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We Shall Not Be Moved: Finding Hope in the Stories of Elementary School Teachers in Rural Georgia

Allison Beasley

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WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED: FINDING HOPE IN THE STORIES OF ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL TEACHERS IN RURAL GEORGIA

by

ALLISON H. BEASLEY

(Under the Direction of Robert Lake)

ABSTRACT

Many perceive education and teaching as hopeless, so why do some teachers stay in the profession? This dissertation is focused on the stories of veteran public elementary school teachers in rural Georgia who continue to teach in spite of the current seemingly hopeless state of education at the local, state and national level.

The theoretical framework of this inquiry builds upon a wide array of works such as the work of Freire (1994, 1998) and Fromm (2010) on critical hope, as well as, multiple theorists' work on versions of hope (West, 2004; Giroux, 2013; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Lear, 2006); the work on passion for teaching (Palmer, 2007; Nieto, 2003, 2005, 2008; Ayers, 2008; Villerand et al., 2003; Fernet et al., 2014; Phelps & Benson, 2012), as well as, morale in education (Evans, 1997; Mackenzie, 2007). Methodologically, I utilize narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 1988, 2000) to collect teacher stories (Witherell & Noddings, 1991; Cole, 1990; Shubert & Ayers, 1992; He, 2003; Nieto, 2003, 2005) of what keeps veteran teachers in the elementary school classroom despite all of the challenges in education today, and to learn from those seasoned teachers who choose to stay in the classroom about hope and hopelessness in classrooms today. I then created a collage of the stories that I gathered from the participants.

Three themes emerged from this inquiry as to why teachers choose to remain in the classroom: (1) participants' love for their students, (2) participants' love for learning and (3)

participants' understanding of a 'bigger picture' in education. Two themes emerged in regards to what we can learn from teachers who choose to stay in the classroom about hope and hopelessness in classrooms: (1) the importance of positivity and (2) the impact of stress related to teaching.

INDEX WORDS: Teacher stories, Narrative inquiry, Critical hope, Teachers, Passion for teaching, Teacher morale, Teacher resilience

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ALLISON H. BEASLEY

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GA

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Reggie, and my daughter, Emily, for your support and encouragement through this process. I could not have made it without the two of you.

To my parents, Joe and Faye, who instilled in me a love for learning at an early age. Thank you for your love, support, and encouragement.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In a search to highlight the critical hope that many elementary teachers possess, this narrative inquiry into the lives of three teachers begins with a personal exploration of my inner being as a teacher to find the critical hope in myself. This introduction provides the background to my research, those experiences that have brought me to the place where I am now. As a qualitative researcher using narrative inquiry, my life, my beliefs, and my experiences all come together to create the lens through which I will view research, and in a broader sense, how I view the world. The places I have encountered, as well as, the experiences that I have had, all play a role in why I chose this topic for my dissertation. As a teacher, I cannot tell you the number of times someone has asked me, “Why?” or “How?”...”Why in the world did I want to be a teacher and how could I handle students in the classroom these days?” It was hard for me to understand why I was continually asked these questions. Was it not apparent why I chose to be a teacher? It is because of this that I wanted to focus my research on the lives of teachers and to highlight teacher stories of why they choose to stay in the classroom and teach students when so many think that teaching is a deplorable profession in today's society. There has been an apparent loss of hope by many in the population that is evident on the nation, state and local level. This loss of hope has to be addressed so that the real stories of the teachers can be told and heard to counter the negative that is so apparent in the media with regards to teaching and teachers in the United States. The following introduction begins with a view of education from the national level and moves to a more personal level with my view in regards to the state of elementary education.

Loss of Hope in Elementary Education

Across the Nation

My entire life and educational career have taken place in the United States. More than that my entire life and educational career have somehow been directly tied to education in the United States. So many times I have heard others in all parts of the nation ask the question of teachers, “Why teach and remain in the field of education today?” The answer to this question is just one of the many challenges facing education in the United States today. When looking at the research on teacher attrition rates, it is apparent that one obstacle in education today is keeping qualified teachers in the teaching profession. R. Goldring, S. Taie, and M. Riddles (2014) report that 20% of beginning public school teachers leave or move within the profession within their first three years of teaching. The attrition rate of teachers is even higher than this in schools with a high poverty level or low academic achievement rates (Goldring, R., Taie, S., & Riddles, M., 2014). This high rate of attrition in public education equates to costing the United States billions of dollars annually in training replacement teachers, recruitment, and professional development to support beginning teachers. The question of importance that we must answer in education is not how to find more teachers, but how do we get the good teachers to stay? We must find the key to teacher resilience in education and the source of teacher hope in education and teaching to answer this question. We have to do more to keep good teachers in the profession.

Much research has been conducted to determine the reasons that teachers choose to leave the teaching profession. For example, research has shown that the current conditions of education and teaching in the United States have been tied to high teacher attrition rates (Sass, D. A., Flores, B. B., Claeys, L., & Pérez, B., 2012). These are the conditions in which teachers work, day in and day out, that impact their decision to stay in the teaching field or to leave. The

idea of standardization has a significant impact on the reality of education in the United States. The implementation of the Common Core standards has changed the way that teachers have to teach their students. Research has also shown that teachers are being asked to do more and more in the number of tasks in the classroom, as well as, in the level of expectations for the tasks (Bailey, 2000). The standards are more scripted and require teachers to complete tasks in specific ways. "As the only concern becomes one of the efficient enforcement of the 'right' knowledge, critical engagement, investigation, and intellectual curiosity, not to mention cultural and class differences, appear as impediments to learning, as teachers are treated as deskilled deliverers of prepackaged curricula, prohibiting their potential as critical intellectuals" (Watkins, 2011, p. 59). The stressed importance of standards has made a negative impact on teachers and is cited as one of the reasons that they choose to leave teaching (Sass, D. A., Flores, B. B., Claeys, L., & Pérez, B., 2012). Research has shown that teachers have noted the impact of standardized tests on their role in the classroom (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012). Teachers admitted that subjects that are tested have higher priority than non-tested subject areas. Teachers are giving up social studies and science instructional time, while increasing math and ELA instructional time due to curriculum and standardized testing pressure. This same idea is stated by Rose (2009), "...standardized measures can limit the development of competence by driving curricula toward the narrow demands of test preparation instead of allowing teachers to immerse students in complex problem solving and rich use of language" (p. 103). Teachers are always reminded of the test and checked off to see if they are teaching only the standards for their grade. D. A. Sass, B.B Flores, L. Claeys, & B. Pérez (2012) found that that majority of teachers that left the field of teaching did so because of the increased importance of high stakes testing, more time devoted to teaching test-taking skills, and the increased stress level associated with high stakes

testing.

It should also be noted that the dynamics of schools in the United States are changing. In 2013, almost 21% of school-age children were living in poverty (The Conditions of Education, 2015). The poverty level is up from 17% in 1990. The south had the highest poverty rate of public school children in the United States at 23%. The number of white students enrolled in public elementary schools from 2002 to 2012 has decreased from 59% to 51% of the enrolled population. During this same time, the number of Hispanic students increased from 18% to 24% and the black population decreased from 17% to 16%. This trend is expected to continue in the upcoming years. Related to the change in the proportion of races and ethnicities in schools, the percentage of public school students who were English language learners was up to 9.2% in 2013 from 8.7% in 2003. The number of minority teaching candidates entering the field of education has increased, but not at the same rate of minority student enrollments in recent years (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006). This same article found that minority teachers are inclined to have lower attrition rates than non-minority teachers.

Lake (2013) writes, "Quantifiable uniformity is embraced, and divergent thinking is portrayed as weakness. The operative words under these prevailing conditions are 'accountability,' 'benchmarks,' and 'performance standards'" (p. xx). This illustrates the aim or purpose of education today in the United States. Classroom teachers are at the heart of the school environment, and the changes that have taken place in education have certainly made an impact on their decision to stay in the classroom or to leave. With all of the research on why teachers leave, the voice of the teacher, who chooses to remain in the classroom despite the current educational atmosphere, is one that many have not heard. Kozol (2008) writes, "The best teachers are not merely the technicians of proficiency; they are also ministers of innocence,

practitioners of tender expectations" (p. 4-5). With the current conditions in the public school system and the high turnover rate of teachers, it is essential to ask: Why do teachers choose to remain in the classroom? Education has a feeling of hopelessness, yet many teachers decide to stay the course. It is through the careful examination of teacher's stories that we can see what it really means to teach in K-12 schools today. The foundation of my study is not to determine why teachers leave but to discover why teachers choose to remain in the classroom despite the hopelessness of education.

Georgia on My Mind

The loss of hope in teachers can also be seen on a regional level within the state of Georgia where I live and work in the education field. The Georgia Department of Education released a study entitled "Georgia's Teacher Dropout Crisis" in December of 2015 (Owens, 2015). The following quote was found on the title page of the document: "Something must be done; education is in a major crisis" (Owens, 2015). If that does not scream hopelessness in education, I am not sure what does! The report was conducted after the Georgia Professional Standards Commission reported in the fall of 2015 that 44% of public school teachers in Georgia leave the profession within five years of teaching. Based off the Georgia Professional Standards Commission's findings, the Georgia Department of Education surveyed over 53,000 current educators in Georgia to better understand the reason for this high attrition rate. The survey was based on three questions focusing on whether teachers would recommend teaching as a profession, ranking a list of reasons teachers leave the profession and additional reasons why teachers leave the profession.

In regards to the first question, the report found that 66.9% of teachers responded that they are unlikely or doubtful to encourage the teaching profession. Only an alarming 2.7% of

those surveyed would be very likely to recommend teaching as a profession. This statement in itself shows hopelessness in teaching and the gloom and doom outlook of the teaching profession in Georgia. One elementary teacher wrote, "I love my time with my students, but I would never choose this path again. Which makes me very sad" (Owens, 2015, p. 2). Another alarming finding is that the more the experience a teacher has, the less likely they would recommend teaching to others.

The second question on the survey listed eight possible reasons for teachers to leave the profession and asked respondents to rank the reasons from most prominent to least prominent. The two most prominent reasons for leaving listed were the number and emphasis of mandated tests and the teacher evaluation method overwhelmingly. Slightly below these top two reasons, the respondents ranked level of teacher participation in decisions related to the profession, non-teaching responsibilities, and level of pay and benefits as the next prominent reasons teachers leave education in Georgia. The report noted that "throughout the surveys, respondents repeatedly wrote in tones resembling frustration and hopelessness" (Owens, 2015, p. 4). The Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) was also cited as a reason for high teacher attrition rates. The TKES method makes use of student achievement and growth as a major percentage to measure teacher effectiveness. Many of those surveyed found TKES as an "injustice [in] that mandated tests of minors might determine the assessment of an instructor's performance" (Owens, 2015, p. 4). This emphasis on assessment scores shows that educators/teachers in Georgia are frustrated with the educational system. They do not agree with many of the policies that are in place in the state of Georgia.

The last question gave respondents an opportunity to state reasons for the high teacher attrition rate beyond those listed on the survey. Over 95% of those surveyed replied to this

optional question. The report states that "respondents painted a dismal picture of disillusionment and powerlessness within education in the state of Georgia" (Owens, 2015, p. 6). The responses to this question included issues with student discipline, lack of support, feeling disrespected and stressed out, and a general feeling of having no control as additional reasons that teachers decide to leave the teaching profession in Georgia. The fact that so many responded to this optional question shows that educators want their voice to be heard.

Based on this report released by the Georgia Department of Education, I would say that there is a definite state of hopelessness surrounding education and the teaching profession in Georgia. Hope in education and hope in teaching has been lost by many. These are the headlines that are portrayed in news outlets all over the state. As a teacher in Georgia, I can resonate with many of the quotes and findings from this report. It makes me so very sad to see the current state of education and the teaching profession. I, too, have thought and said many of the same things that were reported from this study/survey. Because of this, I have a strong personal attachment to the teachers' voices that are heard from this report. I believe that most any teacher from any district in Georgia would have many of the same thoughts and feelings about teaching in the state of Georgia.

The Local Context

Many of the same experiences and feeling in education expressed on the national and regional level are also observed in education on the local level as well. I have lived in a southeastern county in Georgia for the past fourteen years. My entire teaching career has been in this county as well. It is located in the lower coastal plain of southeast Georgia, about 75 miles south of Savannah, Georgia and about 45 miles inland from the coast of Brunswick, Georgia. Its total population is a little less than 30,000 according to the latest Census estimation. This county

is a very rural county that encompasses 641.78 square miles. There are eight public schools located in the county that employ around 440 certified staff members. Of the eight schools, five are elementary schools (PK–5th grades), two are middle schools (6–8th grades) and one high school (9–12th grades). All of the schools in county school system are Title 1 schools.

In the past several years there have been many financial cuts made in the local school system. Because of these cuts, the local school system has seen a reduction in staff. The reduction in staff has equated to reductions in middle school connections classes, discontinuing elementary technology and fine arts classes, decreased number of grade level and content area teachers at all grade levels, discontinuing of JrROTC at the high school, and a reduction in school and central office administration. All of these cuts have impacted education and teaching in the county and the morale of educators as well. Furlough days were in place at one time as well, but recently all workdays have been placed back in the school schedule, and the system is working on a full schedule at this time. These cuts show how the local level has had to respond to the state of education with a lack of support and funding from all levels.

Another factor playing a role in education at the local level is the Teacher Keys Evaluation System (TKES), which includes the creation of Student Learning Objectives (SLOs). The implementation of TKES and SLOs has required the local school system to provide professional learning for teachers and administrators as they become familiar with the new programs. The TKES system was quoted earlier as one significant reason that teachers are leaving the profession in Georgia. These same impacts are seen in the local level as the TKES system had seemed to have a negative impact on educators. Also, significant changes to the high school math curriculum, preparation for the implementation of PARCC-like assessments, expanding career pathways, and the new statewide accountability system, College and Career

Readiness Performance Indicators (CCRPT) have made an impact on education at the local level. This all plays a part in how and why educators feel the way they do about the teaching profession and their lack of hope in the future. It is apparent all over the state of Georgia, in both urban and rural areas.

My Personal Connections

My personal connections to this research are strong, so I should reflect upon them to examine how I got to this point in my life. "We teach who we are" (Palmer, 2007, p. 2). This is such a short quote from Parker Palmer's book *The Courage to Teach*, but also a powerful quote in my eyes. Palmer's words have stuck with me ever since I read them, and it really made me start thinking, "Who am I as a teacher and educator? How did I become who I am?" Yes, I know that I was born in Savannah, Georgia on April 18, 1980, to Joseph and Faye Hulst, but, "Who am I really?" I realized that this is a question that I struggled to answer truly. I seemed to have spent the majority of my life worrying about and trying to please others and in doing that lost hope in my desires, and I have never taken the time to determine exactly who I am. Throughout the past several years especially, I have pondered this question many times through the readings and discussions that I have had as a part of my experience at Georgia Southern University. Palmer (2007) says, "As we learn more about who we are; we can learn techniques that reveal rather than conceal the personhood from which good teaching comes" (p. 25). Knowing myself is critical to my success in teaching and the influence that I can make on others.

To realize the impact or lack of impact that I am having as an educator and in life, in general, I must be willing to look at my inner life. This is rarely discussed in the classroom, at schools or home. In schools, it is all about implementing the newest instructional practice or following the frameworks. Palmer shows that these things are not the things that really matter

when it comes to being a great teacher and person. He (2007) states, "Knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject" (p. 3). With that being said it is essential to examine the high and low times of my educational life and how I have changed in the last couple of years in efforts to better myself and my teaching and to create a critical hope around education and myself. All of this plays a role in how I came to peruse narrative inquiry into the lives of teachers.

I grew up in a very, very rural town about thirty minutes south of Statesboro, Georgia in an area of "native, white, Protestant supremacy" (Watkins, 2012, p. 127). This is how I believed that all people in the United States lived. I have a sister that is two and a half years younger than I am. My family was very much the, what I call, typical four-member family in which both parents worked. My father worked an eight-hour workday as an engineer at the local telephone company. My mother was an elementary school teacher, so I have always had a solid connection to the world of education. I can remember spending endless hours at school with my mother while she would prepare her classroom and lessons for her students. It seemed as though the school was a second home for us. Because of the close connection that I had with education growing up, the school was always of great importance to my family. Education was stressed at home by both of my parents, and I assumed that it was like this in all households. Looking back though, I was wrong. This was a time in my life in which naïve hope was apparent. By naïve, I mean that I did not know better. I did not know of different points of view or different appreciations for education. Apparently, I didn't realize it then but in looking back now, I can. Now that I am more aware, I can strive to make a difference in education and teachers. This is partly why I chose to further the development of teacher stories and all that can be learned from the telling of these stories.

I didn't realize that there were others who lived very close to me that were not provided for in the same way that I was when it came to schooling. Kozol (1991) states, "The nation in effect does not have a truly public school system in a large part of its communities; it has permitted what is in effect a private school system to develop under public auspices" (p. 80). This is definitely not the picture of schooling that I grew up with as my mother was a school teacher in the public school setting. Kozol (1991) also says, "The fact that ghetto education as a permanent American reality appeared to be accepted" (p. 4) in regards to education in the United States. When I read this, I was shocked. How could this be? I believed growing up that all schools were good and places that gave students the opportunities that they needed to succeed in life. Watkins (2001) tells that, "Education can be used both to oppress and to liberate" (p. 1). Never in my life did I view education as a mode to oppress others. Education was the way to succeed in life. I was reminded of my high school when I read Bell's book, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*. Bell (1948) states "indeed, the racism that made slavery feasible is far from dead in the last decade of the twentieth-century America" (p. 3). At first, I thought that there was no way that this was true. Surely we have come a long way from the time of slavery. But then I remembered back to my high school years, only fifteen years ago, and the practice of choosing the homecoming queens. At my high school, the practice was to select a white and an African American homecoming queen each year. Bell (1948) writes, "Black people will never gain full equality in this country" (p. 12). Once again it was hard for me to accept this fact from Bell. It seemed so bleak to me, but it is something that I have been guilty of contributing to in the past. When reading Watkins, Kozol, and Bell, I felt myself start to feel very hopeless about the state of education. I almost found myself giving up in the face of reality. But I didn't! Now that I know, I can make a difference by not giving up and not being complacent. The only way for change to

occur is to make a stand and not sit back quietly.

Now as I am in my thirteenth year of teaching, my methods in the classroom and how I approach teaching have definitely changed. I have learned a great deal since starting coursework in the Curriculum Studies program at Georgia Southern University. Looking back, I think that I had the seeds of these beliefs deep in me my whole life, but I was unsure of how to express them. Frisch (2011) describes how I was feeling.

Why do we not follow our longings? Why is it? Why do we bind and gag it every day, when we know that it's truer and finer than all the things that are stopping us, the things people call morality and virtue and fidelity and which are not life, simply not life, not a life that's true, great, worth living! Why don't we shake them off? (p. 66)

This is precisely how I was living my life before, and I did not dare to take a stand for what I believed. I allowed myself to be led by others, but not anymore. I now feel like I can dare to take a stand and a sense of critical hope in what can be in education. By using narrative inquiry, I aim to provide a deeper understanding of teachers through their story and the hope that they see in education.

I do feel that I may struggle in the future and as I continue to better myself. I can see myself becoming very frustrated with those in my community who have no desire to change their ways of thinking. "I cannot think for other or without others, nor can others think for me" (Freire, 1993, p. 89). As I go on in life knowing that I can't think for others, I must ensure that I am thinking for myself and will not allow others to control the ways that I think. I feel that my ability to think as a teacher is gradually being stripped from me and that I must take a stand to prevent this from happening. This is where the critical hope that I possess comes into play, and I must use the situations presented to me in education to foster hope in others and to create change

based on this hope for education.

Theorizing Critical Hope

A vital component of this research is the notion of hope and creating hope in the stories of elementary school teachers. When this study speaks of hope, it is not referring to a naïve hope but a critical hope based on the works of Paulo Freire (1998) and Erich Fromm (2010). Freire (1998) writes:

On the other hand - while I certainly cannot ignore hopelessness as a concrete entity, nor turn a blind eye to the historical, economic and social reasons that explain hopelessness - I do not understand human existence, and the struggle needed to improve it, apart from hope and dream...Hopelessness is but hope that has lost its bearings. (p. 2)

Teachers can identify with the struggle that Freire writes about. In the educational setting today, teachers stand at a critical point to create change but must foster this idea of hope if a change is to be made. This sense of hope can be traced back to John Dewey's (1938) view of Progressivism and a promise of a better future. Freire in *Pedagogy of Hope* (1998) defines hope as an ontological need. "We need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water" (Freire, 1998, p. 2). Freire believes that hope alone is not enough but is necessary to complete the struggle successfully. Freire (1998) goes on to say that to just hope without "an anchoring in practice" will lead to hopelessness (p. 2). He views hope as a tool to be used in maintaining the fight against injustices and to dream of new possibilities. Hope is needed but must be based on practice.

Erich Fromm discusses the meaning of hope in his book, *The Revolution of Hope* (2010). Fromm (2010) states, "Hope is a decisive element in any attempt to bring about social change in the direction of greater aliveness, awareness, and reason" (p. 19). To Fromm hope is more than

merely wishing for something to happen. This aligns with Freire's (1993) discussion of hope as well as he states, "There is no change without dream, as there is no dream without hope" (p. 81). People must dream of the future to make it come true and not just accept things for the way they are currently. This means there must be a conscious effort of how to accomplish the dream or vision and not just a simple naïve dream without any thought as to how to carry out the dream. The only way for hope to create change is with a conscious effort. People need not be complacent and think that things will happen on their own, but instead use what Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/1993) calls "limit-situations" to create change towards their desired hope for the future (p.83). Freire (1993) states:

In sum, limit-situations imply the existence of persons who are directly or indirectly served by these situations, and of those who are negated and curbed by them. Once the latter come to perceive these situations as the frontier between being and being more human, rather than the frontier between being and nothingness, they begin to direct their increasingly critical actions towards achieving the untested feasibility implicit in that perception. (p. 83)

"Limit-situations" are viewed as obstacles to those being opposed or dominated that prevent them from improvements or success. In regards to hope, "limit-situations" should be seen as a possibility to make a change and to overcome oppression. These situations shouldn't be seen as givens because that leads to hopelessness but should be seen as opportunities to foster critical hope and create change to make a difference.

Studying/ Storying Critical Hope

This research seeks to find the critical hope in teacher's stories and to inspire this hope in others. Fromm (2010) believes that "to hope means to be ready at every moment for that which

is not yet born, and yet not become desperate if there is no birth in our lifetime" (p. 22). There is much hopelessness revolving around education. My study seeks out to find examples of teacher resilience and hope in education.

Purpose of this Study

Education feels so hopeless, so why do some teachers stay? The purpose of this study will be to examine teacher stories and to use these descriptions to generate meanings about teaching in the K-12 school environment in light of the current hopeless state of education at the local, state and national level. Witherell, C., & Noddings, N. (Eds.). (1991) state:

Stories and narrative, whether personal or fictional, provide meaning and belonging to our lives. They attach us to others and our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place, character, and even advice on what we might do with our lives. The story fabric offers us images, myths, and metaphors that are morally resonant and contribute both to our knowing and our being known. (p. 1).

By collecting the stories of teachers, I seek to determine why teachers desire to remain in the classroom despite everything negative associated with education that seems to create a sense of bleakness in education. To do this, I interviewed three current elementary school teachers to tell their story of teaching in the elementary school classroom. This was done through narrative interviews, on-site observations and focus group meeting. Then I created a collage of storytelling to tell the story of the teachers who are in the classrooms on a daily basis. The narrative collage brought together the stories of all three teachers so that themes and meaning can be made from their stories. I believe that hope is a necessity for teachers due to the daily challenges teachers face in regards to funding, standardization, respect, and media. The long-term goal of this research is to improve the attrition or turnover rate of elementary school

teachers. This study is a first step towards determining the reasons that teachers choose to remain in the teaching profession. The teachers participating in the study will not directly benefit.

Significance to the Field of Curriculum Studies

Narrative inquiry is vital to the field of education in general especially elementary education given the current state of education with the focus on standards and accountability. Elementary teachers are at the core of the field of education as they plant the seeds of learning into the students that they encounter. It is essential that the positive stories of elementary teachers' choosing to stay in the classroom be heard. A narrative inquiry will contribute to the field of elementary education because "the need for a convincing public language in which to speak about the lived personal experiences of people in schools is particularly acute" (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007, p. 377). This study fits into the field of Curriculum Studies because at its core is to discover teachers' personal and professional experiences about the classroom. The teacher is one of the four commonplaces of the curriculum as defined by Joseph Schwab (Schlein & Schwarz, 2015). The teacher plays a key role in deciding not only how things are taught in the classroom but also what material is taught as curriculum. Since the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1993 "teachers have been portrayed as the major cause of curriculum that lacks rigor and, in fact, the cause of decline of public education in the United States" (Schlein & Schwarz, 2015, p. 155). This study gives a voice to teachers who are often times silenced by larger and more powerful groups by allowing them to tell their story of why they choose to remain in the classroom and describe the things that have impacted their decision. In this way, the teachers' story is used as a counter-story with *A Nation at Risk* as the dominant story in education.

In my study, I interviewed teachers to describe their current teaching practice and to

collect their "teacher story" so that their voice can be heard. This fits nicely into the field of Curriculum Studies and the works of William Schubert and William Ayers in *Teacher Lore* (1992); Ming Fang He in *A River Forever Flowing* (2003); Sonia Nieto in *Why We Teach?* (2005) and *What Keeps Teachers Going* (2003); William Ayers in *To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher* (2010); and Gregory Michie in *Holler if you Hear Me* (2009) on teaching and teacher stories as well as the works of Madeleine Grumet in *Bitter Milk* (1988) and Janet Miller in *Creating Spaces and Finding Voices* (1990) on women and teaching.

Key Issues/Research Questions

The key research issues for me to explore in this study are:

- What keeps veteran teachers in the elementary school classroom despite all of the challenges in education today?
- What can we learn from the teachers who choose to stay in the classroom about hope and hopelessness in classrooms today?

Organization of The Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one introduces the research and provides a context for which the research is based. It began with a discussion on the loss of hope in education from a national down to the personal level. The notion of hope, especially critical hope, is examined as well based on the works of Freire (1998) and Fromm (2010).

Chapter two provides a relevant review of literature of essential topics to this study. I provide a definition and description of hope. Other topics explored through this chapter are teacher resilience, passion for teaching, and morale in education.

Chapter three explains the methodology I used in this study. It begins with the history of narrative theory and teacher stories. I also provide a detailed description of the research design

including the role of place, collection methods and story analysis process. An introduction to the teachers that participated in this study is included in this section as well.

Chapter four presents the personal narratives of the participants. The focus of the narratives is on how these teachers show critical hope in their daily life as a teacher and how they negotiate the demands that are placed upon them. A description of all things that I observed from the participants is included in this chapter as well.

Chapter five examines the themes that emerged from the teacher stories and their relation to the notion of hope in education as well as the implications of the narratives. I synthesized the findings by looking at the stories from all three participants. I answer my research questions from the information gained from the narratives. I also discuss the implications of this study as well as ideas for further study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

To inform my study, I reviewed the relevant literature. This review of literature explores four areas that are directly related to this study: views of hope, teacher resilience, passion for teaching and morale in education. I introduce this chapter with the poem, Hope, by Emily Dickinson and analysis its meaning.

Hope

Hope is defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as “desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfillment” or “expectation of fulfillment or success” (hope, 2016). This definition reflects a hoping for something and is written regarding expectation. Hope is often seen as the driving force that moves us along our path. Emily Dickinson’s poem “Hope” is well known when discussing hope. It states:

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
 That perches in the soul -
 And sings the tune without the words -
 And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
 And sore must be the storm -
 That could abash the little Bird
 That kept so many warm -

I’ve heard it in the chilliest land -

And on the strangest Sea -

Yet - never - in Extremity,

It asked a crumb - of me.

According to Dickinson, hope is described using the metaphor of a bird. Hope is within us all the time despite our worries. Hope is what allows us to overcome difficulties no matter how strong they may appear. Hope has many ties to education as well. Freire (2007) states, “Without hope there is no way we can even start thinking about education” (p. 87). Sonia Nieto (2003) believes that “hope is the essence of teaching” (p. 53). It is this “essence” of teaching that I expect to tap into through my study.

As stated in chapter 1, this study is based on Paulo Freire’s view of critical hope. Freire (1970) also called it transformative hope in his belief that humanization is based on hope and the promise of a better future. Without hope, our zeal dies, and we can no longer see the possibilities of the future. Freire also wrote about the notion of conscientization or limit-situations and the power of critical hope. This is a hope against the evidence and recognizes the obstacles that are evident and grows in spite of those barriers. Critical hope is based on the view of the current situation and that something is missing. It begins with a longing or hunger that things can be otherwise. Webb (2007) states, “Hope’s positive glow offers here no comforting refuge but rather stimulates a restless protest against present suffering” (p. 71). Hope is based on the idea that the present can and needs to be changed and on the promise for the future – the future is open. Critical hope accepts the problems at hand and uses hope to drive commitment. I believe that many teachers have this critical hope in that they know the future can be changed, and they are working towards this better future.

Versions of Hope

There are many different versions or views about hope and what it means to hope. Some of these align with Freire's view of critical hope but use different terms. There are also views of hope that do not support Freire's view. The following explores some of the different perspectives and definition of hope by various scholars and researchers and their relevance to my study.

Tragicomic Hope

Cornel West describes critical hope as “tragicomic hope.” West (2004) defines the tragicomic as “the ability to laugh and retain a sense of life's joy—to preserve hope even while staring in the face of hate and hypocrisy—as against falling into the nihilism of paralyzing despair” (p. 16). Tragicomic hope is “the only kind of hope that has any kind of maturity in a world of overwhelming barbarity and bestiality” (2004, p.20). According to West, the tragic is the starting point, and from there we can see the possibilities for the future. West's view of hope is based on the hope that many African Americans have found even in slavery and disenfranchisement (Edgoose, 2009). The future is what we make of it, what we envision despite everything. There is a step beyond tragicomic hope for West (1993), and that is:

a certain view of the Christian tradition that is so skeptical about our capacity to know the ultimate truths about our existence that leaps of faith are promoted and enacted because they make sense out of our seemingly absurd conditions. (p. x-xi).

This kind of hope demands a commitment and an active struggle. True tragicomic hope must move past just envisioning the future and take action.

An example of tragicomic hope is the “keep on pushing attitude” that many teachers have in spite of everything. Education in the United States appears very bleak, and many feel that

those in power are not doing what is best for our students and teachers. Those teachers who do not let this get in their way of seeing the vast possibilities for their future and their students' future are exhibiting a form of tragicomic hope. They have an active struggle and commitment to brighter and better things for their students and education. I believe that West's tragicomic hope will be found in parts of the stories that are heard as a result of my study. I feel that my study will add to the current view of tragicomic hope because I can see where the notions of teacher struggle and teacher commitment will be apparent in the stories of the teachers that I interview.

Educated Hope

Henry Giroux (2006) uses the term “educated hope” to describe his view of critical hope. To Giroux, educated hope is a “language of resistance and possibility” that educators must use to create change. Educated hope is restless and contains a longing for that which is missing (Giroux, 2001). Giroux (2013) states:

Educated hope also demands a certain amount of courage on the part of intellectuals in that it requires from them the necessity to articulate social possibilities, mediate the experience of injustice as part of a broader attempt to contest the workings of oppressive power, undermine various forms of domination, and fight for alternative ways to imagine a future. (p. 158)

Educated hope has a Utopian tone to it as well as a requirement for the courage to stand up to create change. Educated hope works against the private and corporate influence of public education in the United States and seeks to build upon the democratic nature of education.

An example of this is teachers who create space to allow for students to explore the possibilities of their future are promoting educated hope. Educated hope according to Giroux is

a way to imagine how things can be and to create change. Educated hope is a component of the hope that I am seeking through examining teachers' stories in my study. I believe that teachers who have remained in the classroom possess the courage described by Giroux in his view of educated hope.

Critical Hope

Critical hope is at the root of Duncan-Andrade's (2009) article *Note to Educators: Hope Required When Growing Roses in Concrete*. He writes that critical hope in education is composed of three elements: material, Socratic and audacious (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). All three of these elements must be present and work together to foster critical hope. If any are missing, then critical hope is superficial. Material hope comes when educators and students are "given the resources to deal with the forces that affect their lives" (Duncan-Andrade, 2009, p. 186). Material hope connects education to the real world. Socratic hope involves examining lives and the events in society to realize that "pain can pave the path to justice" (Duncan-Andrade, 2009, p. 188). The third component of critical hope according to Duncan-Andrade is audacious hope because critical hope takes a stance against the dominant beliefs and stands with those who were silenced.

In his discussion of critical hope, Duncan-Andrade warns against three forms of false hope that sometimes are mistaken for critical hope in education. "Hokey hope" is a form of false critical hope that fails to take into consideration the "laundry list of inequalities" that have a role in the way things are in education (Duncan-Andrade, 2009, p. 182). It does not address the needs or inequalities but rather looks beyond them and ignores them. The second form of false critical hope is "mythical hope," and it is based upon "a profoundly ahistorical and depoliticized denial of suffering that is rooted in celebrating individual exceptions" (Duncan-Andrade, 2009,

p. 184). This happens when an individual occurrence is exaggerated in importance thus creating a false sense of hope. The final form of false hope is “hope deferred.” “When we are unwilling to confront these harsh realities of social inequality with our pedagogy – to cultivate their “control of destiny” – all we have left to offer youth is hope deferred” (Duncan-Andrade, 2009, p. 185). This form of hope finds itself hiding behind misinterpretations of research and blaming “the system.” Hope deferred does not offer a solution or plan to overcome the way things are currently. I desire that the three forms of false hope discussed above are not prevalent in my study.

Radical Hope

Lear (2006) uses the term “radical hope” to describe a form of critical hope. Radical hope is “hope without an imagined end, hope with an openness to the future and the unimaginable nature of the unfolding of events to come” (Edgoose, 2009, p. 114). Lear’s view of hope is based on the Crow Nation and their struggle with the loss of their way of life. Lear describes radical hope the following way:

What makes this hope radical is that it is directed toward future goodness that transcends the current ability to understand what it is. Radical hope anticipates a good for which those who have the hope and yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it. (2006, p. 103).

Radical hope is a crucial component of resilience. Part of radical hope is knowing when to fight back, when to change and when to resist. Lear’s version of radical hope also has a grounding in the hospitality of society and the goodness of people.

This form of hope can be seen in education as there is an anticipation for good in the future of education. Educators may not know the exact future, but they have hope in the events

that are to come in education. I also feel that Lear's view of radical hope is a component of the hope that I seek to find in the teachers' stories through my study. Teachers don't know the future, but the ones that remain in the classroom still press on despite this.

Patient Hope

Patient hope is seen as a way of being or a way of life. It is based on the fundamental trust in oneself, other and the essential goodness of existence (Webb, 2007). Patient hope has the view that everything will work out on its own. It is a shallow, wishful view of hope but is the basis for a more extended form of hope like critical hope. Patient hope doesn't have a clear goal that conjures hope. As Webb (2007) states, patient hope "allows one to relax and to let life take its course" (p. 399). It is based on the view that you only need to be hopeful or there is no point in life (Ojala, 2016). Patience is an essential component of patient hope.

When thinking about patient hope, I think about those teachers who have been in the classroom for many, many years. They have the experience and the patience to know that what they are doing as a teacher is making a difference in the lives of the students that they are teaching. Patient hope is vital at the beginning of a teacher's career, but I would hope that what is found in teachers' stories through my study is a more complicated form of hope.

In completing this study of teacher's stories and hope, I believe that my study will add a more elaborate version of the hope that is found in teachers. I think that a new sense of hope that combines parts of West's tragicomic hope, Giroux's educated hope and Lear's radical hope will come to light. Teaching is such a complex profession, and with the state of education today, I feel that the hope that teachers possess will be a hybrid of the versions of hope presented in this literature review of hope.

Problematic Hope

Julie Garlen (2014) in her article *The Abandonment of Hope: Curriculum Theory and White Moral Responsibility* argues that the notion of hope can be problematic. Garlen (2014) states, “an ideology of hope, even ‘educated’ (Giroux, 2003) and ‘radical’ (Farley, 2009) conceptualizations, may be problematic, especially when practiced by White scholars because it operates to reinscribe White privilege and perpetuate the assumption that Whites can transcend the critique of Whiteness” (p. 139). I am a White scholar, so her problematic view of hope has a direct relation to my study. Garlen (2014) warns that hope by White scholars “is embedded in historical projects of nation-building, colonization, and social melioration, and functions to ‘obscure the violent processes on which our hopes are built and carried out’ (Murad, 2011, p. 38)” (p. 140). Because of this, she calls for White scholars to abandon hope and to “relinquish the impulse to act, to move, and to move on as well as the desire to protect our moral innocence” (Garlen, 2014, p. 144-145). Hope is problematic according to Garlen when practice by White scholars because it suggests that we move from the present and focus on a future that is unknown. In doing this, we do not accept the challenges that we are facing now but instead push them aside in looking towards the future. This view of hope is in opposition to the critical hope that I have based my study on. In completing this study, I aim to show that hope is necessary for education and teaching today and that when based on practice and action its intentions are grounded on the better future for all – regardless of race, ethnicity or gender.

Research on Hope and Education

The research available on the relationship between hope and education is limited (Halpin, 2001). Some research is available on hope and its relation to teachers’ loyalty and commitment (Hodge & Ozag, 2007), the creation of hopeful curriculum as a means of social change and

transformation (Generett & Hicks, 2004) and the connection of various forms of hope and urban education (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). Daniels (2010) found in her research that of the few empirical studies available on hope, most of them discussed hope in education in a philosophical tone. This is also what I found in my research on hope in education. More research is needed on hope that has a strong qualitative or quantitative foundation to determine the impact of hope in education.

Teacher Resilience

An essential part of this research is to examine why teachers choose to stay in the classroom. This relates directly to teacher resilience because those teachers who remain in the teaching profession do so despite the challenges that they face. Resilience has been defined as “the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (Masten, Best, & Garnezy, 1990, p. 425). In more detail, Gu and Day (2007) define resilience as “relative, developmental and dynamic, manifesting itself as a result of a dynamic process within a given context” (p. 1305). An alternative way to approach the high rates of teacher attrition is to examine teacher resilience and to understand the characteristics and behaviors of those teachers who choose to remain in the teaching field. I believe that the hope that teachers possess has a direct relation to teacher resilience as well.

Characteristics of Teacher Resilience

Gu and Day (2007) conducted a mixed methods study entitled “Variations in Teachers’ Work, Lives, and Effectiveness” to examine the variables that made an impact on teacher effectiveness and commitment. Face-to-face interview with participants, as well as document analysis and interviews with school leaders were all utilized in the study. The teachers’ effectiveness was found by using their students’ baseline test scores and end of year test scores.

Teacher resilience is a necessary factor for teacher effectiveness. The research found that teachers' resilience was influenced by the "management of the interaction" between "three dimensions: the personal (related to their lives outside of school), the situated (related to their lives in school), and the professional (related to their values, beliefs, and the interaction between these and external policy agendas)" (Gu & Day, 2007, p. 1306). Three specific teacher stories were chosen by the researchers to show the different degrees of resilience found in the teachers that they researched. In all three of the teacher stories, it was evident that the teachers were able to focus on the positive aspects of their work and life to overcome the pressures and challenges they were facing. Gu and Day (2007) state, "These internal values and motivation, fueled their capacities to exercise emotional strength and professional competence and subsequently provided them with the resilience which enabled them to meet the challenges of changing environments in which they worked" (p. 1311). This research shows the complex nature of teacher resilience and how it can change at any moment in time. Resilience is not an intrinsic characteristic because it seems to be dependent upon personal attributes as well as the outside environment. Gu and Day (2007) recommend that more research should be conducted on how and why teachers continue to create a positive environment in teaching despite the challenges they encounter that impact their teaching commitment. The intrinsic characteristics of teacher resilience could be tied to the teacher's personal hope for teaching and education.

Mansfield, Beltman, Price and McConney (2011) surveyed over 250 graduating and early career teachers in Australia on their view of teacher resilience by including the open-ended question, "How would you describe a resilient teacher?" in the survey. The responses to this question were analyzed and coded to find content and themes around teacher resilience. Their research found 23 aspects of teacher resilience in all with 11 of those aspects being mentioned in

20 or more responses. “The capacity to bounce back” was the most repeated explanation of teacher resilience found in the responses (Mansfield, Beltman, Price & McConney, 2011, p. 361). Other frequent descriptions of teacher resilience found were “coping with the demands associated with teaching” and “flexible and adaptable” (Mansfield et al., 2011, p. 361). A final major theme that emerged from teacher resilience is that resilient teachers are “positive and optimistic, despite challenges” (Mansfield et al., 2011, p. 361). Many additional dimensions of teacher resilience were noted in the surveys including “problem-solving, focused on learning, take advice and seek help when needed, persistent, confidence and self-belief” (Mansfield et al., 2011, p. 361). This proves the notion that teacher resilience is very much a multidimensional concept to understand. Even with all of the different facets of teacher resilience Mansfield et al. (2011) discovered that the most common dimension of teacher resilience reported dealt with the emotional aspect. Profession-related traits were the second most common shown in the responses. I wonder if the characteristics they described as “positive and optimistic, despite challenges” would also be linked to the hope that these teachers possess (Mansfield et al., 2011, p. 361).

Resilience strategies were examined by Castro, Kelly, and Shih (2010) by interviewing fifteen first-year teachers utilizing the following questions: “What strategies do new teachers employ in response to adverse situations?” and “What resources do beginning teacher rely on to overcome challenges and obstacles to teaching?” (p. 623). In their interviews, the researchers found four major themes associated with teacher resilience strategies: “help-seeking, problem-solving, managing difficult relationships, and seeking rejuvenation/renewal” (Castro, Kelly & Shih, 2010, p. 624). Based off of these resilience strategies, the researchers noted two important findings. They are “the fundamental role that the political and social organization of the school

plays in the experience of beginning teachers” and “that resilience strategies...create new resources where none previously existed, but also expend energy from beginning teachers” (Castro et al., 2010, p. 628). This research shows the importance of teaching problem-solving strategies to new teachers as well as fostering mentoring programs in schools for teachers to help promote teacher resilience.

Importance of Teacher Resilience

A study conducted by Arnup and Bowles (2016) examined how teacher resilience, job satisfaction, and demographics impacted teacher’s decisions to leave the teaching field in Australia. Participants in the study had less than ten years teaching experience and responded to an online questionnaire with questions related to their demographic information, their intention to leave the teaching profession and the Teacher Job Satisfaction Questionnaire as well as the Resilience Scale for Adults. The results of the study showed that 31.9% of the teachers in the sample intended to leave the teaching profession. Arnup and Bowles found that lower job satisfaction and lower levels of resilience corresponded to a higher intention to leave teaching in their participants. This study shows that resilience is “significantly related to intention to leave teaching” (Arnup & Bowles, 2016, p. 238-239). Teacher resilience was a more significant factor in a teacher choosing to leave the profession over job satisfaction and teacher demographics. This shows that understanding and promoting teacher resilience is vital to keeping teachers in the teaching profession.

Passion for Teaching

Also, related to this research is the topic of passion for teaching. In general, passion is defined as “a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find important and in which they invest time and energy” (Vallerand et al., 2003, p. 757). Passion is a love for an

activity that one finds important or valued in their life. Passion calls for an investment of time and energy into action. There is a personal identification with the activity.

Types of Passion

Vallerand et al. (2003) suggest that there are two distinctive types of passion: obsessive and harmonious. The two kinds of passion share are based on the degree that a person internalized into their identity (Vallerand et al., 2003). The effect that obsessive and harmonious passion has on people is drastically different.

The first, obsessive passion, is characterized by the love of the activity and the investment in the event are out of control (Fernet et al., 2014). Obsessive passion causes people to feel obligated to do an activity regardless of the impact that it might have, positive or negative. In obsessive passion “certain contingencies are attached to the activity... (And) The sense of excitement derived from activity engagement becomes uncontrollable” (Vallerand et al., 2003, p. 757). A person cannot help but take part in the activity, and the activity usually causes conflict in the person’s life because of its control (Vallerand et al., 2003). Obsessive passion is associated with adverse emotions, conflict, and low psychological and physical health (Vallerand et al., 2003). It can lead to emotional exhaustion and a requirement to love the activity.

The second type of passion, harmonious passion, is a more positive approach to passion. A person has control of their passion and the impact that the activity has on their life (Vallerand et al., 2003). In harmonious passion, a person “freely accepted the activity as important for them without any contingencies attached” (Vallerand et al., 2003, p. 757). The activity is in harmony with the other parts of one’s life. Harmonious passion has been associated with positive emotions, positive flow, and high psychological health (Vallerand et al., 2003).

Ruiz-Alfonso and Leon (2016) conducted a “systematic review procedure to identify

characteristics of passion that authors use to define the concept” and to determine outcomes of passion (p. 175). They reviewed articles published between 2004 and 2013 for their study. They found that the most commonly used terms in describing passion were “dedication, need to love the activity, to identify with the activity, to feel positive emotions during the activity” (Ruiz-Alfonso & Leon, 2016, p. 185). They found that very few author or researchers had a clearly defined definition of passion. Ruiz-Alfonso and Leon concluded that this was probably due to the lack of a comprehensive view of passion by all.

Impact of Passion in Teaching

Passion for teaching is vital because passion can enhance motivation and well-being in the teaching profession (Vallerand et al., 2003). On the other hand, it can also lead to negative emotions regarding teaching. This is due to the dual nature of passion. Teachers have a significant influence on their classroom and students in either positive or negative way. When a teacher portrays harmonious passion, the “teacher derives pleasure and self-actualization from teaching but not at the expense of personal life” (Fernet et al., 2014). In this case, teachers freely identify as a teacher and maintain a balance in teaching and personal commitments. Obsessive passion for teaching is characterized by “a teacher who loves teaching but becomes so involved in the work that it becomes the sole source of self-esteem” (Fernet et al., 2014). This could be viewed as closely tied to workaholism.

A study conducted by Fernet et al. (2014) utilized The Passion Scale and the Maslach Burnout Inventory to “gain insights into how passion predicts burnout in novice teachers” (p. 275). Their results support the idea that to burn out one must first have a passion or be invested in the activity. They found “harmonious passion produces a motivational drive to willingly and effectively invest efforts into one’s work” (Fernet et al., 2014, p. 283). Harmonious passion

promotes professional effectiveness in teachers. On the other hand, “obsessive passion produces a motivational drive that drains emotional energy at work” (Fernet et al., 2014, p. 283). This is associated with emotional fatigue and detachment of personal aspects of teaching.

Phelps and Benson (2012) sought to find the answer to “what creates and sustain passion among practicing teachers” in their research (p. 66). They also looked to find ways to instill passion in prospect teachers. For their study, they asked current principals to identify two teachers with more than five years teaching experience that displayed a passion for teaching. They conducted face-to-face interviews with the identified teachers on building and encouraging teacher passion. Phelps and Benson (2012) found the following characteristic highly rated by the majority of their participants in regards to teacher’s passion; “need to maintain a positive outlook...seek and embrace change...maintain strong connections with positive teachers...relationships with parents and students” (p. 68-70). They also asked their participants to describe any obstacles that they perceive to teacher passion. “Time pressures, paperwork and parents’ expectations” were the three highest rated obstacles reported (Phelps & Benson, 2012, p. 71).

Many curriculum studies authors have written on the importance of passion in teaching. Palmer (2007) brings passion in teaching to the forefront of his book *The Courage to Teach*. He tells in his book that teachers must be willing to look at their inner self and bring positive experiences to their students in order to foster their passion and to remain passionate for teaching. Nieto (2003, 2005, 2008) also writes of the importance of passion in teaching. Nieto uses the stories of teachers to show their passion and commitment to teaching. She also shows the power that education has for students in the hands of passionate teachers. Nieto (2005) describes passionate teachers as “teachers who care about kids, who love what they do, and who

would choose to do it over again” (p. xi-x).

William Ayers’ (2010) book *To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher* conveys his story of becoming a teacher and his passion for teaching. Ayers (2004) describes his passion for teaching in the following:

Teaching is an act of hope for a better future. There is a particularly powerful satisfaction in caring during a time of carelessness, of thinking for yourself in a time of thoughtlessness, of opening humanizing pathways for yourself and others, pathways that involve a quest. The reward of teaching is knowing that your life makes a difference...Like friendship, good teaching is not something that can be entirely scripted, preplanned, or prescribed. Teaching is primarily a matter of love. The rest is ornamentation. (p. 121-122)

This shows Ayers passion in life which equates to his passion for teaching because teaching is his life. Palmer, Nieto, and Ayers’ writings highlight the importance of harmonious passion in teaching.

Morale in Education

Teacher morale is “a state of mind determined by the individual’s anticipation of the extent of satisfaction of those needs which s/he perceives as significantly affecting her/his total work situation” (Evans, 1997, p. 832). It is the degree that a teacher feels good about his /her work and work environment.

Impact of Teacher Morale

A recent study by Din and Khuwaja (2016) looked to find relationships between morale in teachers and emotional intelligence in teachers at the university level. They defined morale in “terms of (the) mental, emotional, and spiritual state of the individual” (Din & Khuwaja, 2016, p.

113). Those who have high morale are viewed as happy, confident, and appreciated. Teachers with low morale were described as sad, depressed or unrecognized (Din & Khuwaja, 2016). Their study concluded by finding that there is “a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and morale” in teachers at the university level (Din & Khuwaja, 2016, p. 113).

In general, when a teacher has high morale, they see obstacles as challenges to solve (Ramsey, 2000). With high morale, teachers feel good about themselves, each other and teaching. This transfers to high student morale and top student achievement (Mackenzie, 2007). Students benefit from high teacher morale. On the other hand, when morale is low, obstacles are seen as possible opportunities for failure. Low teacher morale leads to a decrease in productivity and a detachment from teaching, other teachers, and students. This may equate to teachers taking more sick days, “losing heart” in teaching and developing a cynical attitude towards teaching and their students (Mackenzie, 2007).

Mackenzie (2007) conducted a study to determine the impact teacher morale and to find ways to improve morale in teaching. Sixty-six percent of participants reported that teacher morale is not positive at this time in their school and that morale is lower now than when they first began teaching (Mackenzie, 2007). Several reasons for the decline in teacher morale or impact on teacher morale were given. School leadership was reported as having the most significant effect on morale. Effective school leadership fostered higher teacher morale, whereas poor leadership led to low teacher morale. The change in the workload of teachers was noted to have an impact on teacher morale. One participant in the study wrote, “teacher morale is fading because teachers are tiring through over-assessments, misguided and poorly designed definitions of accountability...excessive and ultimately purposeless paperwork” (Mackenzie, 2007, p. 96). Other reasons cited by participants as causes for the decrease in teacher morale were the low

status of the teaching profession, low salary, and student behavior. Also, participants noted that the media had a role in promoting low teacher morale when they highlight the negative aspects of teaching and schools and ignore the positive that is happening as well.

Mackenzie's study (2007) also asked participants for ways to improve the overall teacher morale. It was clear from the responses that no one single answer or issue would resolve the current state of teacher morale. Instead, teacher morale is determined from a very complex combination of problems. The six most common suggestions from participants on how to improve teacher morale were: improve working conditions, better pay, more supportive leadership at all levels, positive media attention, more recognition of groups/individuals, and an increase in high-quality professional development (Mackenzie, 2007).

Summary of Chapter

This chapter provided a review of the current literature related to my study. Hope, especially critical hope, is a critical component of my study. I desire to find and examine examples of critical hope in the lives of elementary school teachers. Because of this the literature available on hope and the different forms of hope are essential to my study. The topic of teacher resilience, passion for teaching and morale in education are also directly related to my current study so the previous research on these topics will significantly influence my study. The participants of my study have been teaching for more than seven years, so these topics directly impact my study as well.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Narrative Theory: Stories of Hope

Narrative is the study of the way people experience the world. Narrative theory asks questions about and looks for a more in-depth understanding of life experiences. I used narrative theory as a por into the lives and experiences of elementary school teachers in my quest to explore hope and resilience in education today. Narrative theory is based on using the stories of participants to find ways of understanding and presenting real-life events. What personal stories do teachers share about their lives as teachers? What do these stories show in regards to critical hope in education?

My use of narrative theory is embedded in the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1988). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe narrative inquiry as:

Inquiry into narrative. By this, we mean that narrative is both phenomenon and method. Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study. To preserve this distinction, we use the reasonably well-established device of calling the phenomenon “story” and the inquiry “narrative.” Thus, we say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories by those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience. (p. 2)

They define narrative as “the study of how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 21). Narrative theory includes more than just the stories that people tell. It also includes the collection, description, and interpretation of those stories,

producing “narratives of experience” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). It is a mingling of thoughts and feelings that will help to provide insight into the lives of teachers and why they choose to remain in the classroom. Storytelling and narratives allow researchers to immerse themselves into the personal experience of the storyteller. Not only does the researcher gain knowledge of the storyteller through the experience but they can also use the opportunity to learn more about themselves through the process. The use of narrative allows the researcher to tap into information through the storytelling process. The narrative provides more in-depth knowledge. This study will be a partnership between me, the researcher, and the participants as we will work closely together in the process of collecting and telling the stories of elementary school teachers. This is one reason why I chose narrative inquiry for the methodology of my study.

There have been numerous studies conducted on using a narrative approach both within the educational setting and beyond. This section is not exhaustive of all the research that is available on narrative but is limited to narrative in the form of teacher stories.

History of Narrative Theory

John Dewey is viewed by many as the beginning point for narrative theory through his discussion and explanation of experience. His theory of experience is the foundation of narrative inquiry. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1938) writes, “The principle that development of experience comes through interaction means that education is essentially a social process” (p. 36). For Dewey, to study life and education is to study experience. In other words, education, life, and experience are all the equivalent. Dewey had a three-dimensional approach to narrative of interaction, continuity, and situation. This approach is based on the notion that to understand people you must take into account their personal experiences as their interactions with others.

According to Dewey, there are two criteria for experience - “interaction and continuity enacted in situations” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 12). This means that to understand people’s experience we also have to see the interactions that take place and understand them as well. Dewey also believes in “fluidity in storytelling,” meaning that an experience is influenced by an earlier experience and will lead to another experience. There is a continuum with experiences that make the story, moving from the past to the present or into the future.

Another critical piece in the history of narrative theory is Jerome Bruner’s (1985) “narrative mode” of learning. Bruner (1985) describes his “narrative mode” of learning as it “leads...to good stories, gripping drama, believable historical accounts” (p. 98). Bruner focused on the human actions and beliefs that show what people want and how they go about getting it. He believed that people do not experience the world by isolated events but rather they understand the world in larger, connected events. Bruner’s “narrative mode” of learning expanded the notion of knowledge to include narratives and to move beyond the singular, traditional mode of learning and knowing. This in return gave higher weight to narrative theory as viable research.

Donald Polkinghorne (1988) wrote of narrative in his book *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*. He found that in his work as a professor of counseling and a practicing psychotherapist, practitioners are “concerned with people’s stories: they work with case histories and use narrative explanations to understand why the people they work with behave the way they do” (p. x). Polkinghorne (1995) describes narrative as “the type of discourse composition that draws together diverse events, happenings, and actions of human lives into thematically unified goal-directed processes” (p. 5). Narrative pulls together various events and actions in a way to make meaning. Polkinghorne (1995) gives an introduction to the idea of narrative use for

qualitative researchers and the importance of narratives and stories as “they are particularly suited as the linguistic form in which human experience as lived can be expressed” (p. 7). The stories that one tells are a direct reflection of who one is and what one believes. Stories are essential to understanding. Polkinghorne (1995) explains this by stating “stories are concerned with human attempts to a solution, clarification, or unraveling of an incomplete situation” (p. 7). Stories can illustrate how lives are understood and transformed, thus giving a complete picture. He found that stories are unique in their ability to describe the human experience in both positive and negative ways (Polkinghorne, 1995). By looking at stories from the past, one can gain a complete understanding of the experience.

Narrative theory and the importance of stories were further advanced by the work of Carole Witherell and Nel Noddings. The narrative is at the heart of their work as they wrote:

Stories and narratives, whether personal or fictional, provide meaning and belonging to our lives. They attach us to other and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place, characters, and even advice on what we might do with our lives. (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 1)

They believe that the use of narrative should be at the core of the researching process because it is a way that people represent their life experiences. It is only through narrative and one’s “rich tapestry” that people form an understanding of their experiences. “The stories we hear and the stories we tell shape the meaning and texture of our lives at every stage and juncture” (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 1). Stories, whether told or heard, help people to make meaning of the world around them. Stories and narrative are used as a means for teaching and learning “across boundaries of disciplines, professions, and cultures.” Narratives and stories are essential as Witherell and Noddings view them as the only way to ultimately see and understand another’s

life. The use of stories can bring people of different backgrounds and beliefs together.

Maxine Greene is an existentialist philosopher that has a part in the history of narrative theory. Greene's work focuses on building relationships between individuals and becoming aware of on the imagination and its connections with aesthetics and freedom. Greene (1995) states that "situation most provocative of thoughtfulness and critical consciousness is one in which teachers and learners find themselves conducting a kind of collaborative search, each from his or her own lived situation" (p. 23). Greene realized the importance of the connection between people and their experiences.

The narratives I have encountered in my journey have made it possible for me to conceive patterns of being as my life among others has expanded: to look through others' eyes more than I would have and to imagine being something more than I have come to be. (Greene, 1995, p. 85-86)

Greene believes that imagination is key to a person being able to become "wide awake" to understand and make meaning of the world and their life experiences. Narrative theory has the power to "release the imagination" in Greene's eyes.

Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin are seen by most as the foremost researchers in the field of narrative theory or narrative inquiry with regards to curriculum, teaching, and learning. Their work has strong roots in Dewey's theory of experience. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) define narrative inquiry as "stories lived and told" (p. 20). Narratives are more complex and encompassing than only listening to a story. "Narrative studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matter; they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequences of places" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Narratives must contain the personal experience of the storyteller that happens in a

specific time and setting. Narratives offer a way of looking into the lives of others, or self, by respecting the personal experience as a primary basis of truth. The story is the entry point for examining the complete narrative of makes up lives of elementary school teachers. Connelly and Clandinin (1991) argue that by studying narratives or stories, we can explore how individuals experience the world. The stories that are gathered are full of knowledge and understanding and are used to develop and refine the meaning of the world and ourselves.

Teacher Stories as Narrative

Robert Coles (1990) in his book *A Call for Stories*, writes “what ought to be interesting is the unfolding of a lived life rather than confirmation such a chronicle provides for some theory...Let the story itself be our discovery” (p. 22). Teachers are at the core of the curriculum development and pedagogy of schools, so there is a need for a narrative understanding of teachers. Early work in teacher’s stories in education can be traced to Joseph Schwab. Schwab (1958) observed “the corruption of education by psychology” through psychology’s studies and thought. Instead, Schwab urged to seek for research on the lived experiences of teachers and students in the classroom. Schwab (1959) believed that only through “teachers...looking at their own practices and the consequences of them...” would education make gains (p. 140). The teacher’s perspective, to Schwab, was the key that was missing from curriculum development and success.

Jean Clandinin (1985) conducted a study with two inner-city teachers in Toronto. This research showed how thought and action are so intertwined that they are almost impossible to separate. Her methods for the study included mixing observations with conversations and letters. Clandinin also felt the need for the researcher to have something of value to give the participants and the classroom. Following this study, Clandinin joined with Michael Connelly to study two

7th Grade science teachers (1986). This study gave light to the complex nature of narrative understanding. All sources or contexts must be taken into consideration when telling the complete narrative. Clandinin and Connelly found the importance of time and place in narratives. Clandinin and Connelly's work pushed the idea of teacher stories as research. They stated, "We need to listen closely to teachers and other learner and to the stories of their lives in and out of classrooms. We also need to tell our own stories as we live our own collaborative researcher/teacher lives" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990, p. 12)

Differing some from Clandinin and Connelly (1985; 1986; 1990) works with regards to teacher stories, Madeleine Grumet focused her writing on the silenced voices of female educators in *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching* (1988). Grumet (1988) describes bitter milk as a "fluid of contradictions: love and rejection, sustenance and abstinence, nurturance and denial" (p. xi). This shows the relationship between women and teaching. Grumet argued for a space for the voice of teachers to be heard because "it is the female elementary school teacher who is charged with the responsibility to lead the great escape" (Grumet, 1988, p. 25). It is the female elementary teacher who is usually leading children into the world that is predominantly masculine. Grumet contended for a middle ground where both men and women's views are honored and valued. In her book, Grumet gives a narrative account or story of one of her students. Through this, Grumet shows the importance of autobiographical narrative inquiry and teacher's stories for teachers to discover the power they need to create change.

Similar to the works of Grumet is Janet Miller's (1990) book *Creating Spaces and Finding Voices: Teachers Collaborating for Empowerment*. In her book, Miller shares her autobiographical narrative as well as the narrative of five classroom teachers in their quest to "finding voices" and "creating spaces" within education. This space is needed so that teachers

can discover their lived experiences of teaching and education. Miller (1990) describes the importance of teacher stories because they “bring teachers’ voices to the center of dialogue and debate surrounding current educational reform” and that they “reveal knowledge that often conflicts with, or is not reflected in, the dominant stories” (p.10). Many times the teacher’s voice is missing from the conversation. Miller (1990) “worked within educational environments and structures that often closed rather than opened the psychic and physical space deemed necessary for critical dialogue and human action” (p. 4). Miller’s work shows the importance of teacher’s stories especially female teacher’s stories to give teachers a voice in the field of education.

William Schubert and William Ayers (1992) realized the importance of telling the stories of teachers. In *Teacher Lore* they state “the secret of teaching is to be found in the local detail and everyday life of teachers; teachers can be the richest and most useful source of knowledge about teaching” (p. v). Because of their belief in the power of teachers’ stories they compiled much of their work in book *Teacher Lore*. This book is a collection of ‘teacher lore’ from teachers. Schubert (1992) writes:

Teacher lore includes stories about and by teachers. It portrays and interprets ways in which teachers deliberate and reflects, and it portrays teachers in action. Teacher lore refers to knowledge, ideas, insights, feelings, and understandings of teachers as they reveal their guiding beliefs, share approaches, relate consequences of their teaching, offer aspects of their philosophy of teaching, and provide recommendations for educational policymakers. Teacher lore can be presented through teachers’ own words, and through the interpretations provided by experienced teacher/researchers who interview and observe teachers. (p. 9)

The stories that are told by teachers and their interactions with others are thus a major component

of the teaching environment. Through teacher lore, the telling of teachers' stories is encouraged and used as a way for teachers to be heard and not silenced. Ayers (1992) states this clearly when he writes the value of hearing and writing about teacher stories is that it allows one to "enter the messy, subjective world of teachers where the talk is idiosyncratic and particular, infused with immediacy and urgency" (p. 152). Schubert & Ayers (1992) work in *Teacher Lore* supports the idea that teachers' stories can be used as an oppositional narrative by actively challenging the educational system. Their work also shows the need to continue such efforts in studies today.

Following the work of Connelly and Clandinin, Ming Fang He (2003) examined the lives of teachers in her book *A River Forever Flowing*. Her work is an example of a cross-cultural narrative perspective on teacher stories. Ming Fang He's work focuses on the lives of three teachers, one of which is He, and uses a metaphor of a river to explain their journey. He (2003) states:

The reason for telling, and retelling, these complex and fluid narratives is to encourage teachers, teacher educators, and many others who live cross-cultural lives, to search for their cultural roots, to reflect upon their background and experiences, to examine their values and beliefs in order to understand the ways in which their personal histories, cultures, and experiences affect who they are, how they perceive the world, and how they interact with other in an increasingly diversified world. (p. xix).

He's narrative inquiry allowed her to incorporate and validate her personal experiences of teaching into her research along with her participants' experiences and voices. This work confirms that telling and retelling stories is an investigation into our identities as the "narratives of our past are part of the narratives of our present and future" (p. 319). The act of telling and

retelling stories allowed He and her participants the opportunity to understand their experiences more fully. He stressed the importance of allowing her participants to tell their story and not to impose their story on them. In narrative inquiry, it is critical for the stories to be faithful to the participants' voice. He discovered the similar themes of political unrest, survival and cultural shifts in the stories that were told (He, 2010).

What Keeps Teachers Going? was written by Sonia Nieto (2003) to answer the central question "What keeps teachers going in spite of everything else?" (p. xi). She began the book with her own teaching story and the lessons that she learned about teaching: teaching is hard work, becoming a good teacher takes time, social justice is a part of teaching, there is no level playing field, and education is politics (Nieto, 2003, p. 10 – 15). Nieto then wrote about the work she conducted with a group of teachers from the Boston Public Schools to seek answers to the question what keeps teachers going. Nieto (2003) states, "The experiences and lives of excellent teachers can help all of us – teachers, teacher educators, parents and citizens in general – rethink some of our assumptions about teaching in the most depressed schools and, in effect, about the future of public education" (p. 7). Nieto views her book as a "counternarrative" to the current view of teachers in the United States. From her interactions with the group of teachers from Boston, Nieto discovered many lessons. One lesson that she learned was that teaching is an intellectual endeavor in that teachers must stay abreast of the newest educational research. Two more lessons that are related that Nieto discovered in her work is that teaching is about democracy, and that teaching involves love and respect. Finally, Nieto found that autobiography is an essential part of teaching as well as creating communities of learning among fellow teachers because they helped the teachers to remain connected to their profession, their student and each other (Nieto, 2003, p. 124).

Why We Teach by Sonia Nieto (2005) continued her work to call attention the importance of telling the stories of teachers. Nieto (2005) states, “Teachers are at the very center of this matter [high-quality and excellent public education], and it is only by understanding the motivations and inspirations of teachers that as a nation, we can hope to accomplish the lofty goals of public education” (p. 1). Her book focused on teacher’s “who stay the course or intent to, who care about who and what they teach, and who know that they touch the future” through an analysis of teacher essays and stories (p. 10-11). Nieto (2005) questions what a highly qualified teacher really means by looking at “what teachers think about the issues that define teaching in today’s classroom” (p. 1). In analyzing the 21 essays in her book, Nieto (2005) found five essential qualities of teachers that were noted in all of the essays. Those qualities were: “a sense of mission; solidarity within, and empathy for, students; the courage to challenge mainstream knowledge; improvisation; and a passion for social justice” (p. 204). Nieto showed the importance of making the voice of the teacher known.

Nieto’s work has strongly influenced my work on teacher stories and hope. My study is different in that it takes Nieto's work and expands it into a rural setting. The location of my study is much different from the site where Nieto conducted her study. Also, many things have changed in the world of education and teaching since Nieto published the works that I have cited above (2003; 2005). I look forward to seeing if my findings relate to Nieto’s work or if there are differences due to the location and timing of the study.

All of these studies support the potential of narratives in educational research. They aided in convincing me that teacher stories are a robust method for understanding teachers and their experiences. It also left me seeing the potential of teacher stories. How can teacher stories be seen as counter-stories to the dominant narrative?

Teacher Stories as Counter-Stories

Teacher Stories can also be viewed as counter-stories. In Richard Delgado's (1989) article *Storytelling for oppositionists and others: A plea for narrative* he writes that "stories create their own bonds, represent cohesion, shared understandings, and meaning" (p. 2412). This is the strength that is associated with storytelling. Delgado believes that there are different types of stories used to generate reality told by the dominant group and the oppressed group or outgroups. Outgroups, according to Delgado (1989), are groups whose voice has been censored and their perspective has been devalued or not recognized by the majority. The dominant stories are told to justify the way things are in the world and to create reality. Dominant stories reiterate and support the ideals and beliefs of those belonging to the group. Delgado (1989) compares the dominant stories that are told to "eyeglasses" in that "they are nearly invisible; we use them to scan and interpret the world and only rarely examine them for themselves" (p. 2413). The stories of the dominant group are seen as stock stories and are taken as reality and rarely questioned. They are seen as just the way things are in the world and taken for granted.

Richard Delgado (1989) defines the dominant story as "the stories or narratives told by the ingroup to remind it of its identity in relation to outgroups, and provide it with a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural" (p. 2412). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) defined counter-stories or counter-storytelling as "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (outgroups)" (p. 32). In the words of Delgado, counterstories "challenge the received wisdom" (p. 2414).

Delgado (1989) argues that the answer to the power of the dominant story is found in counter-storytelling because counter-stories challenge the mainstream ideals of the dominant group and force one to question the authority. Counter-stories force one to come out of

complacency and to see the entire picture. Counter-stories “can open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the one we live” (p. 2414). People are constantly creating their own meaning of the events that take place in their lives. Counter-stories “enrich imagination and teach that by combining elements from the story and current reality, we may construct a new world richer than either alone” (Delgado, 1989, p. 2414-2415). Delgado (1989) explains that using counter-stories is a way to help members of the oppressed or outgroups in two ways through “psychic self-preservation” and through their “effect on the oppressor.” (p. 2437). In describing the healing power of counter-stories, Delgado states that the counter-story has the power of awareness in that it can show how one came to be oppressed to end the mental violence (p. 2437). By hearing the counter-stories told by outgroups, the dominant group must rethink their reality and believed truth told in their stock stories. Delgado (1989) summarizes by stating:

Stories humanize us. They emphasize our differences in ways that can ultimately bring us closer together. They allow us to see how the world looks from behind someone else’s spectacles. They challenge us to wipe off our lenses and ask, “Could I have been overlooking something all along?” ...Stories are useful tools for the underdog because they invite the listener to suspend judgment, listen for the story’s point, and test it against his or her own version of reality. (p. 2440).

The use of counter-stories according to Delgado can benefit all by giving voice to the oppressed or outgroups and working to create a shared narrative. Teachers’ stories act as oppositional or counter-stories when they disclaim a dominant narrative. The current state of education in the United States paints a picture of a hopeless reality for education. The teacher’s stories that are collected as a part of this study can be seen as counter-stories if they show otherwise.

It is important to note that I divulge that I know that Delgado is a Critical Race Theorist, and in no way am I aiming to use Critical Race Theory in my study. I am though borrowing his ideas of counter-stories that he uses in Critical Race Theory in my narrative inquiry study. The stories that I am focusing on for my narrative inquiry can be seen as stories that cut across the flow of stories of despair. Because of this, Delgado's work on counter-stories is directly related to my work with teachers' stories.

Framework of Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a particular framework that is focused on ways of knowing. Narrative inquiry for my study is based on the work of Connelly and Clandinin and their perception and use of narrative inquiry. To them, the experience is the beginning and the end of the inquiry. Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experiences through:

A collaboration between researcher and participant, over time, in a place or a series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. As inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories and experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000, p. 20)

Through narratives, we see and understand the world around us. Living, telling, retelling and reliving are four main components of narrative inquiry. People live out their stories in their life and then tell these stories which are the first two components of narrative inquiry. The last two parts of narrative inquiry are the retelling and reliving of stories. In defining retelling, Clandinin (2013) states, "We call this process of coming alongside participants and then inquiring into the lived and told stories retelling stories" (p. 34). Something happens though when stories are told. Clandinin states, "Because we see that we are changed as we retell our lived and told stories, we

may begin to relive our stories” (p. 34). The act of deciding which stories to tell and retell and the underlying factors of telling stories plays a tremendous role in forming identities.

The conceptual framework of narrative inquiry is composed of temporality, sociality, and place (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000). Exploring these three “dimensions” is vital to my work in narrative inquiry to ensure that the complexity of peoples lived experiences is respected and represented. Narratives are involved, and all aspects of the narrative must be taken into account for the complete story to be heard and told.

Temporality. Temporality refers to the past, present, and future of people and events. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) explain temporality as “inquiry is within a stream of experiences that generates new relations that then become a part of future experiences” (p. 41). The researcher must take into account the past, and the present actions of the storyteller as those actions are likely to occur in the future. Carr (1986) states “we are composing and constantly revising our autobiographies as we go along” (p. 76).

Sociality. Sociality in a narrative inquiry is composed of two conditions: personal condition and social conditions (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, 2013). Personal conditions refer to “feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions of inquirer and participants” (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). Social conditions “refer to the milieu, the conditions under which people’s experience and events are unfolding” (Connelly and Clandinin, 2013, p.40). Sociality is made of the contexts that are embedded in participants and researchers both inward and outward. It also encompasses the relationships between the researcher’s and participants’ lives. Interaction involves both the personal and the social aspects of the experience.

Place. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) define place as “the specific concrete, physical

and topological boundaries of place or sequence of places where the inquiry and events take place” (p. 480). Participants are a part of their place and place have a direct role in shaping who they are. The researcher identifies specific places in the storyteller’s landscape that give meaning to the story.

Collecting and Telling Stories: Research Design

My study focuses on three elementary school teachers in a rural, Southeast Georgia school. Each participant is an elementary, classroom teacher from the same elementary school. Narrative inquiry is based on the view that through our stories we establish our “way of knowing” and identities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through narrative inquiry, I will triangulate data from classroom observations, field notes, and narrative interviews. My research design is based on four stages of research. The first stage in the process is a narrative interview with each participant. By listening to the stories of teachers, I have a porthole into how they view themselves, others and their experiences. I interviewed three elementary school teachers from one elementary school in Southeast Georgia. The second stage is to examine the participants on-site in the teaching setting. To do this, I observed each of the participants in their classroom setting. During the classroom observation, I collected field notes on the interactions that took place in the classroom involving the participant. The third stage of the research design is to conduct a group interview or focus group that included all of the participants. The same question guide was used for the interview and focus group. The final stage is story analysis. All data that was collected through these four stages were kept in a secure location within my home. The data was in the form of field notes, interview notes, audio from interviews, transcripts, and interview guides.

Role of Place in Narrative Inquiry

This narrative inquiry looks intimately into the lives of three elementary school teachers who teach in the same elementary school located in a Southeast County in Georgia. The town where the school is located is a tiny, rural community located in the Northern part of the county, about ten miles from the county seat. There are approximately 550 residents that live in the city limits. The school is located in the middle of a neighborhood and serves the residents of the town as well as many students who live outside of the city limits in neighboring communities. The elementary school houses grades Prekindergarten through fifth grade and has a population of around 440 students. The breakdown of students is as follows: 86% white, 5% Hispanic, 4% Multi-racial and 3% African American. There are twenty-eight certified staff members of which all are considered highly qualified in their assigned teaching area and twenty-six classified staff that work at the school. The school has a very close relationship with the community, especially with the Garden Club. The school motto is “Small School...Giant Commitment.” The most current College and Career Ready Performance Indicators (CCRPI) scores released December 2016 gave the elementary school at a rating of 92.2 which is an increase from the previous year’s score of 88.9 (“2016 College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI)”, 2016).

Participants

This study used purposeful sampling to select three participants. Purposeful sampling is defined by Patton (2002) as

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding

rather than empirical generalizations. (p. 230).

As a previous teacher at the school site that I have selected, I have pertinent information available to me that allowed me to choose the participants that fit the requirements of this study. Each participant met the following criteria: currently teaching at the selected elementary school and have seven or more years of teaching experience. The first criterion was selected because I wanted to focus on one location for my study to remove some of the variability that may arise if I decided to include multiple locations. These teachers are all from one elementary school in Southeastern Georgia. The elementary school is located in a rural community. The second criteria of teaching for seven-plus years was chosen so that the participant pool would be narrowed down to those teachers who have remained in the classroom. There is no restriction to age as long as they have taught elementary school for at least ten years. All of the current teachers at this school are women, so the subjects will also be women as there are currently no men teachers at this school site.

Using the above requirements, I identified the teachers from the selected elementary school that met all of the criteria. I then began to contact each potential participant to invite them to participate in my study. The first three teachers that I approached agreed to participate in the study, and I declined all other potential participants. The teachers selected a pseudonym to protect their identity.

Ruth. Ruth was the first participant that I approached in regards to participating in my study. She is currently in her twelfth year of teaching. Ruth has taught third and fourth grades. She has taught at the selected elementary school for two years. Ruth has a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in leadership. Ruth is a white female in her thirties. She is married and has two elementary aged children. She is very active in the community

outside of the school setting. Ruth always seems to be smiling when I see her and has a sense of joy in all that she does.

Paige. The second participant that agreed to participate in my study was Paige. She is currently in her seventh year of teaching. She has taught all seven years at the current elementary school and in the same grade, third. Paige has a bachelor's degree in elementary education. Paige is a white female in her late twenties. She is married and also has two elementary school aged children. Paige is very active in her church.

Donna. The third participant in my study was Donna. Donna has taught at the selected site for eight years. She has taught first grade her entire teaching career, twelve years. Donna has a bachelor's degree in elementary education and master's degree in leadership. Donna has two children, one elementary school aged and one in middle school. Donna is active in various sports activities with her children. Donna is a white female in her thirties.

How I Collected Their Stories

My study is based on a narrative inquiry research method. This involved retelling participants' life stories to gain insight. The primary qualitative collection methods that I utilized in my study were individual interviews, on-site observations, focus group session and field notes.

Interviews

As a researcher, it is essential for me not to have predetermined notions of what I want to hear in an interview. I wanted to be sure that I allowed for the participants to tell their story and not to tell the story that I hoped to hear. To do this, I used open-ended interview questions and everyday language. Careful attention was given during the interviews to ensure that there was not "an inequality about them" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 110). By this, I mean that I did

not want the participants to feel that as the research I had more power or authority over them. The interviews were used as a time to hear the stories of teachers. I used an interview guide with prompts such as “tell me...” to guide the interview to allow for open-ended questions with follow-up questions as needed to inquire for deeper meaning. I took care to ensure that I did not interrupt my participants so that their story may be told fully and openly.

I designed the participant interviews around three categories: the teacher’s autobiographical narrative, what keeps teachers in the classroom despite the challenges in education today, and the future of education and teaching in the United States. I created an interview guide that I provided to the participants before the interview so that they had an understanding of the interview. The interview guide contains a greeting, explanation of the study and research questions, interview questions, and a time for follow-up. The interview guide only acted as a guide and as the researcher, I hope that the interview is seen more like a conversation with the participants so that there is some flexibility. I allowed time in the interview for follow-up questions as well as a time for the participants to add any additional information. As I already have a rapport build with each of these teachers since they are my former colleagues, I was sure to use additional work to recognize my own experiences and thoughts and not to impose these upon the participants.

I met with each participant individually in person to conduct the interview. Each interview session was scheduled for one hour but ended before the allotted time. I also met with participants outside of the scheduled interviews by visiting their classroom and having lunch with them at school. Field notes were also written before and after the interviews so that I could record my thoughts on each of the interviews.

On-Site Observations

In addition to narrative interviews, the second stage of my research plan is to conduct on-site observations of the three participants in their classroom setting. To do this, I visited each participant at their school for a classroom observation. I observed the teachers teaching the whole class, teaching small groups, meeting with individual students and collaborating with peers. I observed each of the classrooms from 30 minutes to one hour in length. While conducting on-site observations, I took field notes to help me keep track of what was happening in the classroom as well as environmental factors of the observations. During the classroom observation, I collected field notes on the interactions that took place in the classroom involving the participant. I did not record audio or video of the classroom. I only used the notes that I took during the observation as the sole data source from the observations.

Field notes are described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as “the most important way we have of recording the ongoing bits of nothingness that fill our days. These ongoing, daily notes, full of the details and moments of our inquiry lives in the field, are the text out of which we can tell stories of our story of experience” (p. 104). The field notes or written account of what I hear, see or think during the observation will contribute to my study. The addition of the on-site observations to my study allowed me as the researcher to describe the participants in their teaching setting using all of my senses. It allowed for me to view things that may be taken for granted by the participant. This is something that may not be apparent in the individual interviews.

Focus Group

The third stage of my research plan was to conduct a focus group meeting that included all three participants and myself. The focus group allowed the participants to talk with each

other about what keeps dedicated teachers in the classroom despite the challenges in education today and the future of education in the United States. The same question guide was used for the interview and focus group. The focus group took place in a private room at the public library so that the conversations were private. Before the focus group, I provided the participants with another copy of the question guide. I recorded the audio of the focus group using a voice recorder. I did not record a video. Again, I did not use any experimental manipulations in the focus group. The focus group is an excellent addition to my study because it allowed the participants to voice their views to others and also to hear the opinions of other educators. I believe that this setting helped to stimulate the discussion at hand.

Story Analysis/Thematic Analysis

All information that was collected through this project was stored in a secure location at my home. Participant's names were not used during the interview process, as they selected pseudonyms to protect their identity. Interviews and the focus group took place in a private conference room at the public library to protect participant's identity. After gathering the participants' stories, the next step was story analysis. Each teacher had a password protected file on my computer that included all information from interviews, transcripts, classroom observation and field notes. I did not store data on any other computer. Teachers selected pseudonyms to protect their identity. Transcripts were created from each interview and focus group meeting. I used a professional transcriber, Verbal Ink, to transcribe all of the interviews. A confidentiality agreement from Verbal Ink is provided in Appendix B. All transcripts were kept in a secure location at my home.

Then I used thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) to identify significant themes from the transcripts. Braun and Clark (2006) define thematic analysis as “a method for identifying,

analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 6). For my study, I followed Braun and Clark’s (2006) six phases of thematic analysis to guide my story analysis process. The six steps are as follows: familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clark, 2006).

To begin, I immersed myself in the data by reading each transcript individually and then rereading in connection with the other transcripts. This was important to me since I did not transcribe the data myself. I wanted to be sure that I was as familiar with the information as possible before I began the coding process. As I read through each transcript, I jotted down initial thoughts and notes. This was a very time-consuming stage in the story analysis process but a vital one as I felt much more connected to the data that I had collected through my research.

The second phase of thematic story analysis involved generating initial codes. I used an inductive or ‘bottom-up’ thematic coding process to identify themes and patterns (Braun & Clark, 2006). In this, I tried to code the narratives without trying to fit the information into an already existing code category. As a researcher, I know that I have preconceptions, but I decided to put those feelings and thoughts to the side as I read through the narratives that I collected and the field notes that wrote during observations and throughout the research process. I conducted an initial coding of the transcripts and data to determine what the data showed. I created a code based on what the data showed. I used the Atlas computer program to assist in coding the data.

The third phase, searching for themes, required me to read through the data a second time to create categories of codes. By doing this, I was able to see how the different codes related to one another and to sort them into possible themes. A theme “captures something important

about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 10). I considered themes as something essential to my overall research questions. Again I used the Atlas computer program to assist in organizing codes and creating thematic maps.

The fourth and fifth phases of thematic story analysis, reviewing the themes and defining and naming themes, seemed to happen at the same time. During this stage, I considered the themes that emerged during the previous stage and made adjustments as necessary to my analysis. As I analyzed the participants’ stories and the themes that emerged, I began to “restory” them into a framework that makes sense. “Restorying is the process of reorganizing the stories into some general type of framework” (Creswell, 2013, p. 56). This was done by putting the stories into order and finding links among the themes and ideas in the stories. Through the telling and retelling of stories, researchers like myself can show what we know, how we know it and why we believe the way that we do. This was the final phase of the thematic analysis process. A fifteen-point checklist of criteria was created by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 36). I used this checklist to guide my thematic analysis and is provided in Appendix C.

Summary of Chapter

This chapter began with an overview of narrative theory. My use of narrative theory is based upon the works of Connelly and Clandinin (2008). Other important narrative theorists are Dewey (1938), Bruner (1985), Polkinghorne (1995), Witherell and Noddings (1991) and Greene (1995). Teacher stories as narrative inquiry was then reviewed through the works of Cole (1990), Clandinin (1985), Grumet (1988), Shubert and Ayers (1992), Miller (1990), He (2003) and Nieto (2003, 2005). My study is based upon narrative theory and teacher stories and the information discussed will help to develop my study further. My research design and the four

steps of my research process were then examined. My research design is situated within the framework of narrative inquiry. The four steps of my study are individual interviews, classroom observations, focus group session and data analysis. The role of place, a description of the participants and a explanation of qualitative methods ended the chapter.

CHAPTER 4

TEACHERS' PERSONAL NARRATIVES

This chapter contains information collected from the three participants through my study. The specific questions and each participant's responses are given for each stage of my research. The three narrative collection stages were individual teacher interviews, on-site observations, and a focus group session.

Teacher Interviews

Responses from each teacher's individual interview are provided in this section. I interviewed each teacher in the public library after school hours. I gave each participant a copy of the interview guide before the interview. Each interview was recorded using a digital voice recorder. The entirety of each interview was transcribed, but for this section, I chose to organize the interviews according to the topics that were discussed during the interviews and each participant's response. After each topic, I provide an analysis of the data.

Teachers' Autobiographical Narrative

Interview Question/Prompt: I want to understand more about how any why you ended up working as a teacher. What led you to be a teacher? Why did you become a teacher?

Ruth: When I was four years old my mother died. And after she passed and when I started school, I had two older brothers and my daddy. And it wasn't that my daddy didn't care about education. It was that he didn't know what to do. And so I can remember being in first grade at the school where I teach now and being in the lowest reading group. And my dad remarried. And when my stepmother came, she spent a lot of time with me. And practiced reading and I got better at it. And in second grade I can remember, I remember sitting at the table with my second-grade teacher and going over a word list with her.

And I remember after doing that that I went to the highest reading group. And I stayed in that group throughout, I was in advanced classes in high school, and that was just a strength for me. So knowing that I can make a difference and I can maybe connect with those children and help those especially who are struggling, you know that kind of helped me with my decision.

Paige: When I was in college I had four previous majors before I decided on education. It was mainly because my whole life I had taught Sunday school. I had taught Awanas at church, and all these things and people would say, “You are going to be a teacher one day,” and I thought, I am not gonna be a teacher. I don’t wanna do this. I’ve done it my whole life. But anyways, I went through dental hygiene, I went through psychology, I went through Spanish, all these majors, and none of them just felt right. So anyway, my second and a half year into college I finally changed to education and I was just like, this is where I need to be. There was peace there. I guess just the background from everything else it just kind of fed into that.

Donna: Well I just spent a long time doing a little soul searching on these questions, and I know without a shadow of a doubt it was not because I come from a long line of teachers. My parents were not teachers. My parents didn’t graduate from college, but I did at the age of 15 teach one child to swim and that opened a door for me. I do think that teaching was a gift. I do think that teaching swimming defined my view of teaching in the classroom. I did want to become a teacher after I began working with children 20 years ago teaching swimming lessons.

Interview Question/Prompt: Tell me about your best day as a teacher. What would you consider your best day as a teacher?

Ruth: My favorite days as a teacher are when we are able to tie in what we're reading across the curriculum. I love teaching social studies. Love it. So any time we can put reading and writing and a project together with it, I love it. That makes me happy. So just tying it all in together.

Paige: It's probably like when you feel you made a difference. It's normally the end of the year when you're about to take the Milestones. You're about to give that STAR assessment one last time. You look, this is where we came from, and this is where we are, and you see that, and you're like, oh, thank you, Jesus, we've made it, and that's really the best day.

Donna: I think sometimes our best days as teachers are not necessarily when we just have followed a lesson plan. It's almost sometimes off the cuff when we take questions and things that they're asking, and we form our own lesson about what we're teaching, but in that moment I think that we just become better teachers whenever we just stop reading from the lesson plan or following a guide and we just really dive in and just try to teach them what they desire to learn, what their questions are.

Interview Question/Prompt: Tell me about your worst day as a teacher.

Ruth: Probably my worst day has nothing to do with the kids. I would say my worst day is when – you know I feel the pressure of everything. And I probably bite off more than I can chew sometimes. And so I wouldn't say it's the kids at all. It's just all the extra that comes with it.

Paige: When the stress of the job and the demands of the workload flow into the classroom. I hate this. You feel like you have so much to do. You're getting ready for literacy day, you're meeting, meeting, meeting, meeting, and you're so stressed out with that, that you

can't tone it back down to what you're supposed to, and that's – I hate to be emotional, but that is – When I got to bed I worry every night at night like, gosh, I didn't get that clear or I got too – I let the stress flow in and then I yelled, or I let the stress flow in and I couldn't work with the group that I was supposed to, and that's what's hard. That's the worst day. Those seem to be more and more now. We're meeting more and more, filling out more and more data, we're filling out more forms, and it's just where's my time to do what I need to do to do what's best for my kids? So I feel like that's hard right now. That's the worst day.

Donna: I think some of your worst days are when you see their struggle, maybe whenever we see them come in when their needs are not being met at home, or we know that we truly are trying to be an advocate for them, but we find it just we're at a place where we just can't quite reach them, and so they just struggle. Maybe they are struggling with something at home. Those are probably our worst days when we see them struggling on the inside, and we're trying to nurture them in the classroom, but it's just hard for them to wrap their little minds around learning maybe because of something going on outside of school.

Analysis of Teachers' Autobiographical Narrative

All three participants discussed in their reasons for becoming a teacher a prior experience with teaching at an early age. Ruth and Donna seemed to take the prior knowledge and ultimately trust in it and allow it to guide their path to becoming a teacher. Paige, on the other hand, seemed to battle with the notion of teaching a little more. Once she decided that she would begin her studies for becoming a teacher, she seemed ultimately at peace with it and knew that it was her calling.

When asked to tell about their best day as a teacher, all three related the best day to their students in their classroom, whether it was completing a project with them or seeing their growth or responding to their desire to learn. This shows that these teachers “take their job to heart.” On the other hand, when asked to tell about their worst day as a teacher, two of the three participants described the stress and demands of teaching. The worst day had nothing to do with students but the burden of teaching. Donna expressed her worst day as when she could see the struggle that students were having outside of the classroom and not being able to meet their needs outside of school.

What Keeps Teachers in the Classroom

Interview Question/Prompt: Tell me about what motivates you to do what you do. What motivates you to be a teacher?

Ruth: Well, the kids. The kids motivate me. I didn't always know that I wanted to be a teacher.

When I was younger, I thought that I wanted to be a nurse. I had this happen in my family, and I realized that it was – I was not cut out to be a nurse. And so I remember praying about it and then I thought, well, you know I like kids. I like the idea of the schedule. I like, you know everything. And I thought, well, you know I'll give it a try. And I did, and I'm glad that I did. And every year I do it I just think I love the kids even more. And so what motivates me is the kids.

Paige: I would say like what motivates me is when I can teach kids strategies behind how to do something, and then you see that light click, and they can apply that strategy from one thing to another. So it's really just knowing that you made something that day. You learned how to do your vowel teams, and so now you can transfer that into multisyllabic words, and you can see that light just click from one subject to the next.

Donna: Well above all I believe the children and their desire and their want to learn. They're always seeking questions, the asking "why?" I think that really motivates me to come in. Their cheerfulness, their attitudes, their smiles, and their just love to learn, their love for learning.

Interview Question/Prompt: Tell me about a goal that you want to accomplish in your work.

Ruth: I want to be the teacher that the kids remember. And I know, you know you hear people say that, but I really do. When they get older, and they look back on my classroom, I want them to think about how I made learning fun. And it was, you know I want to prepare them and to make it challenging. But I want them to have fun and realize that learning is a fun thing. So that's my goal.

Paige: Well, I want for my kids, first of all, I want them to be on grade level reading-wise because I know they leave me and they go to fourth, there's this statistic or there used to be about they're not reading on grade level, and they're likely to not graduate high school. And I feel like, oh my gosh, teaching third grade I need all of them on grade level because I want my babies to graduate high school. I want them to be college and career ready, and that's my biggest goal, really, and even my teaching goal because that all transfers. It's not to be the teacher of the year, and it's not to be most popular teacher. It's to come in and do my thing and get them where they need to be.

Donna: I really think in that question that I believe that my goal for them is to gain critical thinking skills, problem-solving, ethics, social commitment, self-confidence in all areas of life, not just academics, but when they leave the classroom I do want them to feel confident about their standards and their learning targets, but more importantly how they will grow up and their character as an adult.

Interview Question/Prompt: What excites you the most with teaching or education? What are you most passionate about?

Ruth: Well, I'm really passionate about writing too. And so when I see that kids become better writers, that's something that makes me really happy. Just when they understand something that they didn't understand before. Just seeing their growth. You know when we do our fluency assessment beginning of the year, and then we look at it again after a few weeks and look at it again, to see that they're growing just reaffirms that what I'm doing is working. And so there's a push for them to be where they need to be. And so that's what makes me happy is seeing their growth.

Paige: Reading. I think that's where you can see the most growth which makes you feel like something is happening.

Donna: I definitely think seeing them light up is the most exciting when they go from reading words on a list or on a page to being able to read words and text and comprehend their reading. That really excites me the most, especially children that are able to learn to read. I think that's just what excites me the most. I think reading is what I'm the most excited and passionate about. I love all other areas, but I just think their want and their little desires to understand why that's probably the best part.

Analysis of What Keeps Teachers in the Classroom

Without a doubt, it was apparent that the participants in my study are in the classroom today because of the kids and their desire to learn. Two of the three participants made it clear that their goal as a teacher is to prepare students for the next grade and their future. Donna took this a little farther in that she expressed her desire to foster critical thinking skills and self-

confidence not only in academics but all areas of life. I believe that Ruth's goal of wanting to be the teacher that kids remember relates back to preparing students for their future but also doing it in a way that kids will enjoy. When asked what excited you the most about teaching all three of the participants responded with something related to English Language Arts, whether it was reading or writing. I think this shows that these teachers know and realize the importance of reading and writing and the excitement that students have when they are successful in these areas.

Future of Education and Teaching

Interview Question/Prompt: Is there anything that you would like to change about being a teacher? What do you see in the future of education and teaching in the United States?

Ruth: I know we hear all the time about how we have all this added pressure and all this extra.

And I understand that that's a reality. That we do have those things. But I also feel that that's what I signed up for. I mean when I first started teaching, and maybe a few years after, I am used to having to do all this data and having to keep up with this stuff. And so I just – I really try not to feed into that. Into the negativity. Because I just feel like that's a part of what I'm doing and there's a purpose to what I'm doing. And so I try to keep – I try to be positive about that and just go with it.

Paige: Mm-hmm. All the extras what we call one more things. We joke and say we're going to get a shirt that says "#onemorething" because every time we go to a meeting or get an email, it seems like there's one more thing and back to data, I feel like it's good, but we've taken it to an all new level. We have more meetings than we have planning. There are weeks that we don't even get a planning because we meet every day, whether it be parents or administration or curriculum coach or whoever. It's just meet, meet, meet.

Also, I would like to change that there are so many hands in curriculum. Like we have so many time constraints. Like you have this amount of days to take this common assessment. This is your pacing guide to get these standards taught. I feel like as a teacher that's been here seven years; I know what I'm doing. Give me my standards, let me do what I need to do, and we'll be ready for the test. Every classroom is different. We should be treated that way. And also one last thing I would change is I feel like we have a lot of people who have jobs in our schools that aren't directly working with children, and so as a teacher, I want to plan. I want to pull my kids and work with them, and I want to do those things, and I think in the school system there should be money allotted to have somebody who can pull my data and somebody who can sit down and do the extra things, the one more things that we're having to do, and let us get back to what's important.

Donna: Sometimes I feel like we get so caught up in just reinventing the wheel. We spin our wheels, and we do a lot of the same things. We just put a different take on it. There's something that I wrote about. I think that if we could change some positivity, some constructive, effective, optimistic teachers, I think that if we could bring some cheerfulness back into the classroom that would strengthen our profession. I think it would build morale. I think that it starts with us. I think our conversations, our attitudes, our persona would be the key in our success. I know everybody's personality is not that of a cheerleader, but what if it was? What if we all accepted change? What if we put our frustrations aside? What if we didn't always complain? If we could change some of those things about being a teacher, then I think that it starts with us and I think that we would see education on a different level. I think it would definitely be more positive.

There is a lot of negativity in education. They're surrounded in the news. I do think that teachers are the guiding light, so really the only promising voice for children right now.

Ruth: I would hope that there would be a push for extra support for new teachers. And I would hope that if there was that extra support put into place that we would see more people not wanting to leave the profession because they would feel more confident in what they did and they would understand more about what they're supposed to teach and have, you know kind of like a guideline. I mean just better supported. That's what I hope. Because right now, you know you hear all this all the time on social media where, you know it's just negative, negative, negative and they're wanting to leave. And something has to change if we want to keep teachers. And so I think they need to be better supported. And so hopefully we'll have more stay.

Analysis of Future of Education

When asked about what you would like to change about being a teacher, several things emerged from the responses of the participants. Ruth and Donna talked about the need to bring some positivity back into teaching and not to fall into the negativity. Paige and Donna also expressed the concerns of all the extra's or "#onemorethings" that are consuming the time of teachers.

On-Site Observations

The second stage of my research was to observe each participant in their classroom. I contacted each participant to ask for a good time for me to come and every one of them said to stop by anytime. So, the participants were aware that I was coming but didn't know exactly what day or time that I would arrive.

Ruth

Ruth's fourth-grade classroom is located right in the middle of a long hallway. I entered the classroom and was greeted with many hugs from previous students of mine. Ruth let the class know that I was there to see what they were doing in the classroom and to observe. I found a seat in the back corner of the room so that I could see the entire classroom and also not be in the way. Ruth teaches English Language Arts for the whole fourth grade at Odum Elementary as she is a part of a three-person teaching team. The two other teachers in her squad teach Science/Social Studies and Mathematics. Ruth was just starting her lesson and began with a read aloud. All of the students remained at their desks while she read. Ruth was able to capture the attention of all of her students as she read to them pausing to ask comprehension questions and to gauge students' understanding of the text. As I was exiting the classroom, Ruth was giving instruction for a writing assignment that was based on the text that she had read to the class that day. The students were using their Chrome Books, personal laptop computers, to complete this task.

Ruth's classroom was a delight to observe. I have spent the majority of my teaching career in 1st and 2nd grades so being in an upper elementary classroom was a nice change. It was encouraging to see how the basic skills that are taught in the younger classes are built upon in the older grades. Ruth's classroom was very well run, and it was apparent in the short time that I observed her that she genuinely did everything in her power to ensure that her students are successful. I also loved the way Ruth used technology in her writing assignments. Students were using Google Docs to draft their writing assignments. Ruth used technology to enhance her classroom to the fullest.

Paige

I observed Paige's classroom one morning. Upon walking into Paige's classroom, I was welcome with "Hey Mrs. Allison" and many hugs and waves as many of the students in Paige's classroom I had taught in first grade. I told the students that I was just there to watch and see what they were doing. Paige has a self-contained third-grade classroom. The class was about to start Number Talks, so I took a seat in the back of the room to lessen distractions and to be able to see all that was taking place. All of the students were sitting on the floor with a whiteboard and marker. Paige was utilizing her computer board to model and work out math problems with the students. All of the students were very engaged in the activity. Paige took time to use multiple strategies together with students' assistance to work out math problems. Then she gave the students a problem to work independently. During this time, the students used their whiteboards to work out the problem. Paige walked around and offered assistance to those students who were struggling. The students had to show the answer to the math problem and the strategy that they used to get the answer.

I enjoyed observing and being in Paige's classroom. Not only was it nice to see the faces of so many students that I had previously taught, but it was also encouraging to see the students so engaged in learning. It was evident that routines had been established in Paige's classroom and that students knew the expectations. Paige's classroom was very inviting as there were lots of examples of student work posted throughout the classroom as well of pictures of every student. Paige's interactions with her students were very encouraging and supportive. Many times I heard her say "I love it" in response to a student's work or "Yes!." Paige also encouraged the students to explain their work by prompting them with phrases like "How do I know..." or "How can I figure out..." or "Let's talk about..." As I left Paige's classroom, I felt encouraged

by what I had observed. Her love for children and learning was apparent in how her classroom was set up and run.

Donna

Donna's first-grade classroom is located towards the end of the hallway. I also observed Donna's class during the morning. Students were just getting settled into the classroom and taking care of morning work. I quietly walked in and took a seat on the side of the room as students were getting ready for small group reading time. During this time there were three small groups that the students rotated through. Donna led one group at her table. This group was using leveled readers to work on phonics skills. A Paraprofessional led the second group at another table. Her group was using sight word flashcards. The Paraprofessional acted just like a teacher and had I not known I would have thought that she was the second teacher in the classroom. The third group was an independent group where students were completing work at their desk independently.

As I entered Donna's classroom, I felt right at home. I felt as though I was entering my own first-grade classroom. Donna and I have taught first grade together for several years and have formed a unique teacher buddy bond. It didn't bother her at all that I was there to watch the class. Donna's room was decorated to a tee with a "Welcome to the Theater" theme. The colors and decorations were very inviting. Just like Paige's classroom, it was very apparent that routines and expectations had been established and students were aware of them. Most of the time that I was there I focused my attention on Donna's group even though there were several other activities taking place in the room. Donna's interactions with the students in her group were very supportive and encouraging as they worked through reading a leveled reader and learning new vocabulary words. I observed Donna using phrases like "fabulous," "that was

super,” and “you are so smart – look at how many words you know” with the students in her group. You could see the relationships that Donna had formed with the students in her class and the love that she had for them and vice versa. Once again, as I left Donna’s classroom, I could not help but smile as my heart was full from the interactions that I had just observed.

Analysis of On-Site Observations

I am so glad that I chose to include on-site observations as a stage of my research project. This allowed me to see each participant in their classroom and to observe the interactions that they have with their students and fellow teachers. After leaving each classroom, I felt so encouraged by what I had witnessed. These teachers genuinely care about their students, and it was apparent in the way that they interacted with their students and ran their classroom. These teachers had taken the time to build the relationships with their students, and that was evident in the way the students acted and performed in the classroom.

Focus Group

The focus group was held after the individual interviews and on-site observations. Because of this, I had time to reflect upon what the participants shared during their interviews and what I had observed in each of their classrooms. This helped me to refine the questions that I would ask the group. I used questions from the initial interview guide but did not use all of them. Once again I provided each of the participants with the interview guide beforehand so that they would be reminded of the questions. The following provides an overview of the discussion that took place during the focus group with all three participants. This section organizes the responses from each participant based on the topics that were discussed. Included is the interaction that the three participants had with each other as the topics were being discussed.

Many of their responses were based off things that other participants have said.

Interview Question/Prompt: What are some reasons why you think teachers stay in the classroom despite all the negativity and the challenges that we hear about education?

Donna: I think we understand the importance of helping a child learn to read and learn their math, and understanding that that's part of the real world. And so even with all the other stuff that comes with it, we want to see them succeed later on in life. We want them to be successful adults.

Paige: Absolutely. I feel the same way. And I also was thinking earlier today about being a voice for them, being an advocate for them. Sometimes when they don't have another voice, that maybe we're the only ones that step in line with them and share in their struggles and then share in their success. So just being their person.

Donna: That was great.

Interview Question/Prompt: What do you think are some things that you could do to strengthen or improve the public's perception of education?

Donna: I think that just having positive relationships with parents and –

Paige: And coworkers.

Donna: Yeah. And coworkers. And just letting them know that, even with the bad, there's a whole lotta good. And I think just them understanding the importance of it, and maybe teaching them to value education too: that would benefit what we're doing and maybe change some perspectives.

Paige: Right. And amongst the coworkers at school, I feel like it's important for us to just still have that – have a positive, optimistic attitude about education and not go into every meeting and every agenda with a sour outlook. We need to just really try to stay positive.

Because, I mean, I do think that we're the driving force. Everybody is looking to teachers for our opinion and how we feel about education. So ultimately how we display that, show that to others, is gonna be how the public views what's going on up here at school.

Ruth: And what you were saying earlier about the parents: sending out positive reinforcements or positive notes or whatever – we've got our collaboration down with teachers. We do that all the time. And I feel like that has helped – even collaborating in town...But still working on collaborating with parents: bringing them in more. And then maybe they'll see the value more.

Interview Question/Prompt: What are some of the rewards that you find in teaching?

Donna: I enjoy the relationships that I establish with my students. I have – especially when I worked at a different school, I had a lot of students who were not very privileged. And just as they grow older, and keeping up with them, and seeing how they're turning out and what they remember – that means a lot to me. So that's definitely a positive – the relationships I build with my students.

Paige: And seeing the lightbulb go off too. They answer their own questions. When they can answer their own questions, and they understand the why: "Why's this happening? Why are we doing this?" And then they begin to understand what they're actually learning. That's a reward.

Interview Question/Prompt: What do you see in the future of education and teaching in the United States?

Ruth: I see it become more data-driven. I mean, it already is. But I feel like, especially in the upper grades – I don't know how it is with Y'all, but with us, everything we're doing is

linked to a computer so that it can be tracked and kept up with. And then when you go to a meet, and you look at: “This is where your class is; this is where” – everybody looks, and you’re almost ranked. And I think a lotta that is good because we see growth and we need to track things. But it seems like, more and more; it’s going technology-wise so it can be data tracked, whatever.

Donna: And it becomes like almost a business approach. Like almost a selling point. And that is where you don’t want to – that’s where we start to feel the negativity. Then that’s when we try not to fall into the burnout and the hole – the dark hole.

Paige: And I hate to say, but when you think about it, if we do continue down this path with teachers feeling burned out and this negative perception in the media of what teachers have to deal with in the classrooms, that we are gonna see more people fall away from the profession. And so I think in order to change that, we need to continue to be positive with our coworkers, in our community, and try to be that way in everything that we do, provide positive learning experiences for our kids so that when they get older, they will have a better maybe perspective of education, and maybe they’ll teach their kids to value education.

Donna: Absolutely.

Ruth: Yeah. And I feel like our kids are just a number. Or we’re getting to be that way. Not to us in the classroom, but from outsiders looking in, or from your administration or your superintendents. They’re just a number. But they have a story.

Paige: That’s right. Every one of them. Such a struggle too, just watching them day in and day out, all the needs that they – all their needs. Because when they come into the classroom, you wonder, “How are we gonna meet those needs academically when we know that they

have so many needs emotionally?”

Interview Question/Prompt: Can you think of any stories that you would like to share with the public that would show the hope and positivity in education?

Paige: Well, there are so many. Every year is a new story. So there's always that one that pulls on her heartstrings a little bit.

Ruth: I'm thinking about a student that I taught. It was kinda of a sad story in a way, but I'm very proud of her that she continued. She actually had a baby when she was in seventh grade. I've kept up with her. I talked to her not too long ago, and she's going to night school, but she's finishing. And she said, "Ms. Ruth, I told you that I was gonna finish, and I'm gonna finish." Even though it was a bad experience, I'm proud of her for continuing. And some of the students that I first taught when I first began – they're in college now. So to see them in college and pursuing their career path. That's definitely something positive and make you feel good that they went through and they're making good choices for their lives.

Donna: I mean, I can think about a student that I had a couple of years ago. And, I mean, looking back – I mean, the odds were stacked against him in every area. But just to see him succeed, and for me to see the impact that I made on him, and then he wanted to come to school. He's in sixth grade now. And in a normal classroom. And when he was in my classroom, I would have never thought that was gonna happen. But those are the things – And I believe in that. I mean, every day to squat down by their desk and say, "Don't you ever stop. Don't you ever let anybody tell you that you're not smart enough, that you can't do it. Even if you go with your mama to work every night and you sit on the bench at the grocery store, and you hold your brother and sister, and you're there to

10:00 when she gets off work, don't ever let anybody tell you that you can't. You go to college. You keep going. Don't quit." Because they are so smart and they can do it.

They're gonna have a story. A good story.

Analysis of Focus Group

The focus group was a great experience. It allowed the participants to hear each other's responses and to feed off of each other. I felt that the experience was almost therapeutic to the participants. They were able, to be honest with each other and not feel as though their views did not matter. It was evident in the participants' responses that the reason they continue to teach is for the students that they have in their classroom each year. These teachers see the importance of being an advocate for their students. The importance of relationships was mentioned several times. The need to improve relations with parents and coworkers as well as the reward of enjoying the relationships that the participants establish with their students.

When asked about the future of education, it saddened me to hear the participants relate education to a business and how data is taking over. One participant even stated that it seemed like her students were just a number to those outside of the classroom. The focus group ended with the participants sharing stories of hope and positivity in teaching. Each participant had several students who they could recall and even mentioned that each year there is a new story that should be shared.

Summary of Chapter

This chapter contains the data that I collected during my study. The participants' responses from the individual interviews and the focus group were given, as well as, my notes from the on-site observations. I also included an initial analysis of the data that I presented in the chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Three elementary school teachers from one school site in southeast Georgia participated in my study. These teachers were encouraged to explore their role as a teacher through personal reflection and stories. In this chapter, I discuss an overview of my study as well as the themes that emerged from my research. The title of this dissertation is “We Shall Not Be Moved.” The title expresses the relationship of the show of resistance that these teachers revealed through their stories and the themes that emerged through this research process.

Overview of Study

This research project grew from my strong desire to tell the stories of the teachers who are in the classroom every day making a difference in the lives of the students they teach. I felt that their stories were missing from what the public hears and sees about education on a daily basis. As an educator, I am surrounded daily by amazing teachers who keep pushing and are making a difference in education.

The purpose of my study was to examine teacher stories and to use those descriptions to generate meanings about teaching in the K-12 school environment in light of the current hopeless state of education at the local, state, and national level. A key component of my research is the notion of hope and creating hope in the stories of elementary school teachers. The idea of hope is based on the works of Paulo Freire (1998) and Erich Fromm (2010). Narrative inquiry, based on the work of Connelly and Clandinin, was used to guide my study. Narrative inquiry is based on the view that through our stories we establish our “way of knowing” and identities. The participants in my study were three elementary school teachers who currently teach at one elementary school located in southeast Georgia. Each participant met the requirement of having

taught school for at least seven years. I met with each participant at a time of their choosing in a private room in the library. The same interview guide was used for all interviews. This same location was utilized for the focus group session as well. The audio recordings of the interviews and focus group session were sent to Verbal Inc. to be transcribed. I also completed an on-site observation of each participant in their classroom and recorded field notes. Each transcript was coded and analyzed for themes and patterns. The narrative collection methods for this qualitative study were individual interviews, on-site observations, focus group session, and field notes.

Two research questions guided my narrative study of elementary school teachers:

- What keeps veteran teachers in the elementary school classroom despite all the challenges in education today?
- What can we learn from the teachers who choose to stay in the classroom about hope and hopelessness in classrooms today?

What Keeps Teachers Going

When asked questions about why participants have remained in the elementary school classroom, three major ideals emerged: participants' love for their students, participants' love for learning, and participants' understanding of a "bigger picture" in education.

Love for Students

Without any hesitation, all three participants responded that the main thing that motivates them as teachers is the students. Ruth says it best, "It's all about the kids. Everything that I do is for them" (Individual Interview, line 136). Paige responded with "just working with kids. At the end of the day, that's what we do, and that's the best part" (Individual Interview, line 138). Similar responses were evident in almost every answer given during the individual interviews

not only from Ruth but all of the participants. This love for students was clearly apparent during the on-site observation. The way that the participants interacted with their students showed without a doubt that they loved their students and wanted nothing but the best for them. Paige talked about being a voice for her students when they don't have anyone to be their voice. She called it "just being their person" (Focus Group, line 20). I call it having a sincere desire to make a difference in the lives of the children in her classroom and her genuine love for her students in all areas. The teachers in this study are sincere in their love for their students, and this spills over into the remaining themes that emerged from my study. All of the teachers that participated in my study work hard to develop relationships with their students; relationships that do not stop at the classroom door. These relationships go well beyond the school site. As a parent, I have observed these teachers at the ball field and other events encouraging their students. I appreciate these teachers for just being there for their students. The small nature of the site that I choose helps with the formation of these relationships.

As an educator, I also feel a deep connection to the students that I have encountered in my teaching career. Throughout this study, many times I felt as though the participants could see inside me and how I felt about the students that I have taught. During the interviews, especially the focus group interview, I remember just nodding my head in agreement when the participants were discussing how they teach and stay in the classroom because of the students. In my teaching career, I have had the pleasure of being the inclusion teacher. This is something that many teachers would shy away from, but I welcomed it with open arms. I loved the years that I had this pleasure. It was those students who needed me the most, not only as a teacher but also as "their person" to stand up for them at school and outside of school. Many of these students still to this day come by just to say hey or stop me around town to hug me and let me know how

they are doing.

The teachers that I observed do love children and have a genuine concern for their future. I feel that I will always be connected to teaching in one way or another because of my love for students. Even with all the extras that come with teaching and education, I was born to be a teacher, and I will embrace that as long as I can. I will not give up because of my love for students and neither will the teachers who participated in my study. This ties back to the works of Ayers (2010), Nieto (2003, 2005) and Palmer (2007). The teachers in this study showed many of the characteristics that these scholars described in relation to love for teaching and passion for teaching.

Love for Learning

A second point that emerged from my study on elementary school teachers is the participants' love for learning. Donna said it best when asked what motivates her to continue in the classroom she said, "Well above all I believe the children and their desire and their want to learn" (Individual Interview, line 23-24). She went on to describe it as "seeing them light up is the most exciting" (Individual Interview, line 30). Ruth described this as wanting to be the teacher that her students remember. "When they get older, and they look back on my classroom, I want them to think about how I made learning fun" (Ruth Individual Interview, line 30-31).

The teachers that I interviewed show a passion towards their students and learning. Passion is defined as "a strong inclination towards an activity that people like, that they find important and in which they invest time and energy" (Vallerand et al., 2003, p. 757). I believe that the passion that the participants showed throughout this research program is an example of harmonious passion as described by Vallerand et al. (2003). These teachers "freely accepted the activity (teaching) as important for them without any contingencies attached" (Vallerand et al.,

2003, p. 757). The faces of the participants lit up during the interview sessions when they were discussing the students in their classrooms and the learning that was taking place in their classrooms. The passion these teachers possess for their students and learning can be seen by the extras that they do and how they describe their students and learning. Donna brought it all together when asked what motivates her. She responded, “Their cheerfulness, their attitudes, their smiles, and their just love to learn, their love for learning” (Individual Interview, line 25-26).

I also felt a connection to the love and passion for learning that the participants described. I have been connected to education since the day as I was born. Because of this education has always been valued and viewed as important in my life. This is evident even at the age of 37; I am still a student continuing my love for learning. As a teacher, I feel that it is important that I pass on this love for learning to my students. I want to push my students but in a way that makes them look forward to coming to school. I want them to see the bigger picture of learning and how things are connected. The teachers that I interviewed definitely have the passion that I was searching for in my study. I hope that others see this same passion in me as a teacher.

The Bigger Picture

The third and most powerful notion that emerged to me in regards to what keeps teachers going is their ability to see the “bigger picture” for their students. The teachers in this study know the importance of learning and how it impacts their students’ lives now and in the future. Donna describes this in the following:

I think we understand the importance of helping a child learn to read and learn their math, and understanding that that’s part of the real world. And so even with all the other stuff that comes with it, we want to see them succeed later on in life. We want them to be

successful adults. (Focus Group, line 11-15)

Donna also described the importance of her student's gaining critical thinking skill, as well as, problem-solving and self-confidence in all areas of life – inside and outside of the classroom. These three teachers know the importance of learning is more than just preparing for a test. Rose (2009) reminds us, "...Standardized measures can limit the development of competences by driving curricula toward the narrow demands of test preparation instead of allowing teachers to immerse students in complex problem solving and rich use of language" (p. 103). These teachers do not let standardization and testing dominate everything in their classroom or limit their students' learning. As Donna said, "I think that we just become better teachers whenever we just stop reading from the lesson plan or following a guide and we just really dive in and just try to teach them what they desire to learn" (Individual Interview, line 75-78). When teachers are given some freedom in their classroom, they are better able to meet the needs of all of their students.

As a teacher, I know that there are standards that we are held accountable for teaching our students. I understand the importance of these standards to ensure that all students receive a fair education. I also know that many things are just as vital; things that we teach our students that are not listed in any standard or taught in any preservice teacher program. Part of being that great teacher is finding a balance between the two in the classroom. Teachers have to be willing to step outside of the formalized lesson plan and meet the needs of their individual students whatever they may be. We must ensure that the standards are met, but we must also push the critical thinking skills, or the life skills that the students in our classrooms desire and need to better themselves. Learning and education do not stop at the end of a lesson plan; it is much more profound and broader. Good teachers who stay the course realize and embrace this

concept.

After discussing the prior three concepts that I found during my study, I began to ponder how all three of these ideals may be related to a more complicated finding and if I were missing something bigger. All three of the teachers definitely exude a passion for teaching that is evident in spite of the oppressive environment that surrounds much of education today. But these teachers keep their love and passion for teaching even with all of the negative in education. I also feel that there is a sense of fear found in the stories of these teachers. A fear that the work that they are so passionately pursuing may not be heard by all. Also, a fear that they may not make the impact that they desire in the classroom with their students and learning. These teachers do have a fear associated with teaching but they hold to each other. They lean on each other and show courage and resilience in spite of it all.

What Can We Learn

In regards to my second research question, what can we learn about hope and hopelessness from the teachers who choose to stay in the classroom, two themes emerged from the stories that were told. The two central themes that arose were the importance of the bigger picture and impact of the stress related to teaching.

The Bigger Picture

The concepts of remaining positive and focusing on the bigger picture was discussed on several occasions, especially during the focus group session. Here is what Donna had to say about being positive.

I think that if we could change some positivity, some constructive, effective, optimistic teachers, I think that if we could bring some cheerfulness back into the classroom that we would strengthen our profession. I think that it would build morale. I think that it starts

with us [the teachers]. I think our conversations, our attitudes, our persona would be the key in our success because I did write about – I know everybody’s personality is not that of a cheerleader, but what if it was? What if we all accepted change? What if we put our frustrations aside? What if we didn’t always complain? (Individual Interview, line 146-155)

Donna brought up some very valid points in her conversation that really had the group thinking. It made me start to think, what would happen if teachers became more like cheerleaders? I believe that Donna is on to something. Change does begin with teachers. Paige added to this discussion by saying, “Everybody is looking to teachers for our opinion and how we feel about education. So ultimately, how we display that, show that to others, is gonna be how the public views what’s going on up here at school” (Focus Group, line 39-42). The teachers that participated in this study are ready to be the change agents. From this discussion on the importance of being positive, I found glimpses of the hope my research was seeking to uncover in elementary school teachers.

The discussion of being positive went beyond teachers being more optimistic and moved to include being more favorable in the interactions that teachers have with parents and with coworkers. Paige shared that how she felt about the importance of positive relations with coworkers.

I feel like it’s important for us to just still have that – have a positive, optimistic attitude about education and not go into every meeting and every agenda with a sour outlook. We need to just really try to stay positive. Because, I mean, I do think that we’re the driving force. (Focus Group, line 34-38)

Ruth then carried the conversation on remaining positive to include parents by sharing the

following:

And what you were saying earlier about the parents: sending out positive reinforcements or positive notes or whatever – we’ve got our collaboration down with teachers...But still working on collaborating with parents: bringing them in more. And then maybe they’ll see the value more. (Focus Group, line 52-59)

The participants were acutely aware of the overabundance of negativity surrounding education, but they didn’t let this get them down. Yes, they acknowledged the negativity but quickly moved to what they could do about it. Again, visions of hope came to me as I listened to this conversation take place. The teachers were not complacent in the way education and teaching are being portrayed and wanted to do their part in making it better.

As a teacher who tries to promote positivity at school, I know how easy it is to fall into the trap of negativity that many teachers portray. Frankl (2006) ponders a question that is very relevant to the lives of teachers, how is it possible that these teachers can say yes inspite of all the negative. Frankl (2006) ends his book *Man’s Search for Meaning* with the following quote, “For the world is in a bad state, but everything will become still worse unless each of us does his best” (p. 154). These teachers are doing their best despite it all. They understand what will happen if they give up and do not push on for a better future. Chompsky (2017) states, “We have two choices. We can be pessimistic, give up, and help ensure that the worst will happen. Or, we can be optimistic, grasp the opportunities that surely exist, and maybe help make the world a better place” (p. 196). It seems that the negative is always louder and brighter than all the positive in schools. There are so many teachers out there who genuinely want to make the public perception of education brighter. I was so encouraged by the comments and stories of the teachers that I studied. These are the teachers who need to be highlighted on the news to tell

their good stories of teaching and learning.

Stress

The second theme that emerged from the stories of the teachers was the stress associated with teaching. This appeared first in the individual interviews when I asked the participants to describe their worst day as a teacher and what they would like to change about teaching. Paige and Ruth both said that their worst day as a teacher had nothing to do with the students but with the extras associated with teaching. Paige joked and said that she was going to get a t-shirt that said “#onemorething” when talking about the extras in teaching. What I found most interesting about the theme of the stress as it related to teaching is how the participants acknowledged the extras but also noted that this was part of the job they agreed to do. Ruth responded with the following:

I know we hear all the time about how we have all this added pressure and all this extra. And I understand that that’s a reality. That we do have those things. But I also feel that that’s what I signed up for. I mean when I first started teaching, and maybe a few years after, I am used to having to do all this data and having to keep up with this stuff. And so I just – I really try not to feed into that. Into the negativity. Because I just feel like that’s a part of what I’m doing and there’s a purpose to what I’m doing. (Individual Interview, line 115-121).

This related directly to teacher resilience characteristics that all three of the participants exhibited. They are able to concentrate on the positive to overcome the challenges that they face in teaching. Gu and Day (2007) states, “These internal values and motivation, fueled their capacity to exercise emotional strength and professional competence and subsequently provided them with the resilience which enabled them to meet the challenges” (p. 1311). Donna, Paige,

and Ruth remain positive in spite of the challenges that they face on a daily basis as an elementary school teacher. Yes, teaching is a stressful profession but each participant loves what they do.

Stress has definitely impacted me as a teacher. Teaching is one of the most critical jobs in the world, so naturally, there is going to be stress associated with it. I do feel like many of the accountability practices that have been put in place recently have had a negative impact on the stress level of educators. I also think that teachers must not let the stress of the job weigh them down and must overcome the challenges that they face. I definitely had those bad days where I allow the stress of the day interrupt my classroom and have an impact on my teaching and my students. Stress is a part of my job of teaching because I am dealing with the lives of my students and that is something that I do not take very lightly. Good teachers have resilience and strategies needed to deal with the stress and not to let it interfere in their classroom.

Conclusions

“We teach who we are in times of darkness as well as light” (Palmer, 2007, p. 2).

Parker Palmer’s book *The Courage to Teach* was introduced to me early in the Curriculum Studies program at Georgia Southern and is a book that has come to mind several times throughout my research process. Palmer also states, “Teaching holds a mirror to the soul” in his book (2007, p. 3). The teachers that participated in my study showed who they are and what they believe in through their teaching and interactions with others. This process allowed the participants to answer many of the questions that Palmer suggests that allowed them to explore their inner being to become better teachers. This study required courage on the part of the participants, to be honest with themselves and with me as they told their stories. The passion

that the participants have for teaching became apparent through the telling of the stories that touched their hearts and inner beings. I also feel that I am a much better educator and teacher after completing my courses at Georgia Southern University and conducting this study. I was forced to step out of my comfort zone and face many of my fears as I looked deeply into my life as a teacher. It was not easy for me to take on a critical stance as I looked for themes and patterns from my study. I had to take the time and force myself to look beyond the obvious and to see if there were deeper connections that needed to be made from the stories that I heard. I feel that I am more connected to myself and in return am a much better teacher because I feel more connected to teaching.

Palmer (2007) states, “Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (p. 10). This study allowed the stories of elementary school teachers to be told to highlight the identity and integrity of the participants. These are things that cannot be documented through lessons but can be shown through the stories that the teachers told. The teachers who participated in this study are deeply engaged in their profession and with their students. They take the extra time to make the connections with their students and with the content that they are teaching. This is what makes them such good teachers and promoters of critical hope in education.

Behind their fearful silence, our students want to find their voice, speak their voices, have their voices heard. A good teacher is one who can listen to those voices even before they are spoken – so that someday they can speak with truth and confidence. (p. 47)

The quote directly relates to the teachers that I interviewed because it was apparent that the teachers took the time to make the space needed for their students to have their own voice. They are aware of their students and their needs and pay attention to those needs in the classroom and

outside of the classroom. The teachers in this study are not hiding behind a lesson or teaching strategy – they are addressing their personal fears as well as their students fears in their everyday teaching in the classroom.

Critical Hope in the Stories of Teachers

A vital component of this research was the notion of critical hope and creating hope in the stories of elementary school teachers. The hope that I was searching for was not a naïve hope, but a critical hope based on the works of Paulo Freire (1998) and Erich Fromm (2010). I desired to find this hope in the stories that were told by teachers in a time of perceived hopelessness in education in the United States. I am proud to say that the hope that I searched for was most evident in the educational lives of the teachers I studied. The teachers in this study realized that they are in a critical place to create change and understand the importance of not being complacent, but in making a conscious effort to create change. The teachers that I interviewed are using the “limit-situations” that are coming their way as opportunities to create change to make a difference. The teachers in this study are actively fighting against injustices and they dream of the possibilities for themselves and the students that they teach. I do not feel that the critical hope that they possess fits nicely into one the of previously defined forms of hope, but that it is much more complicated and has components of several kinds of hope.

I definitely found components of West’s tragicomic hope. These teachers are faced on a daily basis with the public perception of education, but still push on. They seek “to preserve hope even while staring in the face of hate and hypocrisy” (West, 2004, p. 16). Teachers have a tough job meeting the needs of all their students inside of the classroom and outside, as well as, meeting the demands of administration and parents, yet they push on. They understand that the future is what they make of it and do their part to keep pushing for change.

I also found parts of Henry Giroux's educated hope in the stories that were told. Giroux's (2006) educated hope is a "language of resistance and possibility" that educators must use to create change. This language was apparent during the focus group session with the participants. The participants expressed the notion that evolution starts with them and they were ready to lead. The participants, especially Donna, dare to take a stand for their students and to allow their students the space that is needed for them to better themselves in all aspects of education and life in general.

Radical hope based on the works of Lear (2006) was the final component of hope that I found throughout the stories of the participants. Radical hope is based on "hope without an imagined end, hope with an openness to the future and the unimaginable nature of the unfolding of events to come (Edgoose, 2009, p. 114). The teachers that participated in this study have no way of knowing the future, and even if it seems bleak, they still push for a better future for all of their students.

Based on this study, I would define the critical hope that teachers possess with components of Freire, Fromm, West, Giroux and Lear's definitions and views of critical hope. The critical hope that I found in the teachers that I interviewed is a messy version of critical hope. These teachers foster critical hope for many different aspects of education and their students. They have hope for their future of education in general, hope for a better future for their students, hope for a better working environment for teachers, and hope for the learning that takes place in their classroom. Critical hope is evident in their stories through their love for their students, their love for learning, and their understanding of the "bigger picture" in their students' education and lives.

Returning back to Garlen's (2014) problematic view of hope, I believe that my study

showed the power of critical hope in education and teaching. Without critical hope that questions the way things are in education and teaching, we will never change. Critical hope is influential in creating change in education and teaching. The teachers that I interviewed are not ignoring the present in their display of critical hope. It is because of the present conditions of education and teaching that these teachers have critical hope in the future of their students and the state of education. The teachers in this study are “shatter(ing) the rose-colored glass that separates us from the unbearable and live in the difficult now” (Garlen, 2014, p. 150). They were very honest in their response to the questions during the interview and focus group sessions and are addressing the challenges that they are facing head-on. They are not hiding from discourse but are ready to take a stand and make a difference in the lives of the students that they teach and in education.

Potential Limitations

One potential limitation of this study is that I taught at the school site selected and have a personal relationship with all of the participants because of this. As the researcher, I do not feel that this interfered with the research process. I was sure to make extra precautions to ensure that I did not bring in any personal bias. I actually feel as though the relationships that I had with the participants aided the participants to talk more freely in their interviews and focus group session.

A second limitation is that I only had three participants in my study all from the same school site. It is possible that if I had included more participants or moved to a different site, that the research findings would be different. I chose only to have three participants so that I could spend more time with each participant to have conversations and include on-site observations as well.

A final limitation of this study is that I only conducted one interview and one focus group

session with the participants. I believe that adding additional sessions would add to the finding of this study by providing more stories of teachers.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study adds to the current research on the importance of hope in the stories of elementary school teachers. The focus of the study was to tell the stories of elementary school teachers who have remained in the classroom. The study included three participants from one school site. Based on the finding of this study, the following recommendations are made regarding future research in the area.

The first suggestion for future research is to expand this study to include more sites. There was only one school site in this study. It was an elementary school in rural South Georgia. It would be beneficial to expand this study to include more sites in different locations.

The second suggestion is to include more of a variety of teachers. This study focused only on elementary school teachers. I would suggest that the study is expanded to include middle and high school teachers as well.

The final suggestion is that the research on hope and education needs to be expanded through additional narrative studies looking into hope in the stories of teachers. The positive stories of teachers need to be at the forefront of current research in education and teachers. Telling the stories of these teachers who possess critical hope is a way for this to be done.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letters

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs Institutional Review Board (IRB)		
Phone: 912-478-5465		Veazey Hall 3000
Fax: 912-478-0719	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	PO Box 8005 Statesboro, GA 30460

To: Beasley, Allison; Lake, Robert

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs

Initial Approval Date: 7/19/2017

Expiration Date: 6/30/2018

Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research –
Expedited Process

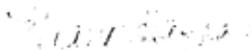
After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H17420** and titled **“We Shall Not be Moved: Finding Hope in the Stories of Elementary School Teachers in Rural Georgia”** it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable. You are authorized to enroll up to a maximum of 3 subjects.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research. Description: The purpose of this study is to examine teacher stories and use these descriptions to generate meanings about teaching in the K-12 school.

Please Note: The Confidentiality agreement is between Allison Beasley and Verbal Ink. It is not an agreement between Georgia Southern University and Verbal Ink.

If at the end of this approval period there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,



Eleanor Haynes
Compliance Officer

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs		
Institutional Review Board (IRB)		
Phone: 912-478-5465		Veazey Hall 3000
		PO Box 8005
Fax: 912-478-0719	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	Statesboro, GA 30460-8005

To: Beasley, Allison; Lake, Robert

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees (IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Date: 10/16/2017

Expiration Date: 6/30/2018

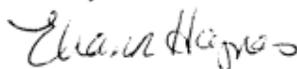
Subject: Status of Research Study Modification Request – Amendment # 1

After a review of your Research Study Modification Request on research project numbered **H17420** and titled "**We Shall Not be Moved: Finding Hope in the Stories of Elementary School Teachers in Rural Georgia**" your request for modification appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your modification request. Description: Change the participant requirement of 10 years teaching experience to 7 years teaching experience.

The expiration date of your original application approval remains in effect. If additional time beyond your expiration date is required to complete your data collection and analysis and there have been no further changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period. If your project will require approval beyond 36 months from the initial approval date, a new submission and review will be required. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, another change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary; you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to provide the final information to allow your file to be closed.

Sincerely,



Eleanor Haynes
Compliance Officer

Appendix B: Confidentiality Agreement with Verbal Inc.

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Date:

“Verbal Ink”: Ubiquis Reporting Inc. dba Verbal Ink

“Client”:

This Confidentiality Agreement (“**Agreement**”) is entered into by and between Client and Verbal Ink as of the above date in connection with discussions between the parties with respect to Verbal Ink performing transcription services for Client (“**Services**”). Whereas Client intends to provide Verbal Ink with certain confidential and proprietary information regarding Client and/or its business for transcription purposes and Verbal Ink intends to maintain the confidentiality of such information, now, therefore, in consideration of the disclosure of such information, and other good and valuable consideration, the parties agree as follows:

1. The parties acknowledge that related to any Services provided by Verbal Ink to Client, Client may make available to Verbal Ink certain information and materials: (i) in writing, by email, by audio tape or other tangible electronic storage medium clearly marked and identified by Client as “Confidential” or “Proprietary” or (ii) that, by the nature of the information and circumstances surrounding their disclosure ought to, in good faith, be treated as proprietary and/or confidential (hereafter referred to as “**Confidential Information**”). Excluded from Confidential Information are: (i) information which is known to Verbal Ink prior to entering into this Agreement, (ii) information which becomes known to Verbal Ink from a third party who is not subject to a confidentiality agreement with Client, (iii) information which is required to be disclosed as a matter of law, and (iv) information which is generally known to the public.

2. Verbal Ink acknowledges that all Confidential Information furnished to it is considered proprietary and is a matter of strict confidentiality. Verbal Ink further acknowledges that the unauthorized use or disclosure of any Confidential Information may cause irreparable harm to Client. Accordingly, Verbal Ink agrees that Client will be entitled to seek equitable relief including injunctive relief and specific performance, in addition to all other remedies available at law or in equity for any breach of this Agreement. In the event of any dispute under this Agreement, each party and its managers’, officers’, directors’, executives’, owners’, members’, shareholders’, employees’, affiliates’, agents’, advisors’, representatives’, and, in the case of Verbal Ink, its transcriptionists, (“**Representatives**”) monetary liability to the other party and its Representatives for all claims related to this Agreement will be limited to direct and proven damages. Neither party (nor its Representatives) will be liable for or entitled to any indirect, incidental, reliance, special, punitive, exemplary or consequential damages arising out of its performance or non-performance under this Agreement, whether or not they had been advised of the possibility of such damages. In the event of any dispute related to this Agreement, each party (and its Representatives) shall pay its own attorneys’ fees and other litigation costs.

3. Verbal Ink agrees that, except to its Representatives to the extent necessary to permit them to assist in the performance of the Services, it will not distribute, disclose or convey to third parties any of Client’s Confidential Information without Client’s prior written consent. All transcriptionists working with Verbal Ink are subject to and must pass criminal background checks before starting work with Verbal Ink. Confidential Information shall not be distributed, disclosed or conveyed to any Representative unless such Representative is advised of this Agreement and agrees to be subject to the terms hereof or a similar agreement.

4. Verbal Ink agrees that all Confidential Information received from Client shall at all times remain the sole property of Client and upon completion of the Services shall be either: (i) returned to Client, if Client has made such prior written request, or (ii) deleted from Verbal Ink’s files such destruction certified to the client. Notwithstanding the immediately preceding sentence, Verbal Ink may (but shall not be obligated to) retain one copy of Confidential Information in its files for legal or regulatory requirements only (subject to the confidentiality requirements hereof). No rights or licenses, express or implied, are granted by Client to

Verbal Ink under any patents, copyrights, trademarks, service marks, or trade secrets owned by Client as a result of, or related to, this Agreement.

5. This Agreement is effective upon the date first written above. This Agreement shall remain in full force and effect for three (3) years from the above date.

6. This Agreement is binding on the parties and their successors and assigns, and its provisions may only be waived by written agreement of the parties.

7. This is a binding agreement that contains all of the agreements and understandings of the parties and any amendments to this Agreement must be in writing. This Agreement and any claim related directly or indirectly to this Agreement shall be governed and construed in accordance with the laws of the State of California (without giving regard to the conflicts of law provisions thereof). No such claim shall be commenced, prosecuted or continued in any forum other than the courts of the State of California located in the City and County of Los Angeles or in the United States District Court for the Central District of California, and each of the parties hereby submits to the jurisdiction of such courts. Each of the parties hereby waives on behalf of itself and its Representatives, successors and assigns any and all right to argue that the choice of forum provision is or has become unreasonable in any legal proceeding. This Agreement may be executed in counterparts by facsimile.

READ, AGREED AND ACCEPTED:

By: _____

Its: _____

Ubiquis Reporting Inc. dba Verbal Ink

By: _____

Its:

Appendix C: A 15-Point Checklist of Criteria for Good Thematic Analysis

Process	No.	Criteria
Transcription	1	The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcriptions have been checked against the tapes for ‘accuracy.’
Coding	2	Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.
	3	Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead, the coding process has been through, inclusive and comprehensive.
	4	All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collected.
	5	Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original dataset.
	6	Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.
Analysis	7	Data have been analyzed – interpreted, made sense of – rather than just paraphrased or described.
	8	Analysis and data match each other – the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.
	9	Analysis tells a convincing and well-organized story about the data and topic.
	10	A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.
Overall	11	Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or give it a once-over-lightly.
Written	12	The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are

Report		clearly explained.
	13	There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done – i.e., described method and reported analysis are consistent.
	14	The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.
	15	The researcher is positioned as active in the research process; themes do not just ‘emerge.’