in the data collection and analysis of this study, my axiological assumptions or my previously established values and biases, (Creswell & Poth, 2018) are openly acknowledged in this chapter and are further explored in Chapter Three of the present study. My relation to the phenomenon offers background knowledge and

experience but I engaged in the epoche process, or set aside those experiences (Moustakas, 1994) during the initial phase of the study to promote limited bias throughout the research process.

Problem Statement

Eighty percent of early educator attrition occurs among individuals who persevere as early childhood educators but fail to persevere at the same school (Wells, 2014). These rates indicate teachers may have the intrinsic motivation required to remain in the field, but extrinsic experiences within the school climate impact their perseverance. It is not known why high percentages of early childhood educators fail to persevere as early childhood educators (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Hale-Jinks et al., 2006; Porter, 2012; Wells, 2014). Even more early childhood educators remain in early childhood education but fail to persevere in the same school, (Wells, 2014) negatively impacting program quality and student outcomes (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Hale-Jinks et al.,2006; Korjenevitch & Dunifon, 2010; Petras et al., 2011; Porter, 2012; Wells, 2014). Educator attrition rates in early childhood education range between 25-50% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Hale-Jinks et al.,2006; Porter, 2012; Wells, 2014).

Teacher perseverance impacts the quality of early childhood education programs, and quality impacts student outcomes (Lamont et al., 2013; Porter, 2012; Wells, 2014). High rates of teacher perseverance increase both long-term and short-term student achievement (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Hale-Jinks et al.,2006; Korjenevitch & Dunifon, 2010; Petras et al., 2011; Porter, 2012; Wells, 2014). To improve program quality, directors and owners of early childhood education centers would benefit from additional research on perseverance, including the impact of school climate and individual characteristics on a teacher's motivation to persevere (Gallant & Riley, 2014; Hall-Kenyon et al., 2013; Wells, 2014). Therefore, the problem of the present study is limited understanding surrounding the experiences which support early educator perseverance

within an early learning program. This lack of understanding limits the ability of early learning programs to create workplace climates which support perseverance.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences that motivate early childhood educators to persevere in their positions at the same early childhood education center, for five or more years, in south-central Pennsylvania. Perseverance within the same field and location is a personal decision made individually by the teacher. Therefore, the experience of the early educator surrounding the phenomenon of perseverance was needed to gain an understanding of the phenomenon.

For the purposes of this study, perseverance was defined as continuous teaching at the same site for five or more years. The theory that guided this study was Herzberg's (1968) motivation hygiene theory, as it addresses experiences which impact job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Research indicates school climate impacts a teacher's level of perseverance (Borkar, 2016; Hoerr, 2017). Herzberg's (1968) model related to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction aligns with research concerning experiences related to school climate which impact teacher perseverance (Borkar, 2016; Clipa & Boghean, 2016; Hoerr, 2017; Kraft et al., 2016).

Significance of the Study

Through this study, I sought to present information that may offer practical ideas for early childhood education programs trying to increase the perseverance of teachers employed within their program. In addition, the empirical gap in the literature was addressed, as many studies have been conducted surrounding perseverance of educators, but few have addressed

perseverance in early childhood education settings (Kaden et al., 2016; Lochmiller, Adachi, Chesnut, & Johnson, 2016; Lochmiller et al., 2016; Mee & Haverback, 2014; Wells, 2014).

This study also sought to address gaps in current theory related to early educator perseverance. The challenge of limited financial compensation within the field of early childhood education is frequently discussed in perseverance literature (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; NSECE, 2015; Whitebook, Phillips, & Howe, 2014). However, additional experiences have been shown to impact perseverance in the workplace (Borkar, 2016; Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Herzberg, 1968; Hoerr, 2017; Kraft et al., 2016). These additional experiences can be globally referred to as the schools' climate (Borkar, 2016; Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Herzberg, 1968; Hoerr, 2017; Kraft et al., 2016).

This study is significant in that the outcomes provided insight on experiences which motivate early childhood educators to persevere as teachers at the same early childhood education setting for five or more years. Several quantitative research studies conducted related to educator persistence cite a lack of understanding regarding reasons for teachers remaining in the field or leaving the field (Kaden et a., 2016; Lochmiller et al., 2016; Lochmiller et al., 2016; Mee & Haverback, 2014). By revealing the essence of the perseverance experience among teachers who have persevered as teachers beyond the expected timeframe, directors and owners of early childhood education centers may be able to adjust policies and practices to encourage more significant levels of perseverance among an increased number of teachers. This increase in perseverance of teachers within an early learning center, has the potential to improve quality within the program and improve student outcomes (Barnett & Masse, 2007; Kraft et al., 2016; Porter, 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2015; Reynolds et al., 2002; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). The early

learning programs and teachers who participated in the study may benefit by gaining knowledge about practices and policies that will support teacher perseverance within their programs.

Teacher perseverance within the same early learning program benefits both students and teachers. Benefits to students include improved student outcomes and lifelong trajectory (Barnett & Masse, 2007; Lamont et al., 2013; Petras et al., 2011; Reynolds et al., 2002) while teachers benefit from a consistent and supportive teaching staff which helps limit teacher stress and burnout (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Johnson & Birkland, 2003; Kraft et al., 2015; Kraft et al., 2016). Studies indicate school context or school climate is a stronger predictor of teacher perseverance than individual teacher traits (Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Ladd, 2011; Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005; Marinell & Coca, 2013; Simon & Johnson, 2015). Consequently, an increased understanding of school policies and practices which appropriately support early childhood educators would positively impact continued teacher perseverance and student outcomes if the experiences of the participants can be maintained or replicated in other early learning programs.

The sites selected for this study represent a wide range in program size, recognized quality, services offered, location, and program management. Due to the range of programs, the experience of the participants may apply to an increased number of programs both within the immediate community and within the larger geographic region of the state. The information from the study can be shared with early learning programs through a variety of state and community organizations allowing an increased number of programs to benefit from the shared experiences of the participants.

As the researcher, I also sought to add to the current body of literature concerning perseverance in education. Currently, many studies exist studying the phenomenon from a

quantitative perspective or within the context of another setting (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Kaden et al., 2016; Lochmiller et al., 2016; Lochmiller et al., 2016; Mee & Haverback, 2014). But, limited research exists within the context of early learning centers (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Wells, 2014), or from a qualitative perspective examining the teachers' experience with perseverance (Gallant, & Riley, 2014; Kraft et al., 2016).

Concerns have been noted in previous studies surrounding compensation and work environment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Clipa & Boghean, 2015; High-Quality Early Learning Settings, 2016; NSECE, 2015; Kraft et al., 2016; Wells, 2014; Whitebook et al., 2014). The experiences of the participants may expand Herzberg's (1968) theory by providing insight regarding which experiences most heavily impact early childhood educators' abilities to persevere even when faced with challenges related to school climate. This study may provide insight into how values impact motivation and perseverance. Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory will be examined, and theoretical contributions to this theory will be achieved by examining the theory in a new setting, as the theory derived from study participants who ranged in careers but did not include early childhood educators. (Herzberg, 1968). Applying the theory to a new profession will expand upon the previous work of Herzberg.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer one central research question, and two research subquestions regarding the essence of the participants' lived experiences with perseverance in their current positions as teachers in early childhood education centers. The central research question was designed to support the phenomenological foundation of the study. Phenomenology seeks to present the lived experiences of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Research indicates school climate and personal motivation impact perseverance

(Borkar, 2016; Bullough Jr, Hall-Kenyon, & MacKay, 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Najjar & Fares, 2017; Porter, 2012; Russell, Williams, & Gleason-Gomez, 2010; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Central Research Question

How do early childhood educators of five or more years in the same early learning program describe their experiences with perseverance and reasons for persevering as early educators in the same early learning program?

Subquestions

SQ1. How do early childhood educators perceive that their experiences within their early learning program impacted their decisions to persevere as early educators?

Subquestion one sought to delve deeper into the experiences that would both encourage and discourage perseverance. Currently, early childhood education teachers have an attrition rate of 25-50% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; DOE & DHHS, 2013; Hale-Jinks et al.,2006; Porter, 2012; Wells, 2014) with one-fifth of early childhood educators leaving the field altogether (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; DOE & DHHS, 2016; Wells, 2014). This means that 80% of those who fail to persevere at an early learning center change places of employment while remaining in the field.

In comparison, it takes teachers of school-aged children five years in the profession to reach these percentages (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Wells, 2014). The discrepancy between perseverance rates of school-aged teachers and early childhood education teachers indicates there are characteristics exclusive to early childhood education centers that create a more challenging work environment.

This question also addresses the impact of school climate on teacher perseverance (Borkar, 2016; Kraft et al., 2016). The research indicates the issue of perseverance goes beyond

simply remaining in the field of early childhood education and extends to remaining in the same school (Bullough Jr et al., 2012; DOE & DHHS, 2016; Porter, 2012; Russell et al., 2010). While perseverance in the field benefits the field as a whole, the impact of attrition is still felt at the school level and limits the quality of the program as well as child outcomes (Barnett & Masse, 2007; Kraft et al., 2016; Reynolds et al., 2002; Porter, 2012; Wells, 2014).

SQ2. How do early childhood educators who persevere in the same early learning program for five or more years perceive that their coping methods promoted their perseverance and ability to face challenges in the early childhood workplace?

Subquestion number two seeks to discover the experiences that create challenges for perseverance in addition to the experiences that encourage teachers to persevere. Challenges presented in the literature include low wages (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Porter, 2012; Russell et al., 2010; Wells, 2014), limited benefits (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Porter, 2012) and lack of administrator support (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Kraft et al., 2016). Compensation and a lack of benefits are addressed as hygiene factors by Herzberg (1968), and are associated with job dissatisfaction.

The subjects of the study have persevered through the most common period of attrition, years one through five (Gallant, & Riley, 2014; Pogodzinski et al.2013; Riley, 2011; Santavirta, Solovieva, & Theorell, 2007). The second subquestion seeks to explore the experience early educators who persevere have coping with the potential challenges of their employment experience. Insight may be gained to support other early educators by understanding perseverance strategies utilized by participants.

Definitions

1. *Early Educator*- An individual providing support for growth, development, and education of children birth through age eight within the context of an early learning center (Morrison, 2015).
2. *Early Learning Center*- A program supporting the growth, development, and education of children birth through age eight (Morrison, 2015). This study will further define early learning centers as programs independent of school districts in which care and education are provided through face to face interactions between the teacher and child.
3. *Persevere*- Overcoming obstacles regardless of genes or talent through hard work and focus (Hoerr, 2017).
4. *Quality Education*- Definitions of quality in early childhood education programs vary widely by location, program, and pedagogical beliefs. For the purpose of this study quality will be defined as valid and reliable indicators of developmentally appropriate classroom environments and interactions which promote child learning (DOE, 2018).
5. *Turnover*- A phrase used in American culture to reference attrition (Wells, 2014).

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences that motivate early childhood educators to persevere in their positions at the same early childhood education center, for five or more years, in south-central Pennsylvania. This study sought to present the essence of the perseverance experiences among early childhood educators who have remained in their current program for five or more years. The study sought to answer one central research question and two subquestions, in order to present the essence of the perseverance experience. The information shared by these educators helps to inform

program policies and practices to encourage more early childhood educators to persevere, thus raising levels of quality and improving student outcomes.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The teachers who remain in the field may provide insight into experiences that have promoted their perseverance. Chapter Two of the present study will examine literature related to current theory regarding perseverance, the impact of perseverance in education, as well as experiences which impact perseverance among early childhood educators. Quality education, the impact of perseverance, student outcomes, and the fiscal impact of the perseverance of teachers will also be examined within this chapter.

Teacher perseverance is a challenge for early learning centers, yet, a key indicator of quality in early learning is teacher perseverance (Borkar, 2016; Cassidy, Lower, Kintner-Duffy, Hegde, & Shim, 2011; Center on the Developing Child, 2007; Klein et al., 2016; Phillips & Meloy, 2012). Expectations are placed on preschool teachers, including educational attainment and professional responsibilities, while preschool teachers are compensated less than half of a K-12 teacher's average salary (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; DOE & DHHS, 2016; NSECE, 2015; Maryland Family Network, 2015; Whitebrook et al., 2014; Wells, 2014). For some teachers, this type of work environment is too much to bear and finding another position within the teaching profession is a decision that comes easily (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Friedman-Krauss, Raver, Morris, & Jones, 2014; Hale-Jinks et al.,2006). While for some, this job is viewed as a calling and remaining in the education profession, working with the youngest learners, provides personal fulfillment (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Langford, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this study is Herzberg's (1968) motivation hygiene theory, also known as two-factor theory. Herzberg's (1968) work expands upon the work of an

earlier theorist, Maslow. In his hierarchy of needs, Maslow (1943) proposed five sets of needs. The most basic of these needs is physiological, followed by safety and security, social or belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization. For children and adults, these needs, and their progression are important to consider when examining both the impact of low perseverance rates and the motivation of teachers to persevere.

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs may be applied to both the child and the teacher in situations of perseverance. For children, the basic need of feeling safe comes from developing a relationship with their caregiver. Children who are faced with low rates of teacher perseverance are constantly bombarded with a new person who has yet to be determined trustworthy. This climate challenges a child's ability to learn and development at an optimum pace (Center on the Developing Child, 2007; DOE & DHHS, 2016; Hale-Jinks, Knopf and Kemple, 2006; Horm, Hyson, & Winton, 2013; Kraft et al., 2016; Phillips & Meloy, 2012; Ronfeldt et al., 2013).

Maslow's theory provides a basic framework that combines both extrinsic and intrinsic experiences which impact perseverance through motivational needs. To thoroughly examine perseverance in early childhood educators, both intrinsic and extrinsic experiences must be considered because research indicates both impact perseverance in the workplace (Bullough Jr et al., 2012; Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Johnson, 1990; Kraft et al., 2016; Hoerr, 2017; Porter, 2012; Russell et al., 2010). Consequently, a theoretical framework which acknowledges the importance of both extrinsic and intrinsic experiences within employment satisfaction is necessary for this study.

For individuals who are already in the self-actualization stage (Maslow, 1943), who are already working at maximum capacity, and are committed to their current work situation, motivation must still exist. For these teachers or employees, Maslow (1943) recognized their

motivation must come from sources other than their needs. Maslow (1943) proposed these individuals are motivated to meet intrinsic values such as truth, excellence or simplicity, depending on the individual. The research on teacher perseverance acknowledges intrinsic values to a very small degree (Hoerr, 2017; Kraft et al., 2016; Langford, 2008; Wells, 2014). In specific areas of teaching, with lower than average teacher perseverance, such as urban school districts, teachers have identified intrinsic values, such as making a difference in society as a motivation for remaining in their position (Easley, 2006; Kraft & Papay, 2014; Watlington et al., 2010).

Herzberg's (1968) research and motivation hygiene theory serve to further explain motivation and perseverance within the workplace by essentially adding to Maslow's theory. Maslow's (1943) theory provides guidance on general motivation and needs while Herzberg (1968) sought to determine what people want specifically from their jobs. People are motivated to have their needs met. If their needs can be met by a variety of jobs or employers, employees may not stay in a specific field or may not stay with a specific employer if they choose to remain in the same field (Herzberg, 1968). Herzberg recognized a prevailing need within employers who did not know how to motivate employees to comply with their work environment and requirements (Herzberg, 1968). Herzberg (1968) developed a theory of motivation expanding on Maslow's theory that separates hygiene and motivators. The research has been one of the most replicated studies related to job attitudes (Herzberg, 1968). His research indicated a two-factor theory model in which experiences that impact job satisfaction are different from experiences which impact job dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1968). This two-factor theory will guide the study of experiences which impact perseverance among early childhood educators by delineating

between experiences which impact them to persevere and experiences which challenge their motivation to persevere (Herzberg, 1968).

When examining perseverance, the main motivation associated with perseverance is satisfaction. Satisfaction in the workplace may be found in a variety of job attributes (Najjar & Fares, 2017). Directors who do not assume the source of a teacher's satisfaction but take time to develop a relationship with teachers to ascertain needs appropriately have the potential to effectively increase a teacher's ability to persevere (Hoerr, 2017; Kraft et al., 2016; Najjar & Fares, 2017). The primary experiences associated with negatively impacting the perseverance of early childhood educators, financial remuneration and working conditions, fall into Herzberg's (1968) hygiene factors. Herzberg (1968) found that experiences such as compensation and working conditions do not contribute to job satisfaction or promote perseverance; instead, these experiences can promote job dissatisfaction or limit an individual's motivation to persevere.

Similarly, Herzberg's (1986) theory surrounding motivation aligns with the current research regarding experiences that positively impact an early educator's ability to persevere. A teacher's level of educational attainment has been found to impact their level of perseverance. Educational attainment can provide a sense of achievement, allow for advancement and increased responsibility, as well as demonstrate a commitment to the field of education (Diamond, Justice, Siegler, Snyder, 2013; Klein et al., 2016). These experiences all align with Herzberg's (1968) motivation factors. Also, teachers who view early childhood education as a calling or feel a sense of commitment to the students they work with, are more likely to persevere. (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Hall-Kenyon et al., 2013; Wells, 2014). For these teachers, motivation comes from the work itself, which is another experience associated with satisfaction in Herzberg's (1968) motivation hygiene theory.

In addressing those in the workforce, Herzberg (1968) discussed various practices that encourage individuals to accomplish tasks. There is a negative physical motivation approach that involves harassing or physically harming people to get them to accomplish a task. A negative psychological approach involves applying psychological harm to an individual (Herzberg, 1968). For obvious reasons, these are not appropriate practices within the workforce because they neglect to provide a means of motivating employees to accomplish the desired task. The person harassing or psychologically harming the employee is motivated to accomplish the task. The employee is simply motivated to stop harassment (Herzberg, 1968).

Positive motivation, on the other hand, creates a similar environment in which the individual providing incentives is motivated to accomplish the task, but the employee is only motivated to get the incentive (Herzberg, 1968). Positive motivation is provided in the workplace by offering incentives like increased salary, promotions, or recognition, but still does not serve to motivate the employee to accomplish the task (Herzberg, 1968). Positive motivation is the most common strategy used to motivate employees in American businesses (Herzberg, 1968).

The goal of motivation in the workplace, which will support employee perseverance, is to engage employees in such a way that they want to do the work, not that they want the reward or want to avoid harassment. This further aligns with Maslow's (1943) work, as individuals reach the self-actualization stage. They are motivated by intrinsic values like ideas of goodness, beauty, justice, or truth (Maslow, 1943). These values can motivate employees to perform even when all their physical needs are met (Herzberg, 1968; Maslow, 1943).

The challenge with using traditional extrinsic motivation techniques in the workforce is the constant need to increase those extrinsic rewards (Herzberg, 1968). For example, if pay is

used as a motivation strategy, employees will work for the next pay increase (Herzberg, 1968). The same is true with fringe benefits, offering incentives like additional time off or retirement packages do not serve to motivate employees to complete the work and persevere; it serves to motivate employees to get the fringe incentive (Herzberg, 1968).

Adjusting communication practices or developing relationships of trust between the employer and the employee fail to promote the kind of motivation sought in the workplace. The idea has also been proposed that employees who see the most important facts about a situation and the effects of that situation on other things would be more motivated than employees who only saw their role in the project. Herzberg (1968) provided an example of this type of motivation by comparing it to an employer telling an employee who tightens bolts all day they are building a car. This provides the employee with the big picture. The result is then perceived as more worthwhile than their task, but this alone is not enough to truly impact an employee's ability to persevere (Herzberg, 1968).

To examine perseverance, an understanding of what motivates employees must be considered. Herzberg (1968) proposed eliminating the notion that satisfaction and dissatisfaction are opposites of each other. Instead, the opposite of job satisfaction is no job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1968). Needs that would be located on the bottom half of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy, built-in drives to avoid pain and biologically conditioned needs, are considered by Herzberg (1968) as hygiene factors and needs. Motivation factors and needs are located near the top of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy, which he refers to as growth and achievement. Growth and achievement are considered by Herzberg (1968) as motivators. Growth factors or motivators include achievement, recognition for achievement, the work itself, responsibility, and growth or advancement (Herzberg, 1968). Experiences associated with dissatisfaction include company

policy and administration, supervision, interpersonal relationships, working conditions, salary, status, and security (Herzberg, 1968). Herzberg found through his work that motivators were the primary reason for job satisfaction, and encouraged perseverance, while hygiene factors were the primary cause of job dissatisfaction and discouraged perseverance (Herzberg, 1968).

Herzberg's theory is supported by the current body of literature related to teacher perseverance, as current literature indicates that a variety of experiences impact teacher perseverance (Borkar, 2016; Hoerr, 2017; Kraft et al., 2016; Kraft & Papay, 2014; Marinell & Coca, 2013). The primary experience associated with teacher perseverance is school climate (Borkar, 2016; Kraft et al., 2016; Simon & Johnson, 2015). School climate has been defined as the 'quality and the character of the schools' life' (Borkar, 2016). School climate, as it relates to teacher perseverance, has been studied by examining the context of professional environment (Kraft & Papay, 2014), administrator support (Hoerr, 2017), school organization (Marinell & Coca, 2013), and policy and practice (Kraft et al., 2016).

Herzberg's (1968) theory considers employment experiences which impact school climate such as administration, working conditions, security, recognition for achievement, opportunity for advancement, and the work itself. He classified these experiences as commonly impacting either job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Herzberg's (1968) theory provides a framework by which intrinsic motivators and extrinsic motivators related to school climate can be considered.

Related Literature

The following section examines current literature related to perseverance. An overview describing the importance of accessible, quality early education, as it relates to society, families, and children will be presented. The overview will be followed by an examination of the direct

impact teacher perseverance has on program performance, student outcomes, and fiscal spending for school districts and early learning programs. The final sections of this chapter will address specific experiences from current research which impact perseverance. These experiences are presented in sections aligned with Herzberg's (1968) motivation hygiene theory. Both hygiene and motivation experiences have been examined in the context of research among participants from varying locations and specializations in the field of education.

Quality Education

Quality education not only impacts the student and family, but the economy as a whole (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007; Borkar, 2016; DOE & DHHS, 2016; Kraft et al., 2016; Milanowski & Odden, 2007; and Porter, 2012). Families, early childhood professionals, and community stakeholders list affordability as the essential characteristic of a quality early learning center (Mooney & Munton, 1998). The United States DOE (2016) defines quality in education as valid and reliable indicators of developmentally appropriate classroom environments and interactions which promote child learning. Similarly, the state of Pennsylvania, the present study's location, rates quality levels of early education programs based on a variety of indicators such as curriculum, student and teacher assessments, classroom arrangement, materials, teacher training, and administrator training and support (Keystone Stars, 2017).

Quality in early learning correlates closely with teacher training and education (Center on the Developing Child, 2007; DOE & DHHS, 2016; Harris & Sass, 2011; Horm et al., 2013; Klein et al., 2016; Roseman, 1999). Additional areas correlated with quality in early childhood education include responsive environments, access to materials, parent engagement, health and safety practices and business practices (Environment Rating Scale, 2017). Practices highlighted in quality rating scales such as the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS, 2016),

usually require financial capital to either provide resources, maintain equipment and supplies, or train the teachers and administrators. This financial capital comes from the consumer or the families unless the center such as Head Start is directly supported by government funding. To provide a quality rich environment and balance the fiscal budget, most early learning teachers are compensated at or below the poverty level (Bassok, Fitzpatrick, Loeb, & Paglayan, 2012; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Center for the Child Care Workforce, 2016; DOE and DHHS, 2016; Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2012; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2012; Whitebrook et al., 2014).

Affordability may be a consideration of families and community stakeholders (Mooney & Munton, 1999) but quality early learning often comes at a cost (Center for the Child Care Workforce, 2016; DOE and DHHS, 2016). The cost of quality is far outweighed by the benefits (Center for the Child Care Workforce, 2016; DOE and DHHS, 2016). Students who attended a quality early learning program achieved higher cognitive ability than those who did not (Center for the Child Care Workforce, 2016; DOE and DHHS, 2016; Porter, 2012). Not only are children who are exposed to quality early learning experiences more likely to function at a higher cognitive level, they are also more likely to function at higher social and emotional levels (Center on the Developing Child, 2007; DHHS & DOE 2016; Horm et al., 2013; Phillips & Meloy, 2012; Porter, 2012). This improved functioning of cognitive and social functions increases a child's success rate in kindergarten (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Porter, 2012; Wells, 2014). Children who were offered a quality early learning experience were more likely to graduate from high school and go to college. They were less likely to be retained in a grade during their K-12 education (Barnett & Masse, 2007; Lamont et al., 2013; Petras et al., 2011; Reynolds et al., 2002).

Impact of perseverance. Teacher perseverance impacts schools and programs both from an education and fiscal standpoint (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Klein et al., 2015; Lamont et al., 2013; Petras et al., 2011; Wells, 2014). The literature outlined in the following sections demonstrates the individual and societal improvements that could be achieved if greater numbers of teachers persevered and maintained their careers as educators. Through increased teacher perseverance, fiscal concerns for school districts and early learning programs could be minimized, while student outcomes improve (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Klein et al., 2015; Kraft et al., 2016; Lamont, et al., 2013; Petras et al., 2011; Wells, 2014).

Student outcomes. When teachers persevere in early education, they can form a social- and emotional attachment with the children in their classroom, which promotes learning (Arslan, 2017; Center on the Developing Child, 2007; Lang et al., 2016; Phillips & Meloy, 2010; Porter, 2012). Teacher perseverance has been linked to increased language skills in students and improved social and emotional development (Center on the Developing Child, 2007; DOE & DHHS, 2016; Hale-Jinks et al.,2006; Horm et al., 2013; Klein et al., 2016; Korjenevitch & Dunifon, 2010; Phillips & Meloy, 2012). The impact of a positive teacher-student relationship has been well established (Arslan, 2017; Klein et al., 2016; Kraft et al., 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Wells, 2014) and teacher perseverance allows for that relationship to grow and flourish, thus promoting development (Arslan, 2017; Hale-Jinks et al.,2006; Korjenevitch & Dunifon, 2010; Lang et al., 2016). High attrition rates or turnover, as it is often referred to in American culture, negatively impact the relationship between the child and the teacher, causing emotional stress for children (Lang et al., 2016; Wells, 2014). Hamre and Pianta (2001) found that negative relationships between a child and their kindergarten teacher impacted their academic and behavioral success to the eighth grade. This study did not discuss findings related to early

childhood education teacher/student relationships but serves to demonstrate the far-reaching implications these early relationships have on student outcomes. Teacher perseverance impacts outcomes among students in urban schools or students from low socio-economic backgrounds even more significantly than students from rural or high socio-economic backgrounds (Beteill et al., 2012; Kraft et. al., 2015; Kraft et al., 2016; Pogodzinski et al., 2013; Watlington et al., 2010).

An additional outcome impacted by the child-teacher relationship is the rate of child expulsions or suspensions from early learning programs. In a policy statement issued by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) with the United States Department of Education (DOE), the two departments noted that expulsion rates are high in early learning settings (DOE & DHHS, 2017). Expulsion from an early learning center has been associated with negative educational and life outcomes (Lamont et al., 2013; Petras et al., 2011). The goal of the DHHS is to make states aware of racial, sexual, and ethnic biases in student expulsion rates while simultaneously providing resources that could be used to implement preventative measures and practices to eliminate, or severely limit, the rates of expulsion in early learning programs (DOE & DHHS, 2017). The DOE (2014) lists creating positive climates as the priority for early learning programs. Relationships must be established between the child and the teacher to create positive learning climates (Aslan, 2017; Borkar, 2016; Hale-Jinks et al., 2006; Korjenevitch & Dunifon, 2010; Porter, 2012).

The teacher-child relationship is not the only relationship that impacts student outcomes; the parent-teacher relationship has also been found to as well (Cassidy et al., 2011; Morrison, 2015; Rouse & O'Brien, 2017). Parent involvement has been linked to positive educational, social, emotional, and career outcomes for students (Cassidy et al., 2011; Morrison, 2015; Rouse & O'Brien, 2017).

An indicator of quality in early childhood education is family engagement (ECERS, 2016; Lang et al., 2016; Rouse & O'Brien, 2017). Teacher perseverance impacts not only the teacher-student relationship but also the teacher-parent relationships (Cassidy et al., 2011; Lang et al., 2016; Morrison, 2015). Early childhood education is also often linked to early care. Parents and teachers share caregiving responsibilities and must communicate to an even greater degree than parents and teachers in a K-12 setting based upon the nature of the services and physical needs of the children (Lang et al., 2016) making consistency of teachers even more critical in the early childhood education setting. Teacher perseverance impacts the quality of the early childhood education program and quality impacts student outcomes (Arslan, 2017; Hale-Jinks et al., 2006; Klein et al., 2016; Kraft et al., 2016; Korjenevitch & Dunifon, 2010; Lamont et al., 2013; Marinell, & Yee, 2016; Petras et al., 2011; Porter, 2012).

With so many developmental outcomes hinging on teacher perseverance in early education, an average turnover rate of anywhere from 25-50% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Hale-Jinks et al., 2006; Porter, 2012; Wells, 2014), with one fifth of early childhood educators leaving the field altogether (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Wells, 2014), is terrifying at best. In comparison, it takes teachers of school-aged children five years in the profession to reach these attrition percentages (Klein et al., 2016; Wells, 2014). Lack of teacher perseverance, or attrition, is a growing concern among school-aged teachers as well, but these percentages demonstrate the severely low rates of perseverance in the field of early childhood education specifically.

Fiscal impact. When teachers leave schools, there is a substantial financial impact on those schools, both when examining student outcomes and when examining fiscal operations (Barnes et al., 2007; DOE & DHHS, 2016; Kraft et al., 2016; Milanowski & Odden, 2007;

Watlington et al., 2010). Schools may not be able to control the number of teachers who retire from the profession but, as previously stated, the flood of teachers exiting the profession prematurely is a problem that can and should be addressed (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Ingersoll, 2002; Papay & Kraft, 2015; Watlington et al., 2010).

The quantitative cost resulting from teachers who do not persevere, thereby increasing rates of turnover, is of concern for both policymakers and school leadership (Barnes et al., 2007; DOE & DHHS, 2016; Papay & Kraft, 2015; Watlington et al., 2010). Non-educational industry-based models were used to quantify the cost of turnover (Watlington et al., 2010). These models were limited in their ability to interpret the cost of turnover within districts, and the School Turnover Analysis (STA) (Shockley, Guglielmino, & Watlington, 2006) and the Teacher Turnover Cost Calculator (TTCC) (Barnes et al., 2007) were developed to help provide a more accurate picture of the fiscal cost of attrition.

The three primary areas in which fiscal costs arise when examining teacher attrition are separation costs, replacement costs, and training costs (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Watlington et al., 2010). Estimates of cost for K-12 schools in the United States totaled 2.2 billion dollars for teachers who leave the profession and $4.9 billion per year when teachers who change districts are included in the formula (Watlington et al., 2010). These numbers are staggering especially when K-12 schools enjoy significantly higher rates of teacher perseverance than early childhood education centers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; DOE & DHHS, 2016). A similar study, quantifying attrition costs for early childhood education programs, could not be found, but the fiscal impact that is incurred when teachers do not persevere within education is apparent (Barnes et al., 2007; DOE & DHHS; Kraft, et al., Marinell, & Yee, 2016; Milanowski & Odden, 2007).

Areas considered when examining the cost of teacher attrition include considerations such as the cost of the exit interviewer's time, separation pay, sick leave pay, unemployment tax costs, recruiting costs, interviewing/administrative costs, training costs, and salaries for substitutes (Watlington et al., 2010). The impact of these costs varies greatly by school and region, but schools which are underperforming or in urban settings continually demonstrate challenges with both recruitment and teacher perseverance (Kraft et al., 2015; Kraft et al., 2016; Watlington et al., 2010).

Experiences impacting perseverance. In a classical approach to the labor market, education is considered a regulated market because teaching requires certification and a degree from a higher education institute (Dupriez, Delvaux, & Lothaire, 2016). Typical shortages in the workforce are considered from a supply and demand standpoint, while regulated workforce jobs are viewed from a context examining a lack of graduates or qualified personnel (Dupriez et al., 2016). In many countries, including the UK (White, Gorard, & See, 2006), Australia (Buchanan et al., 2013) and the United States (Sass, Flores, Claeys, & Perz, 2012), a shortage of teachers, especially early childhood education teachers, has been found to be related more closely to the profession's inability to retain those qualified to teach than a lack of qualified personnel. Two primary experiences have been associated with limiting teacher perseverance in early learning programs: financial remuneration and working conditions. (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Klein et al., 2016; Wells, 2014). Both financial remuneration and working conditions are part of the school's climate.

School climate. The experiences currently associated with impacting early educator perseverance are aligned with school climate. School climate is often referred to as the 'quality and the character of the school's life, including both social and physical aspects of the school

(Borkar, 2016). Experiences relating to achievement, recognition for achievement, the work itself, responsibility, growth, advancement, company policy, administration, supervision, interpersonal relationships, working conditions, salary, status, and security are experiences Herzberg (1968) saw as impacting job satisfaction, job dissatisfaction, and perseverance. These experiences also impact the school climate (Borkar, 2016).

School climate finds its roots in the everyday policies and practices that define an organization (Borkar, 2016; Kraft et al., 2016). Teachers' career decisions have been found to be most closely linked with the organizational contexts in which they teach (Johnson, 2009; Kennedy, 2010; Kraft et al., 2016). Schools which have dysfunctional contexts or lack organizational support have lower rates of teacher perseverance (Kraft et al., 2016; Simon & Johnson, 2015). Schools in which teachers persevere have been found to maximize the effectiveness of the teacher by providing opportunities for feedback, peer collaboration opportunities, responsive administrators and an ordered environment (Borkar, 2016; Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Kraft et al., 2016; Kraft & Papay, 2014). Teachers have referenced collegial interactions, administrative support, and school discipline as experiences profoundly impacting their ability not only to be effective teachers but also to persevere within their school setting (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Johnson & Birkland, 2003; Kraft et al., 2015; Kraft et al., 2016).

Studies indicated school context or school climate is a stronger predictor of teacher perseverance than individual teacher traits (Allensworth et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Ladd, 2011; Loeb et al., 2005; Marinell & Coca, 2013; Simon & Johnson, 2015). The most reliable predictors of teacher perseverance related to school climate are quality of leadership (Kraft et al., 2016; Ladd, 2011), order and discipline within the school and supportive, collegial relationships (Kraft et al., 2016; Simon & Johnson, 2015). If these experiences are

improved within schools, perseverance rates of teachers have been found to improve as well (Kraft et al., 2016). School climate, especially these identified experiences, are closely associated with a teacher's decision to leave a school while remaining in the teaching profession (Kraft et al., 2016). Additional characteristics impacting school climate within the context of early childhood education are further examined in subsequent sections. These school climate characteristics can be aligned with Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory as either hygiene factors or motivators.

Hygiene factors. The following sections provide additional information regarding the hygiene factors, or experiences commonly impacting dissatisfaction. These experiences challenge the ability of early childhood educators to persevere within their current center.

Compensation. Most early learning teachers are compensated at a rate that puts them at or below the poverty level (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017; Center for the Child Care Workforce, 2006; Klein et al., 2016; NSECE, 2015; Maryland Family Network, 2015; Whitebrook et al., 2014). Teachers with the same education and experience earn an average of $30,000 more per year if teaching in a public school rather than teaching in a preschool (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Klein et al., 2016; NSECE, 2015; Maryland Family Network, 2015; Whitebrook et al., 2014). This means early learning teachers are often making between $7.90 and $9.35 per hour (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Porter, 2012) putting them at about one third compensation of a kindergarten teacher, despite having identical educational and experiential backgrounds (Cassidy et al., 2011; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; NSECE, 2015). For many teachers, this pay gap is too significant and, despite a desire to remain working within early education, these teachers must make a fundamental economic decision and explore other employment options (Whitebook et al., 2014).

As teachers consider leaving the field of early education, the initial consideration frequently comes based on their perception of fair pay (Russell et al., 2010; Whitebook et al., 2014). This perception was an even greater consideration for directors or teachers with higher level degrees (NSECE, 2015; Porter, 2012). Teachers' referral to fair pay, rather than increased pay, indicates even teachers who may not need significant income to help support their family or lifestyle, could be influenced to leave their position in favor of a position offering an increased salary. For some teachers, this decision may be driven less by economic necessity and more by an evaluation of their value based upon their experience, degrees earned, or the level of work required of them (Porter, 2012; Whitebook et al., 2014). Despite fair pay being a consideration, teachers typically will not leave the field based only on low pay (Wells, 2014). Most preschool teachers enter the profession to help educate and nurture children and young families (Bullough Jr et al., 2012; NSECE, 2015; Wells, 2014), understanding the position one is accepting will not make one wealthy. Overall, low wages have been correlated with lower perseverance rates while higher wages have been correlated with higher perseverance rates and increase program quality (DOE and DHHS, 2016; NSECE, 2015; Wells, 2014; Yoshikawa et al., 2013).

Monetary compensation is not the only consideration of professionals when examining economic pressures. Health insurance, retirement plans, or other fringe benefits may be heavily considered. Even in this area, early childhood educators will struggle to find employer support. Only 30-50% of early childhood educators are offered health insurance from their employer (DOE & DHHS, 2016; NSECE, 2015; Porter, 2012). The lack of benefits can impact a teacher's decision to seek other employment, especially when combined with low wages (DOE & DHHS, 2016; NSECE, 2015; Porter, 2012; Wells, 2014).

Work conditions. Preschool teachers are often faced with job stressors that may not be as prevalent in educational settings in later years (Clipa & Boghean, 2015). Over 50% of preschool teachers identify the experience as being very or extremely stressful, with only 6% reporting low stress associated with their work (Clipa & Boghean, 2015). Preschool children may be experiencing their first formal education setting and developmental delays, disabilities, or behavior challenges may not have implemented support. Teachers list behavior concerns (Bullough, Jr. et al., 2012; Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Friedman-Krauss et al., 2014; Kraft et al., 2016; Kraft et al, 2015; Kraft & Papay, 2014) as well as high stress and emotional and physical exhaustion (Hale-Jinks et al.,2006; Wells, 2014) as reasons for leaving the field of early education. Managing students' negative behavior in the classroom is a significant point of stress for teachers (Dorman, 2003; Friedman-Krauss et al., 2014; Hinds et al., 2014; Kraft et al., 2016; Kraft et al, 2015; Kraft & Papay, 2014; Manassero et al., 2006). This is demonstrated in the levels of teacher attrition, as these levels have been found to be higher in schools with high levels of disruptive or challenging behavior (Dorman, 2003; Friedman-Krauss et al., 2014; Hastings & Bham, 2003; Kraft et al., 2016; Kraft et al, 2015; Kraft & Papay, 2014). High levels of stress make leaving a low paying job easier for teachers (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Hale-Jinks et al.,2006).

Classroom responsibilities have been one of the primary themes identified by early childhood educators when reflecting on stress in the workplace (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Hinds et al., 2014; Kraft et al., 2016). This stress impacts a teacher’s ability to persevere and negatively impacts one’s psychological, social, and physiological health (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Hurrell, Nelson, & Simmons, 1998; Whitebrook et al., 2014; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Hildebrand (1976) wrote that the responsibility of impacting young children is significant and

those who teach young learners are taking on more than a typical job. They are joining a profession. This profession is full of challenges and rewards and can at times be frustrating.

Hildebrand (1976) brings to light an additional stressor that many early childhood educators have experienced. American society often views early childhood educators as less valuable than school-aged teachers (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; DOE and DHHS, 2016; Langford, 2008). In his State of the Union Address in 2015, President Barack Obama highlighted the importance of affordable, high-quality childcare based on the current economic climate, which necessitates both parents working in many families (State of the Union, 2015). He proposed addressing childcare as a national economic priority, which benefits all of society.

Despite the federal government expressing the value of early childhood education, the idea that early childhood educators are merely babysitters still exists. This idea negates the experience, knowledge, and expertise related to the care and development of young children, which many teachers in the field possess (DOE & DHHS, 2016; NSECE, 2015; Wells, 2014). While early childhood educators are asked to assume a very wide range of responsibilities within their professional roles, their position is not one which garners high levels of respect (Buchanan et al., 2013; Clipa & Boghean, 2015; DOE & DHHS, 2016; Langford, 2008). This struggle is not specific to the United States. Additional countries in which studies have been conducted, such as Canada (Langford, 2008) and Australia (Buchanan et al., 2013), have also identified a lack of professional recognition as a source of stress for early childhood educators.

Early educators also identify experiences related to late payments, sick children attending the program while contagious, negative interactions with parents, parents who pick up their children late from the center, and events or circumstances the children are exposed to in their

home life, increase the stress experienced within the workplace (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Curbow, Spratt, Ungaretti, McDonnell, & Breckler, 2000).

Teachers who feel their workload is too extensive are more likely to leave their positions, but the correlation has not been found to be strong (Wells, 2014). Teachers find arduous working conditions to be a substantial stressor (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Hale-Jinks et al.,2006). Teachers cited long hours, physical demands, and the constant variation of stimuli being presented (fights in centers, bleeding children, sick children) as creating stress (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Friedman-Krauss et al., 2014; Hale-Jinks et al.,2006). In addition to these experiences, teachers in K-12 schools commonly cite lack of administrator support and a negative school culture as reasons for leaving (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Gallant, & Riley, 2014; Kraft et al., 2016; Simon & Johnson, 2015). For about one-third of teachers, an opportunity to advance is also an important consideration impacting the teacher's decision to persevere within the program (Ruhland, 2001). Exponentially increasing the problem of limited perseverance, is a noted pattern that turnover begets turnover (Hale-Jinks et al.,2006; Wells, 2014). As teachers leave their positions, current teachers are forced to assume their workload or train new staff, creating additional stress for the teachers who stay, thus increasing the challenges faced by teachers who remain in the field (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Wells, 2014).

Additional studies demonstrate that work environment plays a role in teacher perseverance in other educational settings. For example, charter school teacher perseverance has been found to be lower than traditional brick and mortar schools (Samuels, 2011). While in urban school settings, teacher perseverance rates are lower when compared to rural school settings (Barnett & Stevenson, 2016; Easley, 2006; Kraft et al., 2015; Watlington et al., 2010).

In urban schools, as well as in schools classified as low performing, low teacher perseverance rates have also been found to have an excessively negative impact on students (Kraft et al., 2016; Watlington et al., 2010). Schools with students who are at risk often have a variety of characteristics which make teacher perseverance more challenging. Urban and under-performing schools often have high populations of students that require specialized or additional support and, in addition, these schools are often underfunded due to the low socio-economic status of the community from which their tax base is derived from (Barnett & Stevenson, 2016; Watlington et al., 2010).

Even if underperforming schools can recruit qualified teachers, a challenge in and of itself, teachers are less likely to persevere in underfunded, low performing schools (Barnett & Stevenson, 2016; Watlington et al., 2010). Teachers are likely to consider their current position, expected earnings, and working conditions against potential earnings and working conditions possible within other districts, impacting their decision to persevere. For urban and underperforming schools, this phenomenon of low perseverance rates among teachers creates an environment which calls into question academic equality and social justice (Watlington et al., 2010). Students with low-income backgrounds already are faced with a variety of risk factors related to poverty and its far-reaching impact. Students in underperforming or low-income districts are often taught by the novice teachers who quickly leave the profession or school only to be replaced by another novice teacher, further impacting student performance (Barnes et al., 2007; Harris & Sass, 2011; Papay & Kraft, 2015; Rockoff, 2004).

On a national level, schools with higher than average minority populations have been linked with low teacher perseverance (Barnes et al., 2007; Barnett & Stevenson, 2016; Kraft et al., 2015; Kraft et al., 2016). Upon examination of this phenomenon at a closer district by

district level, the impact of the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch, or high levels of children living at or slightly above the poverty line, has a greater impact on teacher perseverance than the percentage of minority students (Barnett & Stevenson, 2016; Shockley et al., 2005). These findings indicate the impacts of poverty within a district both on funding, supplies, and individualized student performance heavily impact a teacher's ability to persevere (Barnett & Stevenson, 2016).

In Head Start, a federally funded program that provides early education, health, and family services to children who are considered low income (Head Start and Early Head Start, 2017) five major challenges have been identified in classroom practices. Classroom practices do not always align with research-based practices, teachers do not buy into the program or lesson goals, assistant and lead teachers do not plan together frequently, assistant teachers do not teach consistently, and teacher perseverance is low (Christ & Wang, 2013). While these five challenges have been identified through research in a Head Start setting, some of the challenges have been identified in other education settings. Teachers cite large class sizes, pressure from higher bodies such as licensing, management, or boards, as well as lack of time, as creating a challenge to their level of perseverance (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Johnson, 2009; Kennedy, 2010; Kraft et al., 2016)

Personal life. Marital status and age have been trends linked to limiting teacher perseverance (Wells, 2014). Older teachers, as well as teachers who are married, are more likely to persevere in the field (Holochwost, DeMott, Buell, Yannetta, & Amsden, 2009; Wells, 2014). Young teachers fall into the category of novice teachers as they are just beginning their career in education. Novice teachers are less likely to persevere than teachers who are older or who have been teaching for more than five years (Gallant & Riley, 2014; Kraft et al., 2016; Papay & Kraft,

2015). Even among teachers of school-aged children who typically enjoy a retention rate higher than that of early childhood education centers, the attrition rate is close to 50% within the first five years (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Gallant, & Riley, 2014). Limited perseverance among novice teachers is not a problem localized to the United States. Almost identical rates of attrition in novice teachers have been noted in Europe, Hong Kong (Santavirta et al., 2007), and Australia (Riley, 2011).

Security. Before the 1960s, a pattern of loyalty to the company with which an individual was employed was evident (Hanif, Khalid, & Khan, 2013). As economic changes occurred, companies were no longer able to offer the same level of security to their employees, and generations of workers became defensive in their interests out of perceived need (Hanif et al., 2013). By eliminating the perceived security derived from employment, a workforce of individuals who recognized companies would no longer look out for their interests was created (Hanif et al., 2013). The new mentality of the current worker was to look out for themselves (Hanif et al., 2013). Security within the workplace was linked with impacting job dissatisfaction (Clipa & Boghean, 2014; Herzberg, 1968; Kraft et al., 2016). Companies that do not create a climate in which their employees feel secure are more likely to have employees who are dissatisfied with their jobs (Hanif et al., 2013; Herzberg, 1968; Kraft et al., 2016; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Motivation factors. The following sections address motivation experiences discussed in the current literature. According to Herzberg (1968), motivators in employment include the work itself, advancement, achievement, responsibility, growth, and recognition. Current literature reflects the value educators place in the work itself. This demonstration of commitment to the field and the children educators work with is reflected in their demeanor and

held beliefs surrounding the value of their work. Similarly, educational attainment provides the opportunity for the early educator to advance their career and skill set within the classroom.

Work itself. An excellent early educator has been described as passionate, happy, and alert to the needs of the children they care for (Langford, 2008). This Mary Poppins-like description has been expressed by early childhood educators, early childhood education professors, and parents (Langford, 2008). While the image may present as somewhat frivolous, an examination of early childhood education texts dating back through the early 1970s show a consistent pattern of these characteristics being valued for and by early childhood educators for the last four decades (Langford, 2008).

Although these characteristics may be valued in early childhood educators, knowledge of best practice and the ability to support the developmental milestones of children is also imperative to success (DOE & DHHS, 2016). When faced with increasing scientific evidence and studies of brain development, touting the importance of experiences of children in the first five years of life, early childhood educators who have been interviewed have consistently responded with an attitude of prior knowledge and understanding of the concepts released in journals (Langford, 2008). Essentially, early childhood educators have learned through lived experiences their role is valuable and heavily impacts a child's ability to succeed (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; NSECE, 2015).

In interviews conducted among early childhood educators, a common theme arose in which early childhood educators identified using personal qualities like passion and love as opposed to scientific knowledge when implementing practices within their classrooms (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Langford, 2008). Similarly, early childhood educators identified a desire to help children grow, to have a positive influence, to aid children in reaching their fullest potential

(Langford, 2008). Only a limited number of the participants who were seeking a career in the early childhood education field referenced research related to the influence on student outcomes from early childhood education experience (Langford, 2008). Instead, those interviewed expressed their desires to pursue the career derived from personal desires, experiences, or beliefs. These individuals saw themselves as "serving a higher purpose" and as "primary builders of our nation's future" as well as believing they are "preparing children for the world" (Langford, 2008).

These personal beliefs and desires about the influence of their work, not only on the child, but on society, and even the world as a whole, demonstrate how personal beliefs about the value of the work they are completing may impact an early educator's ability to persevere (Clipa & Boghean, 2015). These perceptions of the greater good and the impact their work has on society long term may provide motivation and intrinsic satisfaction to early childhood educators (Clipa & Boghean, 2015). Also, teachers who saw their work as a personal calling, or viewed themselves as professionals were more likely to persevere in the field of education (Torquati, Raikes, & Huddleston-Casas, 2007). Teachers who report feeling happy with their position are also more likely to persevere (Wells, 2014).

Personal characteristics, or the early educator’s view of their work as a calling, can positively impact teacher perseverance, but the idea that early childhood education careers are based simply on a love of children or desire to positively impact the world can present as a challenge to the field of early childhood education (Klein et al., 2016). While a love of children is indeed a strong foundation, professionals in the field must also possess specialized training and engage in professional practices to provide quality early learning experiences (Klein et al., 2016).

Despite increased dialogue surrounding the impact an early childhood educator can have on society, low perseverance rates continue to plague the profession (Hale-Jinks et al., 2006; Langford, 2008; Porter, 2012, Wells, 2014). Samples taken from students studying to enter the early childhood education field indicated that despite possession of ideal personal characteristics and an understanding of their vital role in society, fear and uncertainty remain prevalent concerning their future if they remain in early childhood education (Langford, 2008; Pogodzinski et al., 2013). In fact, many students indicated a desire to use early childhood education as a stepping stone to elementary education, a more lucrative and respected career (Langford, 2008).

Advancement. Educational attainment allows for advancement within programs and employment within an individual's field of study supports the advancement of the individual's career in their chosen field. Early childhood education teacher preparation is under-researched, perhaps adding to the problem of teacher perseverance in the field, as effective research-based strategies for teacher preparation are few and far between (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Lobman, Ryan, & McLaughlin, 2005). Most early childhood education preparation programs take an ideological stance when promoting early childhood education as a valued aspect of education, but minimal research exists to support pedagogical instruction, and the ideological stance taken in early childhood education teacher preparation is not enough to promote the field or encourage individuals to persevere within the field (Langford, 2008).

Teachers are more likely to persevere in teaching if they have more education or if their education program was designed to prepare them to work within early childhood education (Pogodzinski et al., 2013; Wells, 2014). Educational attainment has been linked with perseverance (Gallant, & Riley, 2014) and some studies have been conducted to measure the impact of educational attainment as a means to increase perseverance (Brill & McCartney, 2008;

Gable, Rothrauff, Thornburg, & Mauzy, 2007). Despite teachers with higher levels of education perhaps being qualified for more fiscally lucrative positions in elementary schools, the body of literature indicates teachers with higher degrees remain more likely to stay in early childhood education than those without degrees or with lower level degrees (Hall-Kenyon et al., 2013; Wells, 2014).

In the United States, appropriate pre-service training has also been found to correlate with teacher perseverance, although this phenomenon has not been replicated in other countries in which perseverance has been examined (Gallant & Riley, 2014). Simply possessing a degree does not necessarily equate with appropriate training and the program in which the teacher studied should be considered. For example, teachers entering the early childhood education field with a bachelor of science or bachelor of arts degree in education may be qualified for the position for which they are applyingbut may not have any experience working with preschoolers. Strategies, classroom routines, and behavioral expectations vary greatly between third grade students and preschoolers, so providing initial employment support with ongoing coaching can help promote perseverance.

***Responsibility*.** Teacher responsibility is often delegated by program administrators. Teachers who received appropriate administrative support or perceived administrators as having high levels of competence were more likely to persevere in the field of early childhood education (Hall-Kenyon et al., 2013; Kraft et al., 2016; Kraft & Papay, 2014; Russell et al., 2010). Teachers are further committed to the center they are employed with if they report high job satisfaction (Wells, 2014), get along well with co-workers, develop a positive relationship with the children in the center, and have opportunities for promotion (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Hall-Kenyon et al., 2013). A work environment that promotes a sense of belonging and allows

teachers to feel ownership of their classroom and to a greater degree, the center itself, promotes perseverance as well (Hale-Jinks et al., 2006; Kraft et al., 2016).

***Growth*.** Communication within a program is important and should be designed to foster growth. Specific feedback offers teachers the opportunity to grow in areas of weakness and recognize areas of strength to build upon. Communication is an important piece of effective administration, and administrators must offer specific and practical feedback both in and out of formal meetings (Carter, 2000; Hoerr, 2017; Kraft et al., 2016). When addressing children in early childhood education best practice dictates that specific praise is offered. For example, instead of saying "good job" teachers would say, "I like how to you were a good friend and helped Sammy up." This model of communication is also transferable to administrators. This type of feedback encourages recognition of desired practices and supports areas in which the teacher or program may want to grow by explicitly addressing them.

Teamwork can also produce a growth mindset. Teachers who feel they are part of a team are also more likely to persevere in their positions (Hale-Jinks et al.,2006; Kraft et al., 2016). Directors can facilitate teamwork and provide teachers opportunities to work together to resolve problems or brainstorm solutions. One such opportunity may be offered during a semi-unstructured time of staff meetings in which teachers are provided the opportunity to reflect on struggles and consult other members of the team for advice or support. This sense of belonging is necessary for teachers to feel secure while simultaneously providing an opportunity that allows teachers the opportunity for growth. This type of collaborative problem-solving assists programs in increasing job satisfaction and promoting perseverance. This teamwork model encourages teachers to rely on each other and encourage each other so that all in the program can grow their skill sets and further develop the practices within the program.

Some Head Start centers have engaged a community of practice model in which onsite coaching training is offered to educators to encourage teachers to feel like more of a team (Christ & Wang, 2013). This model has shown to be more effective than traditional teacher training (Christ & Wang, 2013; Joyce & Showers, 2002). The community of practice model offers ongoing support and feedback for members of the team, allowing for shared dialogue, and membership in the community to drive practice (Christ & Wang, 2013). This model may help facilitate engagement for both novice and experienced teachers as it promotes a team-based atmosphere, encouraging and facilitating a growth mindset for both the program and teachers (Christ & Wang, 2013; Hale-Jinks et al.,2006).

Impacts of personality. Herzberg's (1968) motivation hygiene theory provides a theoretical framework surrounding workplace experiences which impact job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction. Current literature also addresses the impacts of an individual's personality on their ability to persevere. Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) have studied the personality trait g*rit* which they have defined as consistency of interests and perseverance of effort. The consistency of interests refers to an individual's ability to focus on achieving their long-term goals (Datu, Yuen, & Chen, 2016). Perseverance of effort addresses an individual's ability to endure adversity while maintaining the effort to reach their long-term goals (Datu et al., 2016).

Grit-O and Grit-S, two scales developed to assess an individual's grit level have enabled researchers to assess an individual's level of grit correlated to their level of success (Duckworth et al., 2007). Grit research has most commonly been conducted about student achievement (Datu et al., 2016; Hoerr, 2017). The research conducted has shown a link between grit and greater academic achievement (Duckworth et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2014), academic motivation (Eskreis-

Winkler, Shulman, Beal, & Duckworth, 2014), self-control (Duckworth et al., 2007) and most interesting to the context of the current study, fewer career changes (Duckworth et al., 2007).

The impacts of personality vary by individual, and while high levels of grit have been associated with positive outcomes, the degree of impact has yet to be determined (Duckworth et al., 2007). Due only to the positive impact grit may have on an individual's ability to minimize career changes, fostering a grit mindset may support teacher perseverance (Hoerr, 2017).

Addressing the Problem

The current body of research offers some hope because teachers have not been found to leave their positions for only one reason (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Kraft et al., 2016; Wells, 2014). For example, the current research indicates teachers who quit most frequently have three to four risk factors such as income, job satisfaction, or work environment, rather than just quitting for one reason (Wells, 2014). Challenges related to low income may include teachers' inability to have lower level physiological needs met, and therefore, they must secure a position that will allow these needs to be met (Maslow, 1943). Job satisfaction, teacher effectiveness, and school climate are closely linked (Johnson, 2009; Kennedy, 2010; Kraft et al., 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Simon & Johnson, 2015). Therefore, despite a practical inability to effectively address all the challenges of school climate impacting perseverance, early childhood education leaders can still positively impact perseverance by closely examining their school's climate and the work environment provided for the educators employed within the center.

Summary

Many studies highlight the correlation between low compensation and minimal benefits and limited teacher perseverance in early childhood education (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; DOE & DHHS, 2016; Russell et al., 2010; Porter, 2012; Wells, 2014). The body of research

demonstrated how school climate impacts teacher perseverance to a greater degree than any other experience (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Johnson, 2009; Kennedy, 2010; Kraft et al., 1975; Pogodzinski et al., 2013; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Simon & Johnson, 2015). The research related to why teachers persevere in early childhood education is minimal and could be leveraged to offset the experiences which influence early childhood educators to leave the programs in which they are employed (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Wells, 2014).

Much of the research completed regarding perseverance in education has been conducted outside of the field of early education. Studies have been conducted across multiple states including West Virginia, (Lochmiller et al., 2016) Kentucky, (Lochmiller et al., 2016) and Alaska (Kaden et al., 2016) in K-12 settings. Additionally, areas of education with higher attrition rates such as middle school have been examined (Mee & Haverback, 2014).

Limited research has been conducted specific to early education, and that which has been recently conducted was specific to Head Start or specific to early educator stress and stress management (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Wells, 2014). In addition to limited research examining attrition and persistence in early education, the current body of research has done little to close the floodgates of attrition within the field of education, more specifically early education. A more holistic approach to teacher's individual identities, motivation and maintenance should be taken to examine experiences impacting teacher perseverance (Gallant & Riley, 2014).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand experiences that motivate early childhood educators to persevere as early childhood educators, at the same early childhood education center, for five or more years, in south-central Pennsylvania. Chapter Three of the current study will explore the study's design, setting, participants, data collection measures, data analysis procedures, trustworthiness, credibility, confirmability, transferability, ethical considerations, and summary of the information contained within the chapter.

Design

The present study sought to examine and present the lived experiences of individuals related to the phenomenon of perseverance without bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon of early childhood education teacher perseverance is not exclusive to one geographic region or setting. The phenomenon is unbounded, and the study sought to utilize the experiences of the individuals to describe the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The experiences of teachers who persevere both in the field and in the same program for five or more years were explored. Qualitative research provided a voice for the teachers who persevered, and provided descriptions of experiences that impacted their perseverance. Phenomenological research is designed to explore and explicate the lived experiences of individuals and was used in the current study to explore the perseverance experience of early childhood educators.

Transcendental phenomenology seeks to collect data that explicates the essence of the participants' experience and does not require interpretation by the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). I recognized my experience as a center director would not provide enough personal knowledge or experience with the phenomenon to interpret the experiences of the participants. Therefore, transcendental phenomenology was an appropriate choice of design for this study as it required open acknowledgement or epoché of preconceived notions related to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

Central Research Question

How do early childhood educators of five or more years in the same early learning program describe their experiences with perseverance and reasons for persevering as early educators in the same early learning program?

Subquestions

SQ1. How do early childhood educators perceive their experiences within their early learning program impacted their decisions to persevere as early educators?

SQ2. How do early childhood educators who persevere in the same early learning program for five or more years describe the coping methods they use to face their challenges in the early childhood workplace?

Site

This transcendental phenomenological study was conducted at four research sites. Originally, a fifth site was going to be included, but at the time of data collection the center was unable to accommodate the study due to staffing needs within the program. All selected sites were located in south-central Pennsylvania. The sites spanned two small rural towns with a wide

variance in socio-economic status. Pseudonyms were assigned to each site and are referenced throughout the study. The sites were currently funded either through private-pay families or through state subsidies provided to families to support childcare costs. I selected the sites to allow for variation (Creswell & Poth, 2018) in program type, community or church-based, and to allow for differences in quality rating as defined by Keystone Stars, Pennsylvania's state quality assurance system (Keystone Stars, 2017).

Implemented in 2002, Keystone Stars is based upon performance standards under which early childhood learning programs can earn a one to four-star rating (Keystone Stars, 2017). The standards are designed to reflect research-based practices that support the development of young children (Keystone Stars, 2017). Star One and Star Two centers are based on licensure, curriculum, and training requirements. Stars Three and Four centers are scored using a Program Performance Standard review developed by the Office of Child Development and Early Learning and classroom observations. The Program Performance Standard review includes elements such as child assessment tools, business practices, teacher qualifications and trainings, family and community engagement practices, director qualifications, and trainings (Keystone Stars, 2017). Figure 2 illustrates the various star levels and associated requirements.

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Figure 2. Keystone Stars Steps to Quality

Little Angels

Little Angels (pseudonym) is a four-star church-based childcare center. Little Angels is located in a more urban area and employs one full time director, one part time administrative assistant, one part time bookkeeper and 20 full time teachers. The center has recently

experienced two major changes in administrators and is supported by a board comprised of members of the church sponsoring the center. Little Angels enrolls children ranging in age from six weeks to five years, and provides school aged care over the summer months.

Community Childcare

Community Childcare (pseudonym) is a four-star childcare center that is community-based. The center employs one full-time director, three full-time office staff, and 20 full-time teachers. Board members for this program consist of members of the community. The program offers programming for children ranging in age from six weeks to five years old with before and after school programming, as well as summer camp available for school-aged children. Community Child Care only offers full-time enrollment options. The Community Child Care was chosen because it is community-based, not a church-based program adding to the variation of children enrolled at this location. Community Child Care also serves a higher percentage of lower income families with approximately 50% of the children enrolled receiving state subsidies for childcare. Community Child Care is also one of only a few programs in the region, outside of the public-school system, which provide before and after school care.

Let's Move

Let's Move (pseudonym) is a part-time program offering classes for children ranging in age from two to five years old. They currently have 74 children enrolled. The program is sponsored by a community organization and operates within the context of that organization. Let's Move is not involved with the Stars rating system, as they only offer part-time classes. The classes are all four hours long and meet on different days of the week. Let's Move employs one preschool director, three teachers, five assistant teachers, one office manager, and one business manager, as well as one executive director. The program runs within a community service

organization, so some of those employed have additional responsibilities outside of the preschool. Let's Move was also chosen because the age range of the children in the program and the part-time status of both the teachers and students offered additional variations that may impact teacher perseverance. Let's Move seeks to assist families through parent training and education opportunities. Let's Move was part of the research because the use of a part-time employment model and a family-based model was different from other programs in the area, which provided less holistic support for families. In response to the site participation email, the director of Let's Move reflected that she believed their retention rates were due to “the people, the bonds that are made with the staff members, and the connections to the community."

Noah’s Ark

Noah's Ark (pseudonym) is a one-star early learning program. Noah's Ark is a church-based program providing programming for children ranging in age from two to five years old, with before and after school care and summer camp offered for school-aged children. Children can enroll in Noah's Ark either full-time or part-time. Noah's Ark was selected because it is located in a more rural area of the region and is a smaller program employing six full-time teachers and one full-time director. While Noah's Ark is a church-based program with a board of directors comprised of church members, the program has been participating in Keystone Stars for less than a year, and currently has a one-star rating, which is a variation from other church-based programs included in the study.

Lamb’s Cross

Lamb's Cross (pseudonym) is another church-based program offering programs for children ranging in age from six weeks to fifth grade. They currently have 67 children enrolled. Lamb's Cross is a star four program and offers both full- and part-time enrollment options, with

part-time being select days a week, not part days. Lamb's Cross is also in a more rural area of the region. Lamb's Cross employs 12 full-time teachers and one full-time director, which is an average size program for the region. Lamb's Cross serves fewer children receiving state subsidies than the other programs included in the region, with only about 9% of children enrolled utilizing state funds to cover the costs.

Participants

I identified the participants of the study utilizing a purposeful sample designed to provide maximum variance. Participants were employed in their current position for five or more years because research indicates the highest attrition rates occur within the first five years of teaching (Gallant & Riley, 2014; Riley, 2011; Santavirta et al., 2007). I emailed center directors (Appendix C), to identify early childhood educators within their program who met the criteria and were willing to participate. I provided center directors an email invitation (Appendix D) to send to early childhood educators in their program meeting the participation criteria and inviting prospective participants to participate in an individual interview. Purposeful participant selection (Creswell & Poth, 2018) for the interviews was based on securing a sample rich in variance in work history, educational attainment, socio-economic status, marital status, and racial/ethnic self-identification. The sample size for the study was 13 participants, and interviews continued until saturation of the topic was reached (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additional information was not required, however, all participants agreed to participate in a follow up interview if additional information was required. The individual interviews were followed by a single focus group interview with four of the individual interview participants. Individuals with the most employment longevity at their early learning center were asked to participate in the focus group interview as these individuals have experienced the perseverance phenomenon over a more

significant amount of time. Three of the centers were geographically close in proximity, which promoted ease of access for the focus group participants to attend one centrally located focus group.

Procedures

Following a successful proposal defense, I secured Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix F). However, before receiving IRB approval, early learning center directors were informally contacted via email (Appendix C), or phone calls to secure sites and program director support for participant selection. By partnering with early learning programs, a diverse group of early childhood educators had increased ability to participate in the study as it limited a barrier for individuals who may not be able to attend focus groups or interviews outside of their work hours due to personal commitments.

After securing IRB approval, I sent an email to center directors who agreed to act as sites for the study and asked them to forward the emails to individuals within their program who met the participation criteria. The email (Appendix D) introduced the study and requested participants to contact me to express interest in participating in the study. I contacted experts in the field to review the questions for the individual interviews and piloted the questions using a small group of individuals not included in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used the pilot tests to examine bias, adjust procedures if needed and ensure relevancy of questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Program directors scheduled individual interviews with participants who expressed interest in participating in the study through email or phone contact. Those who participated in the individual interviews completed an informed consent form (Appendix A). Participants were asked to indicate their willingness to participate in a follow up interview or focus group

interview should further information be requested.

Participants were purposefully selected to allow for maximum variance (Creswell & Poth, 2018) in work history, educational attainment, socio-economic status, marital status, and racial/ethnic self-identification. The anticipated sample size was 12-15 participants for the individual interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Individual interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview format and audio recorded interviews using two devices. Transcription latered occured. After completing the interview, participants were asked to provide a tour of their classroom. This tour was open-ended, and I acted as the instrument by taking notes on what participants shared related to their experiences.

Participants for the focus group interview were purposely selected by deciding who among the participants had experienced the perseverance phenomenon over the longest period. The anticipated sample size for the focus group was five to eight participants (Patton, 2015). There were focus group discussions on a designated date and time. Transcriptions were completed by the researcher and occured after each individual interview and focus group interview.

After all data was collected, Moustakas' (1994) steps for transcendental phenomenological research data analysis was employed. First, I epochéd previous experiences to achieve limited bias when analyzing the data. Also, I provided the transcripts to the participants and asked them to provide any corrections necessary. Finally, I used atlas.ti to identify significant statements from the individual interview transcripts, focus group interviews, and observation notes. Significant statements were classified into themes. Those themes were developed into textual and structural descriptions. This theme development allowed me to present the essence of the perseverance phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, an audit trail was retained of all raw data including field notes, audio recordings, transcripts, and any other documents related to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All data reduction steps, analysis notes, and procedures to support the trustworthiness of the study were maintained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The Researcher's Role

As the researcher in this transcendental phenomenological study, I was the human instrument. I followed Moustakas' (1994) guidelines for transcendental data analysis. As part of bracketing out my prior understanding of the phenomenon, I identified any biases I may have brought to the study so they could be set aside to enable me to analyze the data (Moustakas, 1994) accurately.

My experience as an early learning center director has given me an understanding of the topic, but a lack of personal experience with perseverance as a teacher for five or more years. During college I worked part-time at one of the sites, and also worked as an administrator at another site selected for the study. At the time of data collection, it was almost two years since I had contact with any of the potential participants. This amount of time was sufficient to eliminate influence over the responses of the participants. An understanding of the phenomenon comes from a review of the literature, the researcher's attrition from teaching into administration, and working as an administrator, both accepting resignations and filling vacant positions when teachers did not persevere. There is no basis of understanding for why individuals stay.

Data Collection

The process of data collection in qualitative research is lengthy if the desired outcome is rich, reliable data (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2010). For this reason, the three data collection methods, individual interviews, a focus group interview, and observations, were used.

Data collection occurred over the course of several weeks which allowed enough time to support the collection of useful data. The environment was designed to support the comfort of the participants (Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2015).

The first step in collecting data was to hold interviews to collect initial data and identify participants for the focus group. Within qualitative research, individual interviews are the most common type of data collection method (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Locke et al., 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews are the most common type of data collection in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Locke et al., 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The interview data collection for this study was of high importance to ensure I could accurately reflect the perseverance experiences of the participants. Conducting interviews utilizing semi-structured interview questions allowed for open-ended responses and follow up questions if needed (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mirriam, 2002).

Rapport with the participants was established in this phase to successfully collect accurate, rich data. In phenomenology, interviews should be both informal and allow for interaction through open-ended questions (Moustakas, 1994). During the interview, it is important that the participants feel comfortable in all aspects of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). To increase the comfort level of the participants, the use of video recordings did not occur. Instead, there were only two audio recordings.

Video recordings in focus groups ensure transcription is accurate. Determining who is speaking in a larger group presents more of a challenge for transcribing. Interviews occurred with only one participant at a time so only audio recording utilizing two devices for recording the

interview dialogue was necessary. Coordinating interviews with the participating sites' directors enabled participant interviews to occur during the participants' work hours. The interviews occurred at varying points of the day based on the early learning programs' ability to schedule participants out for interviews. The program and director's preferences were followed. The interviews were designed to last no more than an hour, and the questions provided an aid in developing a holistic and personal view of the participants' experience related to the perseverance phenomenon in early education. The following questions were asked during the course of participant interviews.

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Why did you choose to work in early childhood education?
2. What do you see as your primary responsibility as a teacher?
3. Have you ever felt you impacted a child or family? If so, please share about that time.
4. During your time at (name of center) do you have a favorite memory? If so, please share.
5. Do you have a favorite experience working at (name of center)? If so, please share.
6. Over your time at (name of center) have you experienced any challenges? If yes, please share. If you have not experienced any challenges, to what do you attribute your lack of challenging experiences?
7. How did you overcome that challenge? *Asked only if response to question 6 is "yes".
8. Do you have any activities you do in your personal time to relax? If yes, what activities do you find help you relax the most.

9. Do you ever experience stress at work? If yes, how do you manage that stress? If no, to what do you attribute your lack of experience with stress?
10. Do you ever experience stress at home? If yes, how do you manage stress at home?
11. Have you ever considered working somewhere else?
12. What influenced your decision to stay?
13. Is there anything you would change about your job? If yes, what? If no, why not?
14. If someone was going to change your job, what, if anything, would you insist they not change? Why?
15. What advice would you give to a person starting to work at your center?
16. Is there anything else you would like to share about why you have stayed in your current position that you have not already shared?

Questions one and two were designed to ease participants to feel comfortable with me and with the one-on-one interview atmosphere. The questions were open ended to allow participants the opportunity to talk about their job and what they do. The interview was designed to start on a positive, comfortable note with questions three, four and five. These questions were designed to elicit responses that aided in answering the central research question and the two sub-questions as they addressed the experiences of the educator and offered the opportunity for participants to share what they value.

Previous research indicated teachers who saw their work as a personal calling or viewed themselves as professionals were more likely to remain in the field of education (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Torquati et al., 2007). Also, teachers who report feeling happy with their position were more likely to stay as were teachers who had a positive relationship with their supervisor (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Kraft et al., 2016; Pogodzinski et al.2013; Wells, 2014).

This establishment of satisfaction can also speak to the teacher's motivation to persevere and relates directly to Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory establishing experiences which impact job satisfaction and perseverance.

Questions number five and six were both grounded in previous research, which indicated teachers who received appropriate administrative support or perceived administrators as having high levels of competence were more likely to remain in the field of early childhood education (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Hall-Kenyon et al., 2013; Kraft et al.,2016; Russell et al., 2010). Teachers were further committed to the center with which they were employed if they reported high job satisfaction (Pogodzinski et al.2013; Wells, 2014), got along well with co-workers, developed a positive relationship with the children in the center, and had opportunities for promotion (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Hall-Kenyon et al, 2013; Pogodzinski et al., 2013). These experiences also align with Herzberg's (1968) motivation factors, which include the work itself, recognition and advancement.

In contrast, question six was a slightly more uncomfortable topic as it addressed challenges within their positions. This question, in addition to questions seven, eight, nine, and 10 were designed to elicit responses related to supporting research questions one and two. Teachers in previous studies related to perseverance in teaching expressed feeling like their workload was too big (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Wells, 2014). Teachers also found arduous working conditions to be a substantial stressor. Teachers cited long hours, physical demands and the constant variation of stimuli being presented (fights in centers, bleeding children, sick children) (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; DOE & DHHS, 2016; Hale-Jinks et al., 2006; Kraft et al., 2016) as creating stress. These experiences speak to the school's climate and hygiene factors such as work conditions, company policies, and supervision (Herzberg, 1968).

Questions seven, eight, nine, and 10 were designed to delve deeper into the perseverance experience of the participants. Since stress has been found to increase attrition in previous studies (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Hale-Jinks et al., 2006; Kraft et al., 2016; Wells, 2014) questions specific to stress management are included.

Interview questions 11 and 12 directly addressed experiences that encouraged the participant to stay at their current school, despite experiences which may compel them to leave. These questions were aimed at addressing the current research indicating that school climate plays a critical role in a teacher's ability to persevere (Borkar, 2016). Eighty percent of early educator attrition occurs among individuals who persevere as early childhood educators but fail to persevere at the same school (Wells, 2014). Questions 11 and 12 sought to explicate the experiences surrounding school climate which impact the participants' decision to remain in the same school. Questions 13, 14, and 15 were opened-ended and designed to provide the participants the opportunity to share anything left out in the previous questions while simultaneously asking them to extend their answers beyond the first response that comes to mind. Also, the current research indicated teachers who fail to persevere most frequently cite three to four negative experiences most commonly related to income, job satisfaction, or work environment as impacting their decision, rather than just one experience (Wells, 2014). Therefore, an examination of all experiences may be helpful in determining experiences that impact perseverance.

Focus Group Interview

Focus groups are interviews conducted with a small group of people revolving around a specific topic (Thomas et al., 2015). Focus groups are not one of the more common data collection methods in qualitative research (Thomas et al., 2015), but will serve important

functions within this research. For this study, the focus group allowed participants to check each other's responses supporting validity (Patton, 2002). By enabling participants to check each other's responses and compare previous responses to focus group responses, triangulation of the data was achieved to support credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1999).

Participants for the focus group were selected after the interview process. Four participants were included in the focus group and were selected based on their longevity in their early childhood education center and their early learning programs ability to schedule them out of the classroom during the day. Those participants identified as experiencing the perseverance phenomenon for the longest period were included as their extended experiences had the potential to provide a greater understanding of the phenomenon. The focus group was held at a centrally located early learning center in the geographical location of the centers.

The focus group did not exceed one hour to support participation further. Audio and video recording of the focus group ensured transcription was accurate. To assist in transcription, I used video recording for the focus group in addition to audio recording, as audio recording as a singular recording method could make transcription more challenging with multiple participants present and engaging simultaneously in the dialogue. I used a semi-structured format as it is the most common practice in qualitative research and allowed for greater expression of the lived experience among participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mirriam, 2002; Thomas et al., 2015).

Standardized Open-Ended Focus Group Questions.

1. Please introduce yourself to the group.
2. Please explain your role and responsibilities in your job.
3. Have you ever felt happy in your job? If yes, what made you feel happy in your job?

4. Do you find any aspects of your job challenging? If yes, what aspects of your job to you perceive as challenging?
5. If you identified challenges in your job, how do you overcome those challenges?
6. What do you like or dislike about the center you work in?
7. What advice would you give to a teacher just starting at your center?
8. Why have you chosen to stay in your current program?

I used seven semi-structured questions understanding that participant discussion could occur and to allow all questions to be answered by participants in the time frame allotted for the focus group. Questions one and two were designed to provide background knowledge about the participants. These questions were designed to help participants feel relaxed and begin conversing (Patton, 2015). Ensuring participants all have an opportunity to share and are comfortable within the group is a key component of focus group data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Question three was designed to elicit responses that will aid in revealing themes related to the central research question. Question three helped to address experiences related to school climate that encouraged teachers to persevere. Teachers who reported high levels of job satisfaction (Wells, 2014) or who felt supported in their job by administrators have been found to persevere longer than those who do not share these experiences (Hall-Kenyon et al., 2013; Kraft et al., 2016; Russell et al., 2010). Similarly, previous research indicated teachers who feel ownership of the school they are employed by report higher rates of job satisfaction (Hale-Jinks et al., 2006; Pogodzinski et al, 2013). This question further relates to the theoretical framework of the study as it seeks to establish experiences which impact job satisfaction and perseverance. This question addresses motivation factors as they relate to Herzberg's (1968) motivation

hygiene theory. While Herzberg (1968) found experiences such as achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement, and growth to positively impact job satisfaction and perseverance, I was seeking to examine the lived experiences of the perseverance phenomenon, and I had to allow the participants to express experiences which have encouraged their perseverance openly. Question number three allowed the opportunity for participants to share their reasons for job satisfaction.

Question number four related to supporting research question number two. Teachers in previous studies have indicated considerations such as fair pay, (DOE & DHHS, 2016; Russell, Williams, & Gleason-Gomez, 2010) job stress (Bullough, Jr., Hall-Kenyon, & MacKay, 2012; Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Wells, 2014; Whitebook et al., 2014) and, emotional and physical exhaustion (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Wells, 2014) are considered when leaving their school or the teaching profession. High levels of stress make the decision to leave a low paying job is easier for teachers (Hale-Jinks et al., 2006; Whitebook et al., 2014). Herzberg (1968) referred to experiences that challenged job satisfaction and perseverance as hygiene factors. Herzberg's (1968) theory outlined company policy and administration, supervision, work conditions, salary, relationship with peers, status, and security as being experiences, which are more frequently associated with job dissatisfaction. Question number four was designed to elicit responses about challenges faced by the participants in their experience as early childhood educators. Question four was intentionally framed at this point in the focus group because the question may have created more discomfort in response. By proposing it after the first three questions, participants were allowed time to develop a higher level of comfort with those in the room.

The central research question was further explored by questions five, six and seven. These questions sought to allow participants the opportunity to provide response which would

adhere to the purpose of the study. To reiterate, the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences which impacted early childhood educators' decisions to persevere both in the field of early childhood education and at the same school.

Many studies have examined perseverance from a quantitative perspective or within the context of another setting (Kaden et al., 2016; Lochmiller et al., 2016; Lochmiller et al., 2016; Mee & Haverback, 2014) but limited research exists within the context of early childhood learning centers (Wells, 2014) or from a qualitative perspective examining the teachers' experience with perseverance (Gallant, & Riley, 2014). Questions five, six and seven were designed to elicit responses, which would fill the gap in the current literature base. Through questions five, six and seven an examination of the impact of school climate on teacher perseverance was explored. Research indicates that working in a school with a positive school climate lessens teacher burnout and increases perseverance (Borkar, 2016; Kraft et al., 2016). Questions five, six and seven presented an opportunity for participants to share what experiences within their school's climate most heavily impacted their decisions to persevere. Question eight addressed the experience of the participant related to the central research question. This question was designed to allow the focus group participants, those with the most experience with perseverance, the opportunity to share the basis of their decisions. Open-ended questions were used to gain insight into experiences which have led to the perseverance phenomenon among this group of educators.

Observations

One aspect of establishing credibility for the study was triangulation of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Question seven in the focus group and question 13 in the interview were similar

and were designed as such to aid in triangulation. Triangulation of data allows for multiple sources to corroborate the study's findings by allowing the theme(s) located in multiple data sources to be coded (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I collected the third data point and observation notes to allow for triangulation of both methods and data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 1999).

I maintained notes throughout the data collection process. I also asked participants to show me the classroom in which they worked. During the time I visited their classroom, I allowed the participants to lead the discussion, taking notes on what they chose to share and on the environment in which they work as it relates to the purpose of this study. I have not personally experienced the phenomenon of this study and research surrounding perseverance in early childhood educators is limited. I recognized participants may have additional information to share outside of the semi-structured questions posed within the individual interviews or focus group interview. The opportunity for participants to lead this data collection point provided time for them to share additional information while the researcher, as the human instrument, makes observations surrounding the climate in which they work. This data collection method also provided a more relaxed atmosphere than the semi-structured individual interviews and focus group interview. If participants were uncomfortable with the more formal data collection points, being in the environment in which they experienced the phenomenon had the potential to promote reflection and encouraged the participants to share further information related to their experience.

Data Analysis

Transcendental phenomenology seeks to collect data that explicates the essence of the participants' experience and does not require interpretation by the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) is the primary proponent of the transcendental research design and has

outlined concrete steps to complete data analysis. A researcher's experiences may compromise the analysis of the data; therefore, it is important to begin by clarifying any preconceptions I had to limit the influence preconceptions may have played in the analysis of data (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas' (1994) states that “no position whatsoever is taken ... nothing is determined in advance” (p. 84). I considered my experience both as a teacher, for a short time, and later as an administrator in an early childhood education program. I acknowledged the bias I felt when the literature indicated work environment, specifically administrator support impacts teacher perseverance (Hall-Kenyon et al., 2013; Kraft et al., 2016; Russell et al., 2010). By the researcher acknowledging a potential bias from previous administrative experience, a support of the credibility of the study was necessarily established.

Once all data was collected and transcribed, the transcriptions were reviewed to determine if adjustments, deletions, or additions should be made to the focus group questions. After review, it was determined that no changes were warranted, and the focus group was held. The focus group recordings were then transcribed. The transcriptions, in addition to the observations, were entered into Atlas.ti for data analysis. According to Moustakas (1994), the analysis of the transcriptions begins through horizontalization. Horizontalization was completed when specific statements in the transcript which spoke to the experience of the participants were identified (Moustakas, 1994). The specific statements were taken from the transcripts and listed in table form to present the range of experiences surrounding the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Highlighted statements from the transcript were used for open-coding to support concept generalizations from the data rather than any preconceived ideas of the researcher (Lin, 2013). This function of the coding process aligned well with the design of the study which was to explore the experiences of the participants.

Initially, each statement was considered to have equal value. Those statements that did not relate to the topic or were repeating or overlapping were deleted (Moustakas, 1994). The statements which remained were the horizons, also referred to as the textural meanings (Moustakas, 1994). Textural meanings provide a description of the experience by describing what was experienced (Moustakas, 1994). These textural meanings were clustered into themes, also referred to as meaning units (Moustakas, 1994). The software used the identified themes and listed them in chart format with participant statements which supported that theme listed beside the identified theme. Textural meanings were eliminated, so overarching themes were presented in a manageable format (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By combining similar textural meanings, overarching concepts between textural meanings appeared (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each transcription was read three times to ensure the themes aligned with the experiences presented by the participants.

Significant statements with the themes with which they related provided both structural and textural descriptions. These were recorded. Textural descriptions described *what* was experienced while structural descriptions described *how* it was experienced (Moustakas, 1994). Common words used related to the theme were considered textural descriptions while shared experiences related to the theme were considered structural descriptions.

The final step identified by Moustakas (1994) is the process of "intuitive integration" (p. 100). This step involves synthesizing the textural and structural descriptions into a composite description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This process, also known as eidetic reduction, allowed me to pull back the layers of the experience to present the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Once again, my continued reading and rereading of participants statements aided in this process.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness defines the worth of research and acts as the framework for evaluating qualitative research. Trustworthiness is comprised of four elements, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I utilized a variety of methods to establish trustworthiness within the context of this study including triangulation of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) through individual interviews, focus group interviews, and observations, utilization of an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), defined and literature-based data collection and analysis measures (Moustakas, 1994), and provision of rich descriptions of the participants and settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

Credibility provides confidence that the findings of the study are accurate and truthful (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To establish credibility, I achieved triangulation of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I achieved triangulation by examining three data points, interview responses, focus group responses, and observations. This allowed for both methods triangulation and triangulation of sources (Patton, 1999). I collected one source of data in a more public setting and one in a more private setting to ensure responses were consistent within both settings and to aid in establishing credibility (Patton, 1999).

In addition to achieving triangulation of the data, I employed member checking as a method to establish credibility. I achieved member checking by asking participants to review transcripts of the individual interviews and focus group interview as well as the themes interpreted by the researcher to ensure their intended responses and experiences were accurately reflected.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability in qualitative research involves supporting the consistency of the study's results over time. To support dependability, maintenance of the categories of the raw data were collected so that raw data, analysis products, synthesis products, process notes, dispositions, and instrument development for an audit supported a clear description of the research path allowing for study recreation supporting similar results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A reflexive journal was used throughout the research process to establish dependability and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Journals allowed reflections throughout the data collection process. This also allowed the researcher to intentionally reflect upon any biases which had the potential to arise throughout the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
To further support confirmability, transparency of the research and data collection was achieved by documenting the process for establishing the themes and by maintaining an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability

Transferability, or the extent to which a study's findings can be applied to other locations, times, settings, or individuals (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was achieved through the use of thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973; Holloway, 1997; Ryle, 1949). Thick descriptions provided a detailed account of the setting and participants. The detail in the account will allow individuals to determine applicability of the findings to other settings. The research was conducted in privately funded early learning centers, and therefore, the results may not be transferable to centers or programs which are publicly funded. Also, the setting for research, church-based, secular, rural, and urban, had the potential to reveal different experiences among early childhood educators.

Transferability was also supported through the selection of programs with varying characteristics including Star level, size of program, and type of services offered.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations throughout the design of the study were present. The nature of a constructivist view on the research requires that participants be autonomous, with varying experiences related to the phenomenon of perseverance. In viewing the participants as autonomous, recognition of individuals with rights to privacy and input in the data both collected and reported is necessary.

Before beginning the study, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was applied for. No research was conducted until permission was granted. This measure helped protect the participants of the study and the researcher from ethical overstep.

Pseudonyms were used to refer to the centers to protect the confidentiality of the centers participating in the study. Contact to the participants was made through the center directors who were asked to grant permission for the teachers to participate in the study. This permission was requested because the center's demographic information or implemented policies was included in the study and had the potential to be influential in the participant's perseverance within the center. To further maintain confidentiality, data collected was stored on a password-protected computer (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were asked to sign an informed consent agreement (Appendix A) prior to participating in any part of the study. This step helped to ensure participants understood the study they were participating in before they agreed to act as participants. By explaining the purpose of the study to participants, it was hoped that the center directors and participants were encouraged to act as co-researchers and provide support to the

study's goals with their participation. During the study, no participant or center was pressured to participate or continue to participate in the study.

Interviews were conducted during the participants' work day. In order to avoid disrupting the schedule of the center, directors offered times that allowed the participant to leave the classroom without disrupting an established schedule. After data collection, participants were emailed a copy of their transcriptions, offering participants the opportunity to adjust or clarify any statements they wish (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants were also be asked to review the essence of the phenomenon as it is presented (Moustakas, 1994). By allowing the participants the opportunity to review and verify the transcripts and presented essence I took steps to help support the credibility of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through the participant review and verification process, ethical standards were met by ensuring participants were not incorrectly represented.

All data, whether positive or negative was recorded as accurately as possible (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition to honestly reporting all findings, the disclosure of any conflicts of interest was acknowledged (Creswell & Poth, 2018), although none were noted during the course of the study.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences that motivate early childhood educators to persevere in their positions at the same early childhood education center, for five or more years, in south-central Pennsylvania. A qualitative research study using a transcendental phenomenological approach was appropriate (Moustakas, 1994). The study participants were employed in four early learning centers in a rural area of south-central Pennsylvania. Both sites and participants were purposefully selected

to allow for maximum variation. Individual interviews, a focus group interview, and observations were used to collect data. Analysis procedures as defined by Moustakas' (1994) were followed. Trustworthiness was established through a variety of measures including achieving triangulation of the data (Patton, 1999), maintenance of a reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and establishment of an audit trail (Licoln & Guba, 1985; Malterud, 2001). The essence of the perseverance experience as shared by the participants of the study is transferable to similar sites with participants of similar demographics as those included in this research.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences that motivate early childhood educators to persevere in their positions at the same early childhood education center, for five or more years, in south-central Pennsylvania. Perseverance within the same field and location is a personal decision made individually by the teacher. Therefore, the experience of the early educator surrounding the phenomenon of perseverance is needed to gain an understanding of the phenomenon.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a rich description of the participants of the study and the themes developed from their experiences. The rich description will provide a detailed account of the study allowing for an increased understanding of the study's transferability (Creswell, 2018). The study included 13 participants from four early learning programs in south-central Pennsylvania. The chapter includes a discussion of the results of the study, including themes developed from individual interviews, a focus group interview, and observations. The discussion of themes developed is followed by a discussion of the research questions addressed within the study.

Participants

The participants of this transcendental phenomenological study were all employed at their early learning program for five or more years. Participants were selected based on their experience with the perseverance phenomenon. A rich description of each participant is provided, utilizing pseudonyms to ensure anonymity, to further understanding of their individual experiences.

Table 1.

Participant Demographics

Name	Program	Years Experience	Position
Alice	Community Child Care	35	Floating Position
Beth	Community Child Care	18	Toddler Teacher
Cassie	Lamb's Cross	19	Toddler Teacher
Charlotte	Lamb's Cross		Floating Position
Connie	Noah's Ark	16	Floating Position
Deb	Lamb's Cross	18	Infant Teacher
Della	Noah's Ark	9	Floating Position
Karen	Lamb's Cross	6	Preschool Teacher
Katie	Lamb's Cross	6	Toddler Teacher
Lori	Community Child Care	10	Preschool Teacher
Mary	Lamb's Cross	16	Preschool Teacher
Robin	Lamb's Cross	6	Toddler Teacher
Sarah	Community Child Care	16	Toddler Teacher

Alice

Alice is a floating teacher at Community Child Care. Alice was the teacher with the most experience with perseverance. Alice has been working at her early learning center for 35 years. She has served almost every role during her tenure working as an aid, assistant teacher, lead teacher, assistant director, program director, and now a title she lovingly refers to as VIP. Alice

currently works part time and covers in any capacity that is needed. She also acts as the "rock star" for the program. Alice's passion is music, and she incorporates music daily into lessons for the kids, both formally in classrooms and informally on the playground. She is a traveling one-woman band. Alice has a bachelor's degree in elementary education. She was animated and frank during the course of the interview and it was apparent she gained wisdom and had grown as a professional during her time with the program. Alice shared her years of experience enable her to, "try to be a peace maker…just sort of talk to the younger staff members, you know, it's just a lesson plan if it doesn't work today, it's ok…tomorrow's another day." This has enabled her to act as a mentor of sorts to the other teachers within the program. Alice also acted as a participant for the focus group.

Beth

Beth is a toddler teacher at Community Child Care. She has an associate's degree in early childhood education. She is a full-time employee and has been at her early learning program for 18 years. Beth also acted as a participant for the focus group. Beth's responses to both the interview and focus group questions were concise. She seemed very focused and assured of her position. She found a passion for early education at a young age while she was a girl scout. Beth was constantly babysitting or working on projects, like car seat safety, that would provide care and safety for children. This theme continues into Beth's current teaching practices as she saw the "health and safety" of the children in her care as her top priority. Beth also found her co-workers to be supportive sharing, "we have a pretty good team back in the baby wing so I mean we work pretty well back there."

Cassie

Cassie is a toddler teacher at Lamb's Cross. Cassie also has a high school diploma. Cassie began her career in early childhood education after a job loss. While working in a local shop, the program director would come in and ask her to apply for a job. Cassie always had a love of kids, so she applied and was hired. Cassie has been in her early learning program for 19 years. She was willing to participate in the interview but was apprehensive about participating in the focus group and responding with other participants. Cassie shared a strong desire to provide support and love for the kids in her care. She also noted the relationship with her co-workers helps to drive her love of her early learning center. Cassie shared, "they are my pick me up and if nobody can work here with us there's something wrong with them cause we are very happy family, we help each other, you know, you can talk to these girls and get their input."

Charlotte

Charlotte is a floating teacher at Lamb's Cross. Charlotte has a bachelor's degree in accounting and works in a variety of rooms in her early learning program. She covers breaks for teachers during her work day. Charlotte joined the early childhood education field after being laid off from another position. Charlotte had found another job after being laid off which required her to work on evenings and weekends. The program Charlotte works in is connected to the church she attends. She was attracted to the position because it offered the opportunity to avoid working weekends or evenings. Charlotte sees her role as caregiver. She adds a lot of love to that role reflecting that, "sometimes you can't get in the room for all the hugs and in the evening the same way we always try to give hugs you know, we're sort of a huggy place like that."

Connie

Connie is a floating teacher at Noah's Ark. Connie has a master's degree in education and works part time at her early learning center. Connie was unique when compared to other participants because she had actually started the program she currently works in. The program began as Connie saw a need for before and after school care arise within her community. She had previous experience as an early learning center director and founded her current program as a ministry of the church she attended. Since its founding, the program has grown from two children to 90 children enrolled. Connie stepped down as the program's director many years ago, but, has remained active as a part-time teacher within the program she frequently referred to as her ministry. In order to persevere as an early educator Connie believes, "you've got to base it on really saying I'm called to do this. Whatever I do, I'll do it heartily because it's for God. I think you have to sort of base it on that. Otherwise, it's just a job, you burn out, it becomes too much, you don't earn enough money." The interview with Connie was relaxed and she shared story after story about her experiences throughout her career. She has been with her current program for 16 years.

Deb

Deb is an infant teacher at Lamb's Cross. Deb has an associate's degree in an unrelated field. Deb spent time in another career and then stayed home when she had children. When Deb decided to go back to work, she found she enjoyed her time with her children, so she thought she would try early childhood education as a second career. During Deb's interview her calming personality was evident. She was soft spoken and her desire to provide high quality care for the children in her classroom was evident throughout her responses. She also expressed a strong desire to make families feel at ease about the care their babies were receiving throughout the day.

The gratitude from families helps to drive Deb's work. She shared, "there's lot of families that I see now that the children are out of the center and in schools and if I, you know maybe I haven't seen them for three or four years, and if I'm out you know at a function or something the parent will see, they just come up and hug me." Deb has worked at her program for 18 years.

Della

Della is a floating teacher at Noah's Ark. Della has a high school diploma and works a split shift at her early learning center. She works with all ages in the program. Della began working in early childhood education because she was looking for a new job and the center is located in the church she attends. She was originally going to work only part time but has since transitioned to full time employment. Della has been employed for nine years. During the interview, Della had a very relaxed disposition and her answers frequently reflected a flexible attitude and content personality. Della connected her relaxed disposition to her ability to manage stress in her position, sharing, "I just kind of try to breath it out a little bit before you answer them, you know, and just try to keep it calm and remember you know you were a kid once, did you really act like that, maybe you did."

Karen

Karen is a preschool teacher at Lamb's Cross. Karen has an associate's degree in early childhood education. Karen has been at her program for six years and has 10 years experience working in early education programs. Karen grew up in a large family and enjoyed teaching and helping with her siblings. She also stated she found she preferred spending time with children over spending time with adults. Karen provided very succinct answers throughout the interview and seemed to have a very clear picture of her strengths and preferences and how they applied to her work. For Karen, seeing the progress children made created meaning within her work. She

explained, “I used to be in the toddler room and you see the kids grow and just going to kindergarten seeing them, how they’re developing, that’s exciting.”

Katie

Katie is a toddler teacher at Little Angels. Katie has a bachelor’s degree in elementary education. Katie entered the field of early childhood education because she enjoyed her part time work at an early learning center during college. When Katie completed her student teaching in a kindergarten classroom, she found the requirements of the position made her feel like her teaching “was shoved into a box of what you were allowed to do.” She saw the children in the class appeared “miserable” when she taught the expected curriculum utilizing the required materials. For Katie, “play is learning,” and she found her early education center shared that value so her decision to teach in an early learning program was “intuitive.” Katie has been employed at her current center for six years and teaches children ranging in age from 12-24 months. The care and devotion Katie has for the children in her classroom permeated the interview. She frequently referred to the children in her room as her kids and discussed developing relationships with families that extend beyond the walls of the early learning center.

Lori

Lori is a preschool teacher at Community Child Care. Lori has spent 25 years in the early childhood education field. The last 10 years she has spent with her current program. Lori saw her grandmother teaching elementary school and was inspired to become a teacher herself. She works with the four and five year-old classroom and shared that she loves that age group. Lori’s love of the students came out throughout her interview. Throughout the stories she shared, she frequently discussed small things that students had done that she had noticed and enjoyed being part of. She was quiet but passionate about her work. For Lori, reflection has supported her

ability to persevere. She recognized she will frequently, "go back and think over was there something I could have done differently. Um, go home and read, just kind of relax, do activities I like to do, think about, ok this didn't work today, how can I change it tomorrow to be more successful." Lori also served as a focus group participant.

Mary

Mary is a preschool teacher at Lamb's Cross. Mary has a high school diploma and a CDA. She works with the younger preschoolers in her current early education program where she has been employed for 16 years. Mary also had four years of additional experience in early childhood education prior to starting to work at her early learning program. A career in early childhood education was a choice Mary made based on her health needs. While health concerns may have directed her into the field, Mary views her role as "missional." The program in which she is employed is based in a church and Mary views that ability to share her faith as a pivotal part of her role within her job.

Robin

Robin is a toddler teacher at Lamb's Cross. Robin has a high school diploma and her CNA. Robin entered the field of early childhood education because she enjoyed working with children and considered the work to be impactful both on the lives of the children and their families. Robin's desire to work in an early learning program began when she was four years old. While she has held other jobs, she has always returned to early childhood education, finding her other jobs to be less fulfilling or even miserable. Robin works with young toddlers and has been at her current program for six years and has over 20 years experience working in early education settings. Robin has an extremely bubbly personality and was a whirlwind of energy during the interview. She also demonstrated great affection for the children in her care often

saying she “loves them to death” and frequently noting that her feelings toward the children in her classroom mimic the feelings she has for her own child.

Sarah

Sarah is a toddler teacher at Community Child Care. Sarah started her career in early childhood education 18 years ago. She has spent the last 16 years working at her current program. Her education background consists of a bachelor’s degree in sociology. She currently spends her time working with the two year-old classroom. Sarah has a self-professed mellow personality and that came through in the interview. She was relaxed and topics related to stress or challenges within her workplace seemed to not have a resonating impact for her. When Sarah did experience stress she found, “I just enjoyed what I did in my classroom so that just kept me coming back because I still felt like I was making a difference.” Sarah acted as a focus group participant.

Results

Theme Development

Within this study, data were collected using individual interviews, a focus group interview, and observations. The data collected from these methods were analyzed and themes were developed in order to explicate the participants’ experience with perseverance as early childhood educators. A description of the steps taken to develop the themese is provided in the following sections.

During the process of horizonalization, significant statements were identified, coded and themes were developed based on those statements (Table 2). The themes were organized with supporting statements and provided answers to the study’s research questions.

Table 2

Themes and Codes

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes
Meaningful Relationships	Relationships with Co-Workers	Administrator support
		Comfortable work environment
		Co-teaching model
		Modeling for co-workers
		Positive Environment
		Meaningful Relationship-coworker
	Relationships with Families	Appreciation from families
		Positive Interactions
		Meaningful Relationship-families
		Support from therapists
	Relationships with Children	Stories kids tell
		Meaningful Relationship-kids
Program Alignment with Personal Education Theory or Theology	Personal Education Theory	Age group
		Autonomy in teaching
		Educational theory alignment
	Personal Theology	Ministry
		Religious beliefs
Autonomy in Decision Making		Autonomy in teaching
		Child development
		Flexibility
		Work space

		Autonomy in decision making
Impactful Work	Short Term Impact	Child development
		Child engagement in activity
		Equip for future
		Happiness of kids
		Impact on children
		Seeing children grow
		Impact on families
		Reasons for ECE
	Long Term Impact	Seeing children grow
		Value of children
		Child development
		Equip for future
		Long term impact
Recognition of Impermanence in Stressful Situations		Reflection
		Stress management
		Strategies for dealing with stress
		Impermanence
Positive Outlook		Positive interactions
		Positive memories
		Positive emotions
		Pride
		Pride in workplace
		Self-confidence

Ministry

The following six themes emerged from the data presented by the participants.

Theme One: Meaningful Relationships

The theme that occurred most frequently within the data collected was related to the impact meaningful relationships had on the perseverance experience of teachers. The teachers in the program experienced three types of meaningful relationships. Teachers cited relationships with co-workers, relationships with families, and relationships with the children in the program as being the primary driving force behind their ability to persevere.

Relationships with co-workers. When discussing their relationships with co-workers, teachers shared statements about the care they feel for their co-workers. Robin shared, "My co-workers, I love them to death so I'm very lucky I'm very fortunate for where I'm at and that has definitely been one of the reasons that has kept me." This relationship extends outside of the workplace. Robin also shared, "I can honestly say that there is not one person here that is not my friend, like, if I had a bar-b-que they would all be invited." She also shared, "We can joke around, we do things outside of work." Casie experienced the loss of her husband during her employment and experienced support from her co-workers while going through her personal tragedy. She shared, "My husband passed away last year and I mean the pouring of love, donations just the, it was awesome and I can't thank this daycare enough for what they did for me….just being here with this family [co-workers] and just being here helped me a lot to spring back."

Teachers also cited feeling like part of a team and recognizing that support was available from their co-workers. Casie said, "They are my pick me up and if nobody can work here with

us there's something wrong with them cause we are a very happy family, we help each other, you know, you can talk to these girls and get their input." Karen also referenced a supportive family atmosphere, "We just work together well, we're like family."

Much like the feel of being included in a family, teachers also cited a team atmosphere as supporting their perseverance. Karen shared, "I like the team we have here." She also cited the team as being the primary reason she has decided to stay in her early learning program. Robin found a similar atmosphere of teamwork in her program, "We have a great staff here we really do, so if there's anything you need don't hesitate and everyone is so willing to help everyone else." Casie also recognized that her co-workers have, "had my back" when she faces challenges. Della shared that her co-workers were, "really nice" and "the group gets along well." Della also shared that she didn't, "think I would really like a busy factory place where you wouldn't get to know the people. I don't think that would be as good."

Relationships with families. Teachers also shared the impact their relationships with the families played into their perseverance experience. When one child incurred a serious injury while in Robin's care the mother's reaction is what prevented Robin from quitting her job as a first-year teacher. Robin shared the child had fallen and hit the side of his face, knocking out some teeth and biting through his cheek. Robin called the ambulance and the mother. When the mother arrived she,

> walked in carrying her baby and I'm crying and she walked in and gave me a hug and she's like, it's not a big deal and I cannot say that that's the way I would have taken it as a parent but, you know what I mean she was awesome, she was amazing. So I called my director and I told her that was it, I was done cause I couldn't handle, I couldn't, that, I just couldn't and so she called me the next day and she said just come in, you know, if

> you can't handle it we'll figure something else out. Well, I came in and I had two dozen roses waiting for me from the mother and a card from the little boy and I still have it. I still have the roses and the card and that was just amazing that she did that.

Robin further shared that she keeps the thank you cards she receives from families in a box. When reflecting on why she kept them she said, "It's just nice to get a thank you and to impact that child's life and it's not just the child, it's the family too, because you become so close with them."

Katie also experienced a close-knit relationship with the families of the children in her class. She was able to be with one mother during a pregnancy loss. Katie shared, "We had made a kind of connection, I was left to be part of…I was there to kind of do my best to help her." Katie shared that she has, "made some lasting relationships with families." Robin also has experienced lasting relationships with her families sharing that, "A lot of our parents actually keep in touch."

This positive relationship with families also helps teachers accomplish their work more effectively. Robin shared, "It makes it easy to talk to them when you have a good relationship with them." Charlotte also found that building relationships with families encourages her perseverance and makes her feel like she is meeting the requirements of her job. "You can't help but become friends with some of the children and families. Parents appreciate when there's a teacher they're kind of looking out for the child or attaches themselves to the child."

These relationships, which extend beyond the time the child is enrolled in the early learning program, encourage perseverance and allow teachers to see the long-term impact of their work. Deb shared,

> There's lots of families that I see now that the children are out of the center and in schools and if, you know, maybe I haven't seen them for three or four years and if I'm out, you know, at a function or something, the parent will see they just come up and hug me….I think they thought their children were really well taken care of here.

Della found a similar long-term relationship during her time with the school age children in her early learning center. "Even though they're older now, up to the older group, they kind of hang out more with me and they kind of buddy to me and I'm friends with their family on Facebook or whatever." Della was also asked to attend the honor's induction ceremony of a previous student recently and she shared the experience with a reflective smile.

Relationships with children. The relationship teachers developed with the children was the most commonly referenced theme throughout the data collection process. Teachers frequently referenced feeling as though the children in their care were their children. Robin felt, "like I'm a second mother to all of these children. I parent all of these children the same way I parent my own child. I absolutely love them to death, they're amazing, they're amazing." She also said, "I love all of my kids." Karen emulated the same sentiment saying, "Just watching them grow, it's like even though they're not my kids, they're my kids."

Long standing relationships with children were also of value to the teachers. Katie said, "It feels good to me to know that I'm still on their mind, even if they're not in my class anymore." Robin also shared that feeling stating, "It's great to be remembered even though they're only two, you touched them, they remember, it's a good thing, I love it." Mary also found this to be a factor encouraging her perseverance. She shared,

> I have seen kids that I had later on in years and they knew me, some of them knew me, they didn't all know me, but I mean in college they still knew me. I was in to, I was in to

> the ring shop, I forget what it's called, anyway I was in there and I heard this boy's voice and I said Jordan and he says Ms. Mary and he was in high school and I had him when he was two years old so he remembered me.

These long-standing relationships allow teachers to see children grow up, which was also commonly referenced as part of the relationship with the children in the early learning center.

While sharing about her time spent with the school age students, Robin exclaimed, "A lot of them I've watched from babies grow so I really enjoy that. I absolutely love it." Charlotte's job requires her to move between rooms to cover teacher lunch breaks and she has found that seeing the progress children make from room to room is one of her favorite parts of her job. She described it as,

> I go with the babies and then with the toddlers and then the preschool so that's why I kind of like to see how my babies are being…it's kind of nice to see how the baby moves through the system and how they grow up. That's one of my favorite things.

Karen also stated that she enjoyed, "watching them learn and grow."

The reaction of children to their teacher also was commonly cited as a factor positively influencing perseverance. Charlotte found that, "Sometimes you can't get in the room for all the hugs and in the evening it's the same way, we always try to give hugs you know, we're sort of a huggy place like that." Deb shared this experience saying,

> They make you feel like they love you, you know what I mean, like smiling at you. You just know that you built that bond with them and that was always kind of exciting to me getting real close to them.

That relationship extends to learning more about the children through the stories they tell. Della stated, “I really like the children a lot, being with them and just hearing all their funny little stories and things.”

Theme Two: Program Alignment with Personal Education Theory or Theology

Another common theme found within participant responses included the early learning program’s alignment to the teacher’s personal beliefs. The personal beliefs of teachers which contributed to their perseverance were their personal educational theory or their personal theology.

Personal education theory.Teachers recognized their pedagogical practices aligned with specific age groups. For Katie, she was drawn to children who were younger than elementary age while Deb specifically liked, “being around the babies because I’ve always enjoyed babies my whole life.” Lori found a similar experience but for her, her preferred age group was preschool. Similarly, Sarah found that her class of toddlers was her preferred group. She commented, “I’m not a baby person and I used to work with the older kids and I thought that’s what I was supposed to do, but once I got with my two-year olds, that’s where I want to be.”

For a few teachers, their personal theory on learning also came into play when deciding to persevere as early educators. Katie had spent her student teaching days in a kindergarten classroom and the experience made her realize she, “couldn’t go back and give all these kids worksheets every day of my life.” For her, early education programs shared her sentiment that play is learning. When speaking of her early learning program she said, “They’re like play is learning, play is learning and I’m like yes play is learning, go back to that. So, it just felt like it was more intuitive, it just felt better.” For Katie, teaching in an early education environment aligned with her teaching philosophy:

> It doesn't feel like I'm forcing them to sit down and listen to something they have no interest in when they're preschoolers. It's sad enough I'm going to ship them off and they have to do that the rest of their life. When they're under five I feel like they deserve to have some freedom of what you're learning.

Robin also found that her program allowed her to teach in a way that aligned with her educational theory. Robin found it hard to see,

> kids not being kids, run around in the dirt, but we can't do that because you know they'll get dirty. Here [program director] is all about letting them play in the dirt, we bring things in all the time, we build gardens out there that they can you know do. I mean if we could she would have me earthing them all the time.

Personal theology. Along with a program's alignment to educational theory, teachers who had theological beliefs which aligned with the early learning center's beliefs also shared this was impactful in the decision to persevere. Connie shared that her early learning program was, "sort of my ministry" and, "a calling." She also shared that, "You've got to base it on really saying, I'm called to do this. Whatever I do, I'll do it heartily because it's for God. I think you have to sort of base it on that. Otherwise, it's just a job, you burn out, it becomes too much, you don't earn enough money." Mary shared this experience. She recognized her program as, "a mission, it matters." When sharing about a time she felt she impacted a family, she told about a family that now attends church because of the relationship she developed with them through her teaching position. In her position she finds that,

> People that come here are faith driven or they are interested in what you have to offer them as far as faith goes, whether they attend or not. We have a lot of kids, do not attend

church but you know I do lessons, I do lessons that bring in the Bible because this may be the only place they hear it.

Theme Three: Autonomy in Decision Making

Teachers found that having some autonomy for decision making or simply autonomy within their classroom has encouraged their perseverance experience. Sarah shared about a challenging work environment under a previous director. She stayed with the program because, "I just enjoyed what I did in my classroom so that just kept me coming back." Katie's student teaching experience made her feel like she was, "being shoved into this box of what you were allowed to do and they, they looked miserable." For her, early education offered, "the freedom of being able to focus on what the kids are interested in and go off that makes their days and their weeks so much better, it makes it so much easier to find things to tie into it." Karen also enjoyed having her own space, saying, "We have our own classroom, so we play together but when it's teaching time, we have our own space, I would just definitely maintain my own teaching space." Deb also found that she liked the ability to make decisions about her day and her schedule with the children. The classroom environment allowed her to, "get to take them out on walks. It's not like an office job that you're just sitting there all day."

Theme Four: Impactful Work

Feeling like their work was impactful was another common theme throughout the individual interviews and focus group interview. Teachers saw these impacts both in short term and long-term goals.

Short term impact. For the teachers participating in the study, there was a sense of accomplishment in seeing their students' happiness and continued growth. Katie shared,

> If at the end of the day they leave and they've got a smile on their face, I did well. If they've picked up a few things it's even better, but I'd much rather them be building up a kind of happiness and feeling good than forcing them to be picking up a few arbitrary skills.

Robin also focused on the impact her relationships had on the children's growth and happiness saying, "They need to feel comfortable first…as long as they're happy then they can do other things….The learning comes easily to them but if they're not happy then I don't think that's a good environment." Casie shared that one of the favorite parts of her job was the hugs she got from the kids. She shared that to her, "The kids are everything."

Fostering an environment in which children could be happy was encouraging to teachers' perseverance, as was seeing the growth students made throughout the year. Charlotte shared that during summer water play, "It's fun to watch the little ones that don't want to even get wet and by the time fall or end of summer rolls around it's not a problem." For Mary that moment of dawning in children was a moment which, "You can just see it on their face that they light up that they get what you are talking about and why and always the why part is wonderful." Karen also found watching this growth to be exciting sharing, "You see the kids grow and just going to kindergarten see them, how they're developing, that's exciting." Even as children leave for the next classroom Robin shared, "It's rewarding to know that all of your hard work has paid off and they're moving up." Sarah said, "I just enjoy seeing them accomplish something, or learning something. It's nice to see."

Long term impact. Teachers shared gaining fulfillment through experiences watching short term gains students made throughout the year, but the stories of the long-term impact teachers saw had several teachers approaching tears. During these stories, the teachers often

slowed the pace of their story telling, provided more detailed accounts, or began smiling more broadly. It was apparent these were the stories the teachers held closely to their hearts. Connie has received many invitations to high school graduations and recently attended both the graduation and eagle scout ceremony for a child she previously worked with. She shared that when she saw him, "He said because you were the one that always talked. He said we always talked in the morning." Connie said she likes working in the program she works in because, "I've known them from the time they're two until they graduate." Many of the teachers shared about seeing families or children out in the community years after the child had left the program and the family expressed thanks or the child remembered the teacher. While these experiences also speak to the impact of meaningful relationships, the experience of seeing children succeed later in life was, in and of itself, a theme. Connie shared that one of her previous students had written a book that is now signed by the author and sits on Connie's coffee table.

Theme Five: Recognition of Impermanence in Stressful Situations

During the course of individual interviews, and throughout the focus group interview, teachers cited a variety of stressors related to their positions. Teachers shared that challenging behavior and sick children were two of their primary stressors. While teachers may have found a variety of situations challenging or stressful, many of the teachers managed that stress by taking a moment to consider the impermanence of whatever situation was causing them stress. Teachers often reported utilizing problem solving or self-reflection as tools to help them consider the possibility of more desirable outcomes. Katie recognized,

> It can be frustrating or stressful the things you run into but try and keep it grounded in that it's just happening in this moment. In five minutes, it could be completely different. Attitudes can change like that and a situation that was overwhelming can suddenly be

> everyone's playing and it's not necessarily the end of the world if your day starts bad because it can get better. Because I think sometimes if you walk in and everyone is screaming and crying that's a really easy way to feel like well this is my day. But it can change really quickly, and you shouldn't write off your day just based on that.

Robin also noted this as a pattern, advising new teachers to, "Take each day as it comes, don't worry about what happened yesterday cause today is a new day, enjoy it." Deb also advised to, "Just be calm, take each day as it comes because each day can be so different and just, you know, just hang in there and try not to get too excited because you know things pass."

The teachers who experienced the perseverance phenomenon were able to both self-reflect and think through ways to change their current stressful situation. Robin wrote she will change,

> What I do instead of what they do, you know, so if I know that circle time is going to be an issue with them before snack maybe they were hungry and that's why they're biting so we'll just move it around a little bit and not have to make them change, but change how I do things.

Self-reflection also came for Della who shared,

> I just kind of try to breathe it out a little bit before you answer them, you know, and just try to keep it calm and remember you were a kid once, did you really act like that, maybe you did.

Alice often tells new teachers at her program,

> It's ok, it's just a lesson plan, if it doesn't work today it's ok, you know what's important, you know sometimes kids are off the wall…sometimes you do all this planning and it

> goes over and sometimes it works and it's ok, it's ok if today you didn't do the art project, tomorrow's another day.

Lori found reflecting at the end of the day was a strategy which helped her to process the events of the day and eliminate challenges which had occurred. She shared that she will, "Go back and think over, was there something I could have done differently…think about ok this didn't work today how can I change it tomorrow to be more successful."

Mary introduced the idea that learning and introducing new strategies is an important part of her perseverance. She stated,

> I'm like the old billy goat under the bridge I shall bide my time, it's all you can do, I mean you just keep plugging away. You take classes and you learn something different and sometimes it works…you just continue to educate until you can find the right things that work.

Regardless of whether teachers used an understanding of developmental milestones, recognized the crying would end, used self-reflection, or intentionally introduced new strategies to support change, teachers consistently reported that the knowledge that what was challenging was not unchangeable, there was impermanence in what was causing them stress, enabled them to continue to persevere as early educators.

This theme spoke to the teacher's resilience. Resilience is defined as an ability to recover from difficulties. While all themes were shown to impact a teacher's ability to persevere, the knowledge of impermanence within the stressful situations they encountered demonstrated how resilience impacted the perseverance decision during stressful situations. Teachers who were able to recover from difficulties and demonstrate resilience, recognized the situations they found

to be stressful would eventually end which served as a catalyst for their decision to persevere within the setting.

Theme Six: Positive Outlook

For teachers who experience the perseverance phenomenon, a positive outlook was another common theme. For some teachers, this positive outlook was established simply through their personalities. Robin shared,

> You have to look toward the positive and what they can do and just try to redirect them if they're doing something that is going to harm someone else and eventually, they get it. It's just awesome when you see it connect.

Robin also described herself by saying, "I always try to be the person with the glass half full instead of half empty, I always try to find the positive out of a negative." Charlotte also said, "I try to look on the positive side, I pray about things a lot."

Other teachers found their positive outlook through their experiences within their environment. Katie shared, "I really enjoy working here, like it is a nice environment to work in, it's a good center. For the most part, I'd say 90% of my interactions are positive." These experiences made her, "feel overwhelmingly positive about where I'm at or what I'm doing." These positive emotions and experiences also enabled some teachers to identify a sense of pride in their early learning program. Sarah shared, "We've seen so many changes in the building, it's like we're proud to work here." Alice shared this sentiment of pride sharing that her early learning center was, "the cream of the crop." Sarah also found a positive outlook in her perception of how she accomplished her job, sharing, "I think I'm good at what I do."

Structural and textural descriptions. Once themes were identified using the textural meanings, Moustakas (1994) final step of transcendental data analysis, *intuitive integration*

began. For each participant I identified what the participant experienced surrounding perseverance and how they experienced the perseverance phenomenon. These textural and structural descriptions from each participant were synthesized into a composite description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This process, also known as eidetic reduction, allowed me to pull back the layers of the experience to present the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Textural description. The experience of perseverance for the teachers participating in this study was an experience which began for a wide variety of reasons. Some of the participants had recently lost jobs, some had sought to find a different career path, while others knew from a young age, that a career teaching young learners was their desired field. Despite beginning at many different points, and varying backgrounds, the teachers in this study shared a perseverance experience that has impacted both their personal lives and the lives of the children, families, and colleagues they have worked with. The decision to persevere has been heavily impacted by the relationships teachers developed within their early learning programs. The development of meaningful relationships with colleagues helps to support a teacher's decision to persevere. When a family or team-like atmosphere is achieved within working relationships, perseverance is supported.

Similarly, relationships with families, which were positive, and extended beyond the traditional parent-teacher relationship, encouraged teacher perseverance. This extending relationship also served to support the teachers' relationship with the students, both while the student was in their classroom and in years to come. When teachers were able to interact with, or see longer term achievements in their students, their fortitude for perseverance was improved.

While teachers approach learning from a variety of beliefs or values, employment in a program which shares those values or beliefs aids in teacher perseverance. Teachers who experienced programs which aligned with their personal philosophy or theology saw their work as more of a calling or as more meaningful and intuitive to their personality, making the decision to stay with the early learning program easier. Teachers also experienced more freedom with decision making than they anticipated would exist within another work environment. Teachers who were given the freedom to make curriculum decisions, classroom design decisions, or environmental decisions found this experience of freedom encouraged their perseverance.

Encouraging teacher perseverance extends beyond what happens while the child is enrolled in their classroom. When teachers experienced moments that demonstrated the long standing impact of their work, they reflected on the experience as being one of the most rewarding aspects of their career. Teachers who were invited to graduations, who were remembered by children or families while out in the community years after the child's enrollment in early education, or were invited to other accomplishments like honor society inductions or eagle scout ceremonies, were able to recognize the long standing impact of the relationship they had built and the care they had provided the child.

All of the teachers included in the study reported feeling some level of stress or facing some type of challenge while working in their early education center. Challenging behavior among children was the most commonly cited source of challenge or stress. Many teachers found other aspects of their work to be challenging. While factors like crying children, paperwork demands, or schedule requirements were also cited as stressful, teachers used a similar strategy to manage that stress. Teachers who persevered managed their stress or challenges by acknowledging the impermanence of the situation. When children were crying,

teachers were able to take a breath and realize that in five minutes the room could be calm. Teachers also were able to recognize that children's developmental stages are inherently impermanent. What a child may be struggling with one week or one month is something they will have mastered in a short time. Teachers who persevered also shared that their personality and outlook on life acted as an encourager. Teachers who saw the glass as half full or typically had a more positive outlook on life used this outlook both to manage stress and to support their personal perseverance.

Structural description. The experience of perseverance as early educators is one that is supported by meaningful relationships with colleagues, families, and children. The teacher's experience was driven by personal connections. Teachers who persevered saw their work as more than work, they assumed ownership which extended beyond their job description. Teachers viewed the children in their care as their own children. The work they were assigned became their ministry or their philosophy in action. The co-workers they engaged with became their friends. The classroom they worked in became their classroom. The perseverance experience is one of integral connections both to people, space, and communities. These connections enabled teachers to effectively manage the stress of their career and persevere.

Research Question Responses

The themes provided answers to the central research question regarding how early childhood educators wiyth five or more years in the same early learning program describe their experiences with perseverance and reasons for persevering as early educators in the same early learning program. The themes also provided answers to the study's two research subquestions pertatining to how early childhood educators perceive that their experiences within their early learning program impacted their decisions to persevere as early educators, and how early

childhood educators who persevere in the same early learning program for five or more years perceive that their coping methods promoted their perseverance and ability to face challenges in the early childhood workplace.

Central Research Question

How do early childhood educators of five or more years in the same early learning program describe their experiences with perseverance and reasons for persevering as early educators in the same early learning program?

The teachers included in this study had between six and 35 years experience in their early learning programs. Their professional and personal backgrounds were diverse, and they were employed at four early learning programs in south-central Pennsylvania. Their responses to the individual interview and focus group interview questions provide insight into the perseverance experience of early educators.

Based on the responses of the participants, t main reason teachers made the decision to persevere was found in the theme of meaningful relationships. Teachers referred to their co-workers as family. For example, Casie said, “They are my pick-me-up and if nobody can work here with us there’s something wrong with them cause we are a very happy family, we help each other, you know, you can talk to these girls and get their input.” Karen also referenced a supportive family atmosphere, “We just work together well, we’re like family.”

Teachers also shared that they saw the children in their care as their children. For example, Robin felt, “like I’m a second mother to all of these children. I parent all of these children the same way I parent my own child. I absolutely love them to death, they’re amazing, they’re amazing.” She also said, “I love all of my kids.” Karen emulated the same sentiment saying, “Just watching them grow, it’s like even though they’re not my kids, they’re my kids.”

Longstanding relationships with children and their families also supported the teachers' perseverance. Deb shared,

> There's lots of families that I see now that the children are out of the center and in schools and if, you know, maybe I haven't seen them for three or four years and if I'm out, you know, at a function or something, the parent will see they just come up and hug me….I think they thought their children were really well taken care of here.

Additionally, teachers who found a personal alignment with their education theory or personal theology saw that alignment impacting their decision to persevere. Connie shared,

> You've got to base it on really saying, I'm called to do this. Whatever I do, I'll do it heartily because it's for God. I think you have to sort of base it on that. Otherwise, it's just a job, you burn out, it becomes too much, you don't earn enough money.

Teachers also found their personal outlook supported their decision to persevere. Several teachers reported they often look on the bright side of things or see the glass as half full.

Teachers who persevered also had that ability to take ownership of their experience. Theme three, autonomy in decision making, supported teacher's decision to enter the field, remain in the field, and persevere in the face of challenges within their early learning program. Recognition of the impact of their work also encouraged teacher perseverance. When teachers were able to see either short-term or long-term progress in their students, they saw this as an experience which promoted their decision to persevere. For example, teachers found that small changes in students' abilities or skills throughout the year or invitations to graduations supported their decision to persevere as they were able to witness first-hand the results of their continued efforts.

Subquestions

SQ1.. How do early childhood educators perceive that their experiences within their early learning program impacted their decisions to persevere as early educators?

Teachers' decisions to persevere mimicked their reasons for persevering. The teachers who persevered experienced meaningful relationships which made them decide to remain in their early learning program even when challenges arose. Lori recognized,

> It would be the same anywhere so there's no point because you have the same issues. You may have different challenges somewhere else, but you still have challenges so why, you know, leave where you know people, you know your class, you're in, you know, a good situation.

Teachers also experienced an alignment of beliefs with either their personal education philosophy or personal theology that encouraged them to remain in their current early learning program. For the teachers in the study who experienced the perseverance phenomenon, their experiences within their early learning center were the driving force behind their decision to persevere. The teachers recognized that other early learning programs in the same geographic region may offer similar employment opportunities, however, the relationships the teachers had built, the memories they had made, and the philosophical or theological alignment they experienced within their current early learning program would not be replicated if they chose to leave their current early learning program.

SQ2. How do early childhood educators who persevere in the same early learning program for five or more years perceive that their coping methods promoted their perseverance and ability to face challenges in the early childhood workplace?

The coping methods of teachers was revealed through their ability to recognize the impermanence of their stressful situation and their ability to have a positive outlook. Katie shared, "It can be frustrating or stressful the things you run into but try and keep it grounded in that it's just happening in this moment. In five minutes, it could be completely different." Similarly, Robin noted she would advise new teachers to, "Take each day as it comes, don't worry about what happened yesterday cause today is a new day, enjoy it." Deb also advised to, "just be calm, take each day as it comes because each day can be so different and just, you know, just hang in there and try not to get too excited because you know things pass."

A positive outlook was also considered important to early educator perseverance by those teachers who have experienced the phenomenon. For example, Robin shared,

> You have to look toward the positive and what they can do and just try to redirect them if they're doing something that is going to harm someone else and eventually, they get it. It's just awesome when you see it connect.

Robin also described herself by saying, "I always try to be the person with the glass half full instead of half empty, I always try to find the positive out of a negative." Charlotte attested to a similar outlook, saying, "I try to look on the positive side, I pray about things a lot."

By approaching their days with a positive attitude and recognizing the impermanence of their stressful situations, the teachers in this study were able to effectively cope through the wide variety of challenges they have encountered as early educators. Challenging behavior, sick children, and many other scenarios have come at these teachers, but they have managed to rely on relationships, personal outlooks, personal beliefs, and the knowledge that according to Robin, "poop is poop, so it's ok."

Summary

Chapter Four of the present study provided a description of the participants included in the study and discussed the process usedto develop themes from the data collected. The chapter also provided study results by answering the research questions addressed within the context of the study. Herzberg's (1968) motivation hygiene theory was affirmed in the results of the study as participants referenced specific experiences which encouraged their perseverance and specific experiences which challenged their ability to persevere. This study added to the current literature concerning teacher perseverance, specifically in early education programs, and provided new insight into the experiences which encourage early educators to persevere by identifying textural and structural descriptions of the perseverance phenomenon.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences that motivate early childhood educators to persevere in their positions at the same early childhood education center, for five or more years, in south-central Pennsylvania. This chapter will provide a summary of the study's findings, a discussion of the findings and implications considering current literature and theory related to the perseverance phenomenon, methodological and practical implications of the study, an outline of the study delimitations and limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

This study sought to understand the experiences which motiviate early childhood edcuators to persevere in their positions at the same early childhood education center, for five or more years, in south-central Pennsylvania. The theoretical framework guiding the study was Herzberg's Motivation Hygiene theory. The study was guided by one central research question. How do early childhood educators of five or more years in the same early learning program describe their experiences with perseverance and reasons for persevering as early educators in the same early learning program?

The data collected from individual interviews, a focus group interview, and observations was recorded and analyzed utilizing Moustakas' (1994) guidelines for transcendental phenomenological research. Based on the experiences of the participants included in this study, three themes emerged which provided answers to the central research question. Teachers who persevere as early educators experience meaningful relationships with their co-workers, families, and children. Teachers also noted an alignment of the early learning program's mission with

their personal education theory or theology encouraged their decision to persevere in their early education program. Teachers additionally shared a sense of autonomy supported their decision to persevere. When teachers were able to experience a feeling of ownership or control over their classroom, curriculum, or other aspects of their environment, they found the experience motivating, which produced a desire to stay within their early learning program. Teachers also found this autonomy supported their ability to maintain their positions when faced with other oppositions, such as challenging administration.

The study also sought to answer two research sub questions. Sub question one was, how do early childhood educators perceive that their experiences within their early learning program impacted their decisions to persevere as early educators? Teacher responses in answer to this subquestion mimicked their responses to the central research question. Teachers found the relationships they had established to be a determining factor in their decision to persevere. If there was an alignment of personal beliefs, teachers also recognized that alignment may not exist in another education setting, making them more likely to remain in their current program. A few of the participants had previously been employed at other early learning programs and for them, the support they received as a result of the relationships they established with their co-workers made the decision to remain in their early education program an easy one.

The second research sub question, how do early childhood educators who persevere in the same early learning program for five or more years perceive that their coping methods promoted their perseverance and ability to face challenges in the early childhood workplace, was answered through two themes developed through participant experiences. Teachers who persevered perceived both their ability to recognize the impermanence of stressful situations, and their ability to have a positive outlook, influenced their ability to face challenges and persevere.

Participants frequently referenced the idea that situations which are stressful don't last forever, that student behaviors can change, that tomorrow, or next week, or five minutes from now, would be better. Teachers also reported engaging in reflection and adjusting their teaching practice to help create the changes they desired. Additionally, participants shared they often approached the challenges of their position with a positive outlook and advised new teachers to do the same.

Discussion

In order to examine the topic of early educator perseverance empirical and theoretical works were examined. This section discusses the empirical and theoretical findings of the study as they relate to previous research and theory.

Empirical Literature

Current studies indicated a variety of factors influence a teacher's decision to persevere. The majority of these factors relate to school climate. School climate is created through a variety of factors. The interactions between members of the school and the relationships that are formed between these members help to shape the school's climate. The teachers in this study found that positive experiences surrounding their relationships with their co-workers heavily influenced their decision to persevere. Previous research supports this finding, indicating that schools in which teachers persevere have been found to maximize the effectiveness of the teacher by providing opportunities for feedback, peer collaboration opportunities, responsive administrators and an ordered environment (Borkar, 2016; Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Kraft et al., 2016; Kraft & Papay, 2014). Teachers have referenced collegial interactions, administrative support, and school discipline as experiences profoundly impacting their ability not only to be effective teachers but also to persevere within their school setting (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Johnson &

Birkland, 2003; Kraft et al., 2015; Kraft et al., 2016). Studies indicated school context or school climate is a stronger predictor of teacher perseverance than individual teacher traits (Allensworth et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2016; Ladd, 2011; Loeb et al., 2005; Marinell & Coca, 2013; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Teachers in the current study indicated the impact of the long-term benefits of their work was an important experience which supported their decision to persevere. Often this long-term impact was revealed through the relationships teachers established with children and families. Teachers frequently reported being invited to graduation ceremonies, receiving thank you cards from families, or seeing children and being remembered years later helped them understand the importance of their work and increase their fortitude to continue with it.

The school climate in which early educators work is often driven by theories or theology embedded within the program's mission. When these theories or theological beliefs align with the early educator's beliefs the teachers in this study indicated a stronger desire to persevere in their program. Previous studies found that teachers expressed their desires to pursue their career derived from personal desires, experiences, or beliefs. These individuals saw themselves as "serving a higher purpose" and as "primary builders of our nation's future" as well as believing they are "preparing children for the world" (Langford, 2008). Also, teachers who saw their work as a personal calling, or viewed themselves as professionals were more likely to persevere in the field of education (Torquati et al., 2007). Teachers who report feeling "happy" with their position were also more likely to persevere (Wells, 2014). The teachers in the current study frequently referenced having a positive attitude or approaching the day with a smile, often advising new teachers to do the same. These personal beliefs and desires about the influence of their work, not only on the child, but on society, and even the world as a whole, demonstrate how

personal beliefs about the value of the work they are completing may impact an early educator's ability to persevere (Clipa & Boghean, 2015).

While an aligned belief system aids in supporting teacher perseverance, teachers also cited their ability to be autonomous in their teaching decisions as beneficial. Another theme which arose within this study was that autonomy in teaching promoted perseverance. Teachers indicated that being able to be in their own space or having some control over their curriculum or schedule promoted their perseverance. Previous studies have also found that a work environment that promoted a sense of belonging and allowed teachers to feel ownership of their classroom and to a greater degree, the center itself, promoted perseverance (Hale-Jinks et al., 2006; Kraft et al., 2016).

Even in the best of school climates, stressful situations can arise. All of the participants indicated they experienced some stress at work. The approach to stressful or challenging situations, the theme that answers the second research subquestion, expands the current empirical knowledge base surrounding early educator perseverance. Early educators in the current study approached stressful situations with the knowledge that the situation was impermanent. For some teachers this meant that if babies were crying, they would be able to see to their needs, and they would stop crying. For some teachers this meant if children were not getting along, in five minutes their attitudes may change, and they could be playing nicely, while for other teachers, they recognized their ability to adjust classroom routines or lessons that had been challenging.

This theme spoke to the teacher’s ability to be resilient. The knowledge gained from experience impacts a teacher’s ability to persevere through the building of an ability to be resilient. Resilience was developed through experience. For example, teachers were able to recognize the impermanence of stressful situations because they have experienced the stress

before and have also experienced resolution of that stressful situation. Novice teachers have higher rates of attrition perhaps because they have not experienced the resolution of stressful situations making their ability to be resilient, and their ability to persevere, more challenging.

The teachers not only saw that the situation would change, they saw themselves as competent enough to address whatever situation was causing the stress. When teachers did begin to feel overwhelmed, many of the participants reported taking a breath or pausing before responding to give themselves time to control their response and respond to the situation in a way that was going to create positive change.

Theoretical Literature

This study was guided by Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory. Herzberg's (1968) research indicated a two-factor theory model in which experiences that impact job satisfaction are different from experiences which impact job dissatisfaction. This two-factor theory delineated between experiences, which impact individuals to persevere and experiences which challenge their motivation to persevere (Herzberg, 1968). Herzberg (1968) referred to experiences which challenge an individual's ability to persevere as hygiene factors. Herzberg (1968) found that company policy and administration, supervision, interpersonal relationships, working conditions, safety, status, and security were experiences, which were most commonly associated with job dissatisfaction. While the current study did find a delineation between factors which influence job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, the factors did not align, and in some cases were the opposite of those identified by Herzberg (1968).

Herzberg (1968) identifies interpersonal relationships as hygiene factors, but the current study indicates relationships were the primary support for early educators' decisions to persevere. It is possible that the dynamics of early education are different than those in the

careers examined by Herzberg (1968). Many teachers in the study indicated they felt like they were part of a family or team and that may not be an established environment in all places of employment. This shift between hygiene and motivating factors indicates that the factors which influence an individual's decision to persevere or become dissatisfied, may vary by place of employment or career.

Motivators identified by Herzberg (1968) include recognition, achievement, responsibility, advancement, and growth. Herzberg (1968) found that these factors were related to the individual. The current study indicated that factors such as growth or achievement can be achieved by the teacher through the student. Teachers participating in this study often referenced finding satisfaction in seeing student growth or student achievement both in long-term and short-term goals. For the teachers, this achievement or growth in their students affirmed the importance of their work. Recognition was also found to be a theme supporting teacher perseverance in this study. Teachers reported experiencing positive emotions when parents thanked them or recognized the impact of their work. A few participants also reported a desire to be recognized by society, as a whole for their work and contribution to the development of the students in their care.

Implications

This study of early educator perseverance provides theoretical, empirical, and practical implications that can benefit early education administrators, early educators, and the field of education. This section discusses these implications as they relate to Herzberg's (1968) motivation hygiene theory, the current body of literature, and currect polices and practices within the field of early education.

Theoretical Implications

Herzberg's (1968) motivation hygiene theory was the guiding theory for this study. According to Herzberg's (1968) theory, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not merely opposites of each other. His research indicated a two-factor theory model in which experiences that impact job satisfaction are different from experiences which impact job dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1968). This two-factor theory was evident within the experiences of early educators as there was found to be a delineation between experiences which encouraged early educators to persevere and experiences which challenged their motivation to persevere (Herzberg, 1968).

Themes found within participant responses which challenged their ability to persevere as early educators included compensation, job status, and stressful working conditions. Themes found within participant responses which contributed to participant perseverance included meaningful relationships, alignment with personal educational theory, autonomy in decision making, impactful work, and recognition of impermanence in stressful situations. The study findings support Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory, which states experiences which impact job satisfaction and experiences, which impact job dissatisfaction are not necessarily opposites of each other.

While low compensation or limited resources has been linked with limiting perseverance in early education settings, the participants of this study did not see these challenges as impacting their ability to persevere. The participants often mentioned that if they could change their jobs they would increase their pay or benefits but none of the participants in the study made any comments indicating that higher pay would increase their likeliness of perseverance. One of the early learning programs in the study had just given raises to their teachers but none of the participants shared that annual raises influenced their perseverance. While early educators

deserve to be compensated at a rate that acknowledges them as the professionals they are, simply raising salaries, without providing opportunities to engage in activities which the participants saw as encouraging perseverance would not be the most appropriate method of encouraging perseverance. As early education administrators examine ways to increase perseverance among teachers, the factors identified by early educators in this study which have influenced their personal ability to persevere should be considered.

Early education administrators could provide increased opportunities for collaboration between teachers. When teachers were able to seek support from other co-workers or felt supported by their administrator, they were better able to handle the stresses of their position. This could be accomplished through an informal time during a staff meeting, through a formal system in which teachers could request support for a particular challenge, or through requesting assistance through outside agencies such as Early Intervention or local Intermediate Units.

Families within the community can support early educator perseverance by taking time to discuss their child's accomplishments with their teacher. By simply communicating information families help to build relationships with their child's teacher. This also will allow teachers to realize accomplishments of the children they support daily. Families can also provide periodic updates, notes, cards, or invitations to events as their children age out of the program. Teachers who reported being invited to honor's ceremonies, graduations, or other events shared the positive impact that had on their decision to persevere.

Empirical Implications

The current body of literature demonstrates that school climate impacts teacher perseverance to a greater degree than any other experience (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Johnson, 2009; Kennedy, 2010; Kraft et al., 1975; Pogodzinski et al., 2013; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Simon

& Johnson, 2015). The research related to why teachers persevere in early childhood education is minimal (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Wells, 2014). This study expands on the limited body of literature by examining motivation and maintenance factors which influence the perseverance of early educators. Meaningful relationships, alignment with personal educational theory, and autonomy in decision making are areas in which early education programs could further engage to support teacher perseverance.

Many studies related to teacher perseverance have focused on quantitative measures to extrapolate data. By allowing teachers to share their personal experiences surrounding perseverance, this study has expanded the empirical knowledge of the field. Additionally, by identifying how teachers successfully manage the stress of the early childhood education program, additional support can be provided to allow for teacher acquisition of these skills. Programs preparing students for a career in early education could focus on developmental stages. When teachers were able to recognize that a child would gain a skill they were missing or that their challenging behavior was related to a skill deficit, that knowledge promoted their perseverance. Colleges and universities could also ensure students are engaging in reflection throughout their coursework. By reflecting on lessons, teachers are able to feel control over their ability to adjust a lesson that did not go well, as opposed to feeling overwhelmed.

Practical Implications

Early education programs can intentionally create opportunities for families and teachers to form relationships. Many early education centers already provide family engagement activities to engage families in their child's education. These events are often designed to provide opportunities for the child to engage with their family in a meaningful way. The early learning programs included in this study held events like Muffins with Mom or Donuts with Dad

or art shows for families to view child work. These events are well attended by families, but the teacher's role is often to set up or tear down. Early learning programs could expand on these events and host events that would bring the teachers, families, and children together. One center hosts center wide movie nights, while another plans center wide summer picnics. These activities provide an opportunity for the families, teachers, and children to come together and foster those relationships.

Many of the participants referenced the feeling of happiness they experience when a child or family remembers them after the child has left the program. To leverage this and to provide an opportunity for teachers to see the longitudinal effects of their work, centers could hold reunions or an annual picnic that includes both the children currently enrolled in the program with invites extended to those who have enrolled in the past.

The most common stress management strategy utilized by teachers who have persevered was to take a moment and recognize that the stressful situation they were experiencing was most likely going to be short lived. While crying babies or a child exhibiting challenging behavior is stressful, the ability to recognize that this moment will pass is an ability that most of the study participants possessed. Early education programs can provide training on stress management, offer more frequent short breaks for teachers to catch their breath, and provide coaching on reflective decision making within classroom climates to support teacher's acquisition of this skill.

One of the challenges early education programs face is developing resilience in their teachers. The teachers in the current study were able to demonstrate resilience through recognition of impermanence in their stressful situations. This recognition was gained through experience. The teachers who have persevered have experienced resolution of stressful

situations while novice teachers may not have the same experience with resolution, making resilience, and by extension perseverance, more challenging. For this reason, implementation of a mentor system within early education programs could help support teacher perseverance. If programs intentionally allow experienced teachers to mentor novice teachers, the opportunity to share information and experience surrounding the impermanence of stressful situations could help build novice teacher resilience and support their perseverance within the field and program.

In addition to allowing novice teachers to be mentors, all teachers within early childhood education programs could benefit from coaching support. An effective means of coaching in early education is known as practiced based coaching (Figure 3) (National Center for Pyramid Model Practices, 2019). Practice based coaching is a cyclical process which can be used to support teacher's implementation of evidence-based practices (National Center for Pyramid Model Practices, 2019). The goal is for the program's coach and the classroom teacher to work collaboratively. The coach would conduct an observation followed by a time for both the teacher and coach to reflect and discuss feedback. The teacher and program coach would then work together to create a goal and develop an action plan. This model of coaching allows for the teacher to access support for stressful situations without losing the feeling of autonomy teachers in the current study valued.

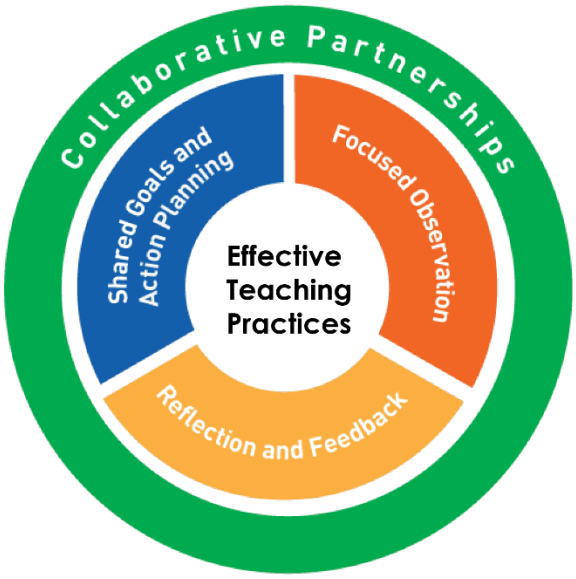

Figure 3. Practiced Based Coaching

Delimitations and Limitations

This study attempted to include participants from a variety of early education programs and from varying levels of experience. Delimitations within the study were imposed only to support the purpose of the study. Based on the current research, indicating the highest attrition rates occur within the first five years of teaching (Gallant & Riley, 2014; Riley, 2011; Santavirta et al., 2007), early educators who had fewer than five years experience were not included in the study. By selecting early educators who have been employed for five or more years, the study was able to focus on the experiences of participants who had exceeded the most common timeframe for attrition.

Limitations of the study include the limitation of the study to one geographic region. While the study spanned two towns, one more rural and one somewhat more urban, the entire region would be considered rural when compared to larger cities. Additionally, early education funding and program types vary significantly by state, so limiting the study to one state created a limitation in the application of the study's findings. Originally, a fifth program was planning to

offer teachers the opportunity to participate, but at the time of data collection, the program's director did not have enough staff to accommodate time for collection of data at their facility. This limited the study to four locations. The fifith location would have provided increased participates and additional variations within the program demographics.

Recommendations for Future Research

Early educator perseverance continues to be a challenge for both early educators and early education administrators. As the problem persists there continues to be a need to conduct further research on factors influencing teacher perseverance in the field of early childhood education. In consideration of the findings of the study, there exists a need to support the development of relationships between teachers, families, and students. Additional areas of research could examine practices which would best support the development of these relationships. Additionally, because teachers who persevere were found to use similar methods of coping with the challenges of their field, practices which would support the development of these skills could be examined in future research. Currently there exists a body of research surrounding teachers acting as reflective practitioners and reflective coaching supports. Practices which would aid teachers in developing these skills could be examined, specifically related to their impact on teacher perseverance.

Future research could also utilize a grounded theory approach to allow for exploration of a theory which would explain certain practices or experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2018). If a theory or framework was revealed through continued research it would aid in the implementation of practices that would support early educator perseverance.

This study was limited in that the geographic region in which it was conducted was primarily rural. In urban school settings, teacher perseverance rates are lower when compared to

rural school settings (Barnett & Stevenson, 2016; Easley, 2006; Kraft et al., 2015; Watlington et al., 2010).

In urban schools, low teacher perseverance rates have also been found to have an excessively negative impact on students (Kraft et al., 2016; Watlington et al., 2010). Schools with students who are at risk often have a variety of characteristics which make teacher perseverance more challenging. Urban and under-performing schools often have high populations of students, which require specialized or additional support. In addition, these schools are often underfunded due to the low socio-economic status of the community from which their tax base is derived (Barnett & Stevenson, 2016; Watlington et al., 2010). Therefore, additional research should be completed utilizing a similar methodology as this study to determine if teachers have the same experiences with perseverance in urban settings or if experiences impacting perseverance vary by geographic region.

Summary

This study sought to understand the experiences that motivate early childhood educators to persevere in their positions at the same early childhood education center, for five or more years, in south-central Pennsylvania. A total of 13 early educators from four early learning programs acted as co-researchers as they shared their experiences with the perseverance phenomenon.

The findings of the study indicated relationships are the crux of perseverance. Teachers in the study shared that the relationships they have developed with their co-workers, families, and children, have been the most influential factors supporting their decision to persevere. Teachers also indicated their own personal beliefs and outlook have heavily influenced their

decision. Additionally, teachers reported the autonomy offered them in their early education program further supports their decision to persevere.

When managing the stress of their positions, early educators participating in this study have developed the ability to recognize the impermanence of their stressful situations. This recognition of impermanence is further supported by the teacher's knowledge that they have the ability to change the situation, either through time, resources, knowledge, or peer support. Early learning programs could encourage perseverance of teachers by creating climates which foster the building of relationships, allow for team building or problem solving, and providing coaching to support teachers in reflective decision making.

This study both supports and adds to the current theoretical and empirical knowledge base surrounding teacher perseverance. Further research could support the development of strategies or practices which would aid in the management of stress in early educators and the development of long-term relationships among teachers, families, and children. Early educators lay an educational and relational foundation for the youngest learners of society. The perseverance of early educators supports the continued success and growth of children, families, and society.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

CONSENT FORM

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE PERSEVERANCE EXPERIENCE OF

EARLY EDUCATION TEACHERS

Alison Mellott
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study on perseverance in early education teachers. The study is designed to explore experiences impacting the decisions of teachers to remain in early education. You were selected as a possible participant because you teach in an early education center and have been with your current program for five or more years. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

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

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to allow early educators who have remained in early education the opportunity to share information about their experiences and decision to remain teaching in the field.

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

1. Participate in an individual interview. My intention is to hold this interview during your work day. The interview will last approximately 1 hour and will be audio recorded.
2. Provide me a brief tour of your classroom. This time is designed to share any experiences you would like.
3. If more information is requested and you are willing, participate in a focus group interview and/or follow up interview. The focus group will be audio and visual recorded to allow me to review the conversations. There will be questions presented for discussion and the focus group will last approximately 1 hour.
4. Review the transcripts of the interview, and/or focus group to ensure I have accurately recorded your statements and review the findings of my research to ensure your experience is accurately presented. I will email you the documents to review and you can respond to the email with any corrections you feel need to be made.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. I am a mandatory reporter so any information regarding child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse or intent to harm yourself or others, I would be mandated to report.

Benefits:

No Direct Benefits: Participants will not receive any direct benefits by participating in the study

Benefits to society include increased awareness of experiences which impact the decisions of educators to remain in early education. Turnover in early education is a problem impacting the success of both students and educators. By participating in the study, you may help offer insight into changes which can be made in programs to better support teachers.

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.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. Hard copies of data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office.
- Focus groups and interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your employer. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Alison Mellott. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 717-713-5624 or amellott1@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Grania Holman, at ggholman@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **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.

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 audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____

Signature of Participant Date

_____

Signature of Investigator

APPENDIX B

EMAIL TO PROGRAM DIRECTORS

Good morning (director's name),

I am currently working toward an Ed.D in Curriculum and Instruction at Liberty University and have reached the dissertation phase of my studies. I have selected early educator perseverance as my topic. I previously worked at a center in your area and I remember as a director one of my biggest challenges was staff turnover. It didn't seem to matter what I did it felt like we were always hiring. I was always impressed by the individuals who stayed in our program for years. Their dedication to the program and to the children was inspiring and I wished I could clone them. When I approached my dissertation topic I wanted to tell their stories, to explore what motivates them to stay, not just in early education, but at the same program.

I know from living and working in the area, your program enjoys higher than average retention rates of teachers, I'm sure you have individuals who have worked at the center even longer than you. I would like to work with your center to tell their stories. My hope is that the information I collect through an interview, focus group, and observations will help all of us understand what influences early educators to persevere. All participants and participating centers will be assigned pseudonyms in the study, so programs and individuals will not be identified by name.

To support the study, I am asking you to forward an email invitation to individuals who have taught five or more consecutive years at your program. The invitation will be inviting those individuals to participate in an interview. I would like to conduct interviews at your center, if possible, to make participation easier for the teachers. Some participants from your program may also be asked to participate in a follow up focus group if they are willing.

I believe we all recognize the value of early education but without ongoing research to support best practice and identify new ways to influence quality, it will be challenging for the field to grow professionally. If you are willing help support the study by forwarding an email invitation and allowing me to conduct interviews at your center, please respond to this email affirming your support and I will send the invitation to participants as well as an email to determine appropriate interview times. I must identify locations for my study prior to the study being approved. Therefore, I anticipate some delay between gaining approval from your program and my ability to send out the invitations. I will keep you updated on the process should your program agree to participate. You are welcome to withdraw your participation in the study at any time. Should you choose to participate, please provide the following information in response to this email; number of staff employed (both teachers and administrative personnel), Star level, number of children enrolled, types of enrollment (full time, part time, etc), age range served by your program and any other information you feel may influence the longevity of your teachers. Thank you for your anticipated assistance in supporting the early education field.

Alison Mellott

APPENDIX C

EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS

Good Morning Teachers!

I am student at Liberty University completing my doctorate. In order to fulfill my graduation requirements, I have to conduct some research and write a dissertation. The topic I have selected is early educator perseverance. You are receiving this email because you have worked at your center for more than five years. Your dedication to children and to the field of early education is inspiring and I would like the opportunity to talk to you about your experiences as a teacher, what motivates you, and what challenges you. Your participation will help support the field of early education.

In order to participate in the study, I am asking you to attend an interview. Your director has agreed to allow me to conduct the interview during your work hours at your program. The interview will be no more than one hour, with snacks provided. During that time, you will be asked a few questions about your experiences in early education. You can choose to answer all of the questions or none of the questions and you can withdraw your participation at any time. Some participants may also be asked to attend a follow up focus group or follow up interview to help gather more information.

If you would be willing to attend an interview and chat with me, please respond to the email by letting me know you are willing to participate. Thank you so much for your anticipated help in further supporting early education.

Alison Mellott

APPENDIX D

PERMISSION TO USE IMAGE

Pew Research Center provides its research – free of charge – as a public service to policymakers, researchers, journalists and the general public, and encourages the use of our material in its original form.

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As a strictly nonpartisan, non-advocacy organization, we do not grant permission for reprints, links, citations or other uses of our data and analysis that in any way imply that Pew Research Center endorses a cause, candidate, issue, party, product, business or religion.

APPENDIX E

IRB APPROVAL

October 2, 2018

Alison Mellott

IRB Approval 3455.100218: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Perseverance Experience of Early Education Teachers

Dear Alison Mellott,

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

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