Thriving with Social Purpose: A Phenomenological Investigation of Resilience and the Role of Life Meaning in a Teacher’s Decision to Remain in the Teaching Profession

by

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the
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of
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Date: ______________________ Spring Semester 2016
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA
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Dedication

This is dedicated to my parents, Ceasar and Mary Verdelli, for their unwavering love, support, and faith that I would someday accomplish this dream. They taught me the value of hard work, commitment, and that education is a precious gift to be cherished. I know they are smiling down on me.
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Abstract

THRIVING WITH SOCIAL PURPOSE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF RESILIENCE AND THE ROLE OF LIFE MEANING IN A TEACHER’S DECISION TO REMAIN IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION

Susan V. Groundwater, Ph.D.
George Mason University, 2016
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Extant research has focused on why teachers leave the profession, but little has been done to address the reasons teachers remain or how we can help them to develop and maintain resilience. At the same time, attrition and retirement have left more mid-career teachers filling classrooms and the research on career stages has demonstrated that teachers at mid-career may be most susceptible to the negative feelings often associated with plateauing. Exploring the factors that help teachers to persevere in the face of adversity may lead to an understanding of the ways we can help them to navigate challenges as well as the necessity of building resilience alongside expectations for accountability and student achievement. This study sought to understand the role that resilience plays in three mid-career teacher’s decision to remain in the teaching profession through the conceptual lens of Ford’s (1992) Motivational Systems Theory and Ford and Smith’s (n.d.) recent theoretical elaborations that include Thriving with
Social Purpose (TSP) and TSP’s Theory of Life Meaning. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the study participants and analyzed using a phenomenological method of data analysis. The findings reveal that resilience appears to be facilitated by an active approach goal orientation, personal optimism, mindful tenacity, emotional wisdom, and strong social purpose goals that lead to life meaning. The findings of this study have implications for teacher education programs that may consider developing programs to support resilience and district policy makers to offer mentoring programs and training directed toward the well-being of staff.
Chapter One

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of three mid-career teachers to gain insight into the role that resilience may play in a teacher’s decision to remain in the profession, despite sometimes challenging contexts. Extant research has shed light on why educators leave the teaching profession, but little research has been done that addresses either the reasons teachers remain (Sell, 2013), or how we can help teachers to develop and maintain resilience (Luthar & Brown, 2007). At the same time, research on the career stages of teachers has demonstrated that teachers at the mid-career point may be most susceptible to negative feelings that are often associated with plateauing, a term used to describe the frustration and disillusionment some teachers experience during their time in the classroom (Farrell, 2014).

A great deal of public attention and research in the past several decades has been directed at the challenges of the teaching profession. Alexander (2008) argued that from this research the following dicta have emerged: teaching is challenging; the challenges that teachers face come from both external and internal sources; that persons with particular personality characteristics are drawn to the profession; and that teachers experience varying degrees of success and personal fulfillment during their careers (p. 484). Yet this acknowledgement of the trials faced by educators and the idea of the role
of personal motivation, persistence, and resilience is nothing new. More than a century ago, James (1899/2014) wrote:

The worst thing that can happen to a good teacher is to get a bad conscience about her profession because she feels herself hopeless as a psychologist. Our teachers are overworked already. Everyone who adds a jot or a little tittle of unnecessary weight to their burden is a foe of education.

Even at that time, scholars in the field acknowledged the idea that educating children is a demanding and challenging profession with a teacher’s sense of success or failure an important antecedent.

Teaching today, however, brings challenges that scholars such as James probably never envisioned. In recent decades, the emergence of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and the subsequent introduction of accountability through high-stakes testing have changed the substance of a teacher’s work. This heightened focus on teacher accountability and student performance has been cited as contributing to diminishing teacher autonomy and to challenging a teacher’s professional stance (Sachs, 2000).

Furthermore, today’s diverse teaching context with its growing racial and socioeconomic divisions has made teaching more demanding than ever (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Within this context, to be an effective teacher who continually strives for optimal student outcomes for all learners, and to do so over time, requires motivation and a certain degree of resilience.

**Definitions of Motivation**
Arcuria (2011) argued that existing research has shown a shifting paradigm in the field of education that now defines a successful teaching career as one which is an ongoing process requiring the motivation to continually acquire new skills. But, motivation is an imprecise construct that lacks a single definition, in part because it is difficult to observe directly (Müller, Alliata, & Benninghoff, 2009). Some definitions are vague, leaving interpretation open-ended. Gredler (2001) broadly defined motivation simply as an attribute that moves us to do or not to do something. Some definitions, however, provide a greater level of detail. For instance, Reeve (1996) suggested that “motivation originates from a variety of sources (needs, cognitions, and emotions), and that these internal processes energize direct behavior in multiple ways such as starting, sustaining, intensifying, focusing, and stopping it” (p. 2). Pintrich and Schunk (2002) defined motivation as a process that is inferred based on behaviors rather than directly observed, involves goals, requires activity, and is instigated and sustained. Similarly, Graham and Weiner (2012) defined motivation as “the study of why individual organisms behave as they do: what gets their behavior started, and what directs, energizes, sustains, and eventually terminates action” (p. 367).

Based on these definitions, motivation appears to be a process in which human behavior is activated, reinforced, and sustained toward the achievement of a particular objective. Ryan and Deci’s (2000) definition of motivation supports this process-oriented concept: “To be motivated means to be moved to do something. A person who feels no impetus or inspiration to act is thus characterized as unmotivated, whereas someone who is energized or activated toward an end is considered motivated” (p. 54). In addition to a
lack of consensus on a precise definition of motivation in the general psychology literature, research on teacher motivation has been equally difficult to conceptualize because of the complexity of teachers’ responsibilities and the sophisticated school environment (Kocabas, 2009). Similar challenges have been found in defining and conceptualizing resilience.

**Definitions of Resilience**

The research on resilience, like motivation, has employed a wide range of definitions. The idea of resilience can be found in the disciplines of psychiatry and developmental psychology when researchers sought to understand the traits that enabled some children to thrive despite adverse situations (Gu & Day, 2007). According to Henderson and Milstein (2003), a change occurred in the 1980s when the concept of resilience focused more on positive qualities and strengths. Over the next two decades there was yet another shift to investigating the underlying protective processes and how such factors might contribute to positive outcomes (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000).

More recently, Mansfield, Beltman, Price, and McConney (2012) have described resilience in teachers as a multi-faceted process that includes interacting with events, an ability or capacity to overcome challenges, and a trait or a quality with an emphasis on both individual and contextual factors.

Resilience is not innate, but rather is developmental and dynamic, suggesting the positive adaptation and development of an individual faced with challenging circumstances (Luthar et al., 2000). According to Gu and Day (2007), it is a product of both personal and professional dispositions that encompass a sense of purpose, involves
meaningful action, and is socially constructed based on the context. This means that there are personal, professional, and situational factors that interact, and suggests that a person may demonstrate resilience in one situation, but not in another. Despite the difficulty of defining and conceptualizing both motivation and resilience, the two constructs do share some common elements.

**Distinguishing Characteristics of Resilience and Motivation**

While motivation and resilience share characteristics that include being self-determined, self-efficacious, a willingness to explore alternative paths, and the presence of a support system (Resnick, 2011), these constructs also differ in some important ways. Based on the definitions of motivation and resilience in this chapter, the capacity to be motivated and/or resilient is something that everyone possess, but how individual’s response to adverse or challenging situations varies. In a study that sought to understand employee career motivation and commitment and its relationship to resilience, King (1999) found that self-identity precedes self-insight which in turn precedes career resilience. This suggests that all individuals have the innate ability to return to a balanced state and to transform change, and grow (Werner & Smith, 1982).

Another important distinction between motivation and resilience is that motivation is a process that initiates, guides, and maintains goal-oriented behavior (Nevid, 2013). According to Nevid, motives are the "whys" of behavior. These are the needs or wants that direct behavior and provide explanations for what we do. It is not something that is observed, but rather is inferred. Resilience, on the other hand, is an outcome of the process of dealing with adversity or challenges (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).
Moreover, Masten (2014) asserts that it is not a trait that people either have or do not have, but rather it involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that a person can develop. However, in order to be resilient in the face of adversity, an individual must be motivated to do so (Resnick, 2011). This means that motivation may be present independent of resilience, but resilience depends on being motivated.

**Today’s Teaching Landscape**

The composition of today’s classroom is changing rapidly. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2014), the number of prekindergarten through 12th grade White students in U.S. public schools decreased by just over three million and Black students by little more than a half million, while Hispanic enrollment increased by nearly four million students during this same period. Projections through 2023 include a continual decline in White and Black student enrollment, while the enrollments of Hispanics and Asians/Pacific Islanders are expected to increase (NCES, 2014). Also changing are the numbers of school-age children living in poverty. In 2012, children living in poverty accounted for 21 percent of U.S. students; an increase of four percent since 1990 (NCES, 2014). Based on this data, the racial and socioeconomic gaps that already exist may grow even wider.

**Teacher quality.** It has been well documented that the quality of the educators in our schools has a profound effect on the quality of the education that our children receive and is therefore crucial to student academic achievement (Hildebrandt & Eom, 2011). This is particularly true for low-performing, minority students (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007). In a study that focused on high school students, Clotfelter et al. (2007)
found that having top quality teachers may even compensate for racial and socioeconomic disadvantages. In a study of public high school students in Chicago, Aaronson, Barrow and Sander (2007) found that based on students’ test scores, higher quality teachers had the greatest impact on African American students. Gu and Day (2007) found that the effectiveness of the 300 teachers they studied over a four-year period, measured by student improvement through baseline test results at the beginning of the year and national curriculum results at the end of the year, and through semi-structure interviews with the teachers, school leaders, and pupils, was closely linked to the relative strength of their resilience. Together, these findings suggest that developing and retaining high-quality teachers is critical to providing an equitable education for all children.

An essential question to consider, however, is how we define quality. Despite sustained discussion throughout the history of education, consensus on a definition has been elusive (Goodwin, 2008). Historically, the intellectual ability of a teacher dominated quality profile discussions. Before teacher preparation normal schools transitioned to colleges and universities, the prevailing public perception was that these preparatory institutions and the teachers they produced were shaped “by the intellectual limitations then commonly believed to be inherent in the female sex” (Lagemann, 2000, p. 6). Even though intellectual ability was called into question, these women were seen as possessing qualities such as altruism or idealism which compensated for the deficit. This perception of intellectual inferiority of both teachers and the field of education helped to usher in the view that standardized test scores are an indicator of quality (Zumwalt & Craig, 2008).
Just three decades ago, the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986) issued *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*. This report was in response to the 1983 landmark report, *A Nation at Risk*, by the National Commission on Excellence in Education that warned of the “rising tide of mediocrity” in educational performance that has the potential to put America’s economic future at risk. Since then, education reform policy has brought to the forefront the necessity for teachers to continue to evolve professionally throughout their careers by holding those who educate our children responsible for the quality of education they deliver (Darling-Hammond, 2010). As a result, NCLB mandated that current teachers must meet the requirements of “highly qualified” and that schools could only hire new teachers who met these criteria (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). This legislation defined highly qualified in terms of the background characteristics including a minimum of a bachelor’s degree, state certification or licensure, and proven subject-area competence. The intent was to increase the likelihood that effective teachers were in a position to promote student learning. Yet, there is no evidence that the criteria established by NCLB are necessarily indicators of teacher quality.

Teachers differ greatly in their impact on student learning and there is little consensus on which teacher characteristics account for quality (Palardy & Rumberger, 2008). Some research has focused on background characteristics such as experience and credentials (Darling-Hammond, Berry, & Thoreson, 2001); while others have argued that teacher efficacy (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998) and teaching practices or processes (Brophy & Good, 1986) are critical factors. According to Palardy and
Rumberger, there is little scientific evidence that background characteristics account for teacher quality, but that attitudes and practices may be alterable through mentoring and continued learning. This may be particularly true in today’s high stakes teaching environments.

As a result of the changing education climate, a teaching career can no longer be seen as a continuum that simply comes along with years of experience and rests upon the status quo. It should be viewed more as a “learning trajectory” where opportunities are created from the constant acquisition of new sets of skills and attitudes (Green Wolf, & Leney, 1999). According to Bronkhorst, Meijer, Koster, and Vermunt (2011):

What students learn is directly related to what and how teachers teach; and what and how teachers teach depends on the knowledge, skills, and commitments they bring to their teaching and the opportunities they have to continue learning in and from their practice. (p. 1120)

As a result, education and training should not be viewed as a stage in one’s life, undertaken before entering the workplace, but rather as something which is a lifelong enterprise.

**Changing workforce.** Keeping experienced teachers in the workforce and continuing to improve their pedagogical practice is important because the pool of mid-career teachers is growing. Based on the results of a five-year longitudinal study, The National Center for Education Statistics (2015) reports a 17 percent attrition rate for teachers who began their careers in 2006. Furthermore, according to the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (2011), nearly 50 percent of the nation’s
teachers and principals are Baby Boomers and therefore predicts that the teaching profession could lose 50 percent of its workforce to retirement within the decade. Together, these findings suggest a growing number of mid-career teachers. This is important because, according to Day (2012), teachers with eight to 15 years of service begin to experience a detachment and loss of motivation. Day contends that this loss of motivation and stagnation often continues throughout the teacher’s career. It can therefore be speculated that teachers who are motivated are more likely to have a positive impact on student achievement. In addition to benefiting students, understanding teacher motivation could have the potential to stem the tide of teacher attrition.

In a study that explored trends in education over two decades (1987-1988 through 2007-2008), Ingersoll and Merrill (2010) sought to analyze how the teaching workforce has been transformed. They identified seven trends, four of which have particular relevance here:

- **Ballooning**: student enrollment has risen 19 percent; the number of teachers has increased 48 percent (Ingersoll and Merrill, 2010).
- **Graying**: the teaching force has gotten older; retirements have increased. The modal age in 1987-1988 was 41, and by 2007-2008 it had increased to 55 (Ingersoll and Merrill, 2010).
- **Greening**: by 2008 the teacher age distribution had ballooned and become two-peaked, with large proportions of teachers at both ends of the age spectrum. In 1987–88, the modal teacher had 15 years of teaching experience. By 2007–08,
the modal teacher was a beginner in his or her first year of teaching (Ingersoll and Merrill, 2010).

- Stability: the average turnover rates have increased since the early 1990s by 28 percent (Ingersoll and Merrill, 2010).

These changes in the teaching workforce have significant implications. While more teachers are entering the workforce, a staggering number are either retiring or are not committed to the profession (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012). Turnover plays a large role in school staffing problems and teacher shortages (Ingersoll and Merrill, 2010), and costs school districts a substantial amount of money each year.

**The cost of teacher attrition.** According to the National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future (NCTAF; 2007), teacher turnover is expensive when taking into account the size of the teacher workforce and the rate of teacher turnover, costing the nation’s school districts at least $7.3 billion dollars a year. The turnover rate has grown by 50 percent over the past 15 years with the national teacher attrition rate rising to 16.8 percent, in urban schools to over 20 percent, and in some school districts, teacher dropout actually surpasses student dropout rates (NCTAF, 2007). According to NCTAF:

> Until we recognize that we have a retention problem we will continue to engage in a costly annual recruitment and hiring cycle, pouring more and more teachers into our nation’s classrooms only to lose them at a faster and faster rate. This will continue to drain our public tax dollars, it will undermine teaching quality, and it will most certainly hinder our ability to close student achievement gaps (p. 1).
Teacher attrition creates more than a financial burden; it has the potential to challenge the ability of educational institutions to produce students who are globally competitive. Additionally, while new teachers can be a source of fresh ideas and energy, for many schools, veterans will become scarce, with increasingly fewer teachers who are able to provide mentoring and leadership. Consequently, this makes it especially important that those who continue to teach also continue to evolve as professionals and instructional leaders.

The research on teacher attrition has helped to explain the reasons people leave the profession including the heavy workload, meeting the needs of a diverse student population, difficult student behavior, lack of support from leadership, and low professional status (Friedman, 2004; Kyriacou, 2001). However, little has been done to understand why teachers choose to stay, and research of this nature would provide another perspective on attrition by investigating the factors that enable some teachers to remain engaged and committed, despite challenging teaching scenarios. Research has found that teachers who exhibit the characteristics of resilience are more likely to persevere and find it easier to adapt to change (Day & Gu, 2007; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Mansfield, Beltman, Price, & McConney, 2012). This means that resilient teachers may be less inclined to leave the profession.

**Conceptual Framework**

According to Ford (1992), motivation is the organized patterning of the psychological functions that direct, energize, and regulate goal-directed activity. When the four components of human motivation – goals, capability beliefs, context beliefs, and
emotions – are amplified in mutually reinforcing patterns and functioning at the optimal level, the result is known as Thriving with Social Purpose (TSP; Ford & Smith, 2007). According to Ford and Smith, this motivation pattern represents an active approach to goal orientation informed by social purpose, or a primary concern for others. This is strengthened with personal optimism – a personal belief in the ability to make progress toward goals; mindful tenacity – the ability to persevere and find alternate pathways in the face of challenge or adversity; and emotional wisdom – the ability to align emotions in a way that facilitates goal progress (Ford & Smith). Because of its comprehensive structure, TSP is an ideal lens through which to view teacher motivation and resilience.

Motivational Systems Theory. TSP is grounded “in an integrative theory of motivation and competence development” called Motivational Systems Theory (MST; M. E. Ford, 1992, p. 155). MST is a conceptualization of the fundamental elements and organization of motivational patterns.

Beyond possible innate motivational influences, Ford and Smith (2007) argue that there is a connection between personally driven motivational factors and those that have broader social associations. According to Ford and Smith, MST represents the sets of phenomena that have traditionally informed the field of human motivation, including the selective direction of behavior patterns, the selective energization of behavior patterns, and the selective regulation of behavior patterns (p. 245). According to Ford and Smith (2007), MST defines motivation as:

“the organized patterning of four closely interrelated sets of psychological processes: personal goals, which are thoughts about desired and undesired
potential future states; capability beliefs and context beliefs (collectively known as personal agency beliefs), which include thoughts about the anticipated consequences of pursuing those goals; and emotions, which include affective states related to the possible consequences of pursuing those goals” (p. 156). These processes enable a person evaluate his or her thoughts and feelings and to make decisions about goals.

Motivational Systems Theory advances the theory of individuals as self-constructing living systems (D. H. Ford, 1987), and is based on a comprehensive theory of human behavior and development called the Living Systems Framework (LSF; D. H. Ford, 1994). According to M. E. Ford (1992), people always function as a unit in context, and therefore human motivation must be understood within the context that the behavior occurs rather than just a particular attribute or process. LFS represents three basic kinds of phenomena. First, it provides a way of thinking about specifics, such as a person’s goals, emotions, perceptions, and actions; second, it describes how these processes work together in organized patterns and the cumulative effect of these over time and throughout different contexts to produce a self-constructed personality; and finally, it describes how behavior patterns can be altered or strengthened through change processes (Ford, 1992, p. 20).

MST is the organized patterning of interrelated sets of psychological processes that include personal goals, capacity beliefs, context beliefs, and emotions (Ford & Smith, 2007).
**Personal goals.** According to Ford (1992), the two basic properties of goals are content and process. These are a person’s thoughts about desired or undesired outcomes and these thoughts direct a person to try to achieve or avoid a particular outcome. Most goal processing occurs at an unconscious level, but understanding these core personal goals can help to remove motivational and behavior barriers, which in turn can lead to self-improvement (Ford & Smith, 2007). A number of studies have discovered that goals impact career planning variables such as career maturity and adaptability (Creed, Patton, & Bartrum, 2005; Hirschi & Läge, 2007).

There are many different kinds of goals, and MST categorizes goal themes based on the Ford and Nichols Taxonomy of Human Goals. This taxonomy is a 24-category classification system based on extant motivational theory and empirical and clinical evidence about people’s thoughts and desires (M. E. Ford & Nichols, 1991). The taxonomy encompasses the full range of human goals and the goal categories directly represent goal cognitions rather than relying on context descriptors, thus making it a precise tool for understanding human motivation (Ford & Smith, 2007). As a result, it may be useful in understanding the complex system of thoughts that serve as a motivational foundation and a pathway for resilience in teachers.

**Personal agency beliefs.** One of the most important factors of fostering and sustaining motivation is the belief that what the future holds has the potential to be better than the present situation (Snyder, 1994). This requires the belief that this future is attainable, and that one has both the ability and support to attain it (Ford & Smith, 2007).
According to Ford and Smith, this concept is represented by personal agency beliefs that include both capability beliefs and context beliefs.

Ford (1992) theorizes that capability beliefs are a person’s expectation as to whether or not he/she can accomplish a particular goal. The key is that these thoughts focus on the “anticipated consequences of exercising personal knowledge and skills,” and this provides “feedforward information (expectancies) that can be used in tandem with feedback information to make judgments about whether to initiate or maintain goal-directed activity” (Ford & Smith, 2007, p. 158). Studies have shown that people who have strong capability beliefs are better prepared for and involved in their career (Creed, Patton, & Prideaux, 2006; Rogers, Creed, & Ian Glendon, 2008).

Context beliefs, on the other hand, are evaluative expectancies about whether the context within which a person works will support or hinder goal achievement (Ford, 1992). The context may include a wide range of characteristics “including the opportunity structure, the availability of necessary equipment and materials and clear guidance for their use, and the presence of a positive emotional climate” (Ford & Smith, 2007, p. 158). Hirschi (2009) found that perceived support from a social environment is crucial for success.

**Emotions.** Emotions, according to Ford (1992), are complex organized patterns consisting of three components: an *affective component* which includes the feeling of the emotion, a *physiological component* which is the supporting pattern of biological processing, and a *transactional component*, which involves a pattern of motor and communicative actions designed to facilitate goal attainment (p. 252). According to
Frijda (1988), emotions are most often evident when an event occurs that is important to an individual’s goals, intentions, or worries. Emotions such as interest or satisfaction encourage the pursuit of goal options, negative emotions such as discouragement or guilt inhibit the pursuit of goals, and other emotions such as anger, fear, or loneliness can actually help a person to deal with threats to their core goals (Ford & Smith, 2007). In this way, certain emotions may trigger resilience in an individual.

Ford and Smith (2007) posit that emotions work collaboratively with personal agency beliefs. If a person anticipates a positive outcome from pursuing a goal, emotions provide the energy to act on the intentions, but if a negative outcome is anticipated, emotions regulate energy that is situationally appropriate and can result in fight, flight, or withdrawal (Ford & Smith, 2007). A number of studies have operationalized a positive emotional disposition as one of optimism, and found that people who are optimistic are more likely to participate in career planning and exploration, and are more inclined to have specific career goals (Creed & Patton, 2002; Patton, Creed, & Muller, 2002).

**Thriving with social purpose.** The essence of optimal functioning is based on the idea of transforming motivational patterns that are only effective for short-term goals into patterns that encourage exploration and competence development, and as a result, are more effective for a broader range of goals and in a variety of contexts (Ford & Smith, 2007). Ford (1992) argues that the most effective and formidable approach to optimal functioning is through the *integrated amplification* of motivational components that includes an active approach to goals, personal optimism and mindful tenacity that influence personal agency beliefs, and emotional wisdom.
According to Fredrickson and Losada (2005), the concept of amplification refers to the development of goals, personal agency beliefs, and emotional functioning that encourages individuals to embrace challenges and new opportunities rather than to become defensive or to stagnate. This, in turn, can produce positive results such as accelerated learning, and competence development, personal empowerment, and enhanced well-being (Ford & Smith, 2007). Meaningful positive emotions can also lead to optimal functioning as well, because according to Fredrickson (2003), positive emotions can promote resilience and transform a person into a more socially integrated and capable individual. This may be particularly important to teachers as they navigate contextual challenges and the stagnation that is often associated with mid-career professionals.

**Strong leadership in personal goals.** Winell (1987) argues that strong leadership qualities in the personal goal facet of functioning are key to developing a thriving motivational pattern. There are number of qualities that are essential in order to achieve this. According to Ford and Smith (2007), this *active approach* to promoting engagement while facilitating self-improvement includes a clear understanding of core personal goals, the ability to remain focused on those goals, the willingness to explore alternatives and take risks, and the determination not to become mired in evaluative thoughts or overly influenced by external circumstances. People who view challenges and uncertainty as possibilities rather than threats are more likely to promote learning and competence development (Ford & Smith, 2007).
**Personal optimism.** Belief in your own judgments and abilities is important. In terms of capability beliefs this means developing self-trust in one’s ability to work toward personal goals, and to do so with an appropriate amount of effort (Ford & Smith, 2007). Research suggests the key is a realistic understanding of both current circumstances and possible future outcomes (Bandura, 1997). According to Ford and Smith, it is this combination of positive expectancies grounded in reality and assessments of current capabilities that support the possibility of growth that facilitates optimal functioning.

**Mindful tenacity.** Context beliefs provide the motivational bridge that connect a person’s internal psychology to the external environment to facilitate optimal functioning (Ford, 1992). Like capability beliefs, context beliefs have a positive impact when they are grounded in the reality of the environmental resources, supports, and feedback needed to progress toward a goal, and the continuous monitoring of how these conditions are being met (Ford & Smith, 2007). According to Ford and Smith, mindful tenacity emphasizes the importance of a monitoring function because persistence in less than optimal conditions includes being able to imagine alternative pathways in working toward personal goals.

**Emotional wisdom.** Emotional wisdom includes reflective understanding, emotional empathy, and emotional regulation, and depends on the circumstances of a person’s functioning and context (Takahashi & Overton, 2002). According to Frijda (1988) one of the primary functions of emotions is to energize the motivational system so there is a conscious sense of wanting to accomplish something. However, Ford and Smith
(2007) posit that in order to have a positive effect, emotions must regulate the amount and sort of energy that is transmitted to other system components, and that emotional wisdom is dependent upon the individual’s current circumstances of functioning and context. Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener (2005) found that positive emotions support an active approach to goal orientation and facilitate growth in personal optimism and social support. The concept of emotional empathy represents a socially oriented pattern of amplification that focuses on aligning personal goals with those of others (Batson, Ahmad, Lishner, & Tsang, 2002). Empathy is particularly important for promoting effective functioning that involves a person’s identity as it relates to a social system that may include family, friends, and colleagues (Ford & Smith, 2007).

Social purpose. Social purpose, according to Ford and Smith (2007), is the “activation of integrative social relationship goals” (p. 164). There are four types of integrative social relationship goals that connect people to one another as well as to the social units to which they are attached. These include belongingness, social responsibility, equity, and resource provision (Ford, 1992), and each is a manifestation of social purpose, which is widely regarded as an essential component of optimal living (Ryff & Singer, 2002). According to Ford and Smith, social purpose functions as a “meta-amplifier” as it enables people to experience life differently with implications for transformative behavior and development, while thriving without social purpose can lead to high achievement outcomes that lack meaning or produce negative consequences (pp. 164-165).
**Life meaning.** One of the important byproducts of TSP and optimal functioning is life meaning. Within the TSP framework life meaning is defined as the feeling a person gets when he or she believes that life makes sense, it has purpose, and that it is worthwhile (Ford & Smith, n.d.). According to Ford and Smith, life meaning is an effective tool for diagnosing the strength of motivation, and those who experience feelings of life meaning are more positive, hopeful, and resilient in difficult times. It includes powerful emotions, thoughts, and perceptions that affirm two principles of human functioning including organization, or the need to maintain a sense of integrity and coherence, and goal-life alignment, which is the need to experience a fit between daily activities and core personal goals (Ford & Smith, n.d.). Experiencing feelings of life meaning has a number of beneficial and potent effects. These feelings can increase awareness of personal goals that may be helpful in maintaining a sense of comfort and stability and provide a source of energy and wisdom in difficult times or when faced with tough decisions (Ford & Smith, n.d.). For these reasons, life meaning may be helpful in understanding why some teachers are resilient when faced with challenges, while others leave the profession altogether.

According to Ford and Smith (n.d.), TSP motivational patterns, including purposeful goal striving, are excellent predictors of when and where life meaning may be experienced. The more important a goal is to an individual the harder he or she will try to achieve it, and as a result, the individual will derive greater meaning from it. There are four predictors of life meaning associated with self-directed goal striving including engagement, goal progress, lasting contribution, and affirmation.
Engagement is an important predictor of life meaning because it reflects the idea that the pursuit of a goal can be meaningful even if the outcome is uncertain (Ford & Smith, n.d.). Based on this assertion, it is possible to live a meaningful life in the pursuit of goals, even if those goals are not realized or achieved. It is therefore essential that an individual have clearly defined core personal goals. In the corporate management literature, Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, and Taris (2008) posit a relationship between engagement and positive organizational behavior and suggest that organizations expect employees to be proactive, collaborate effectively, take responsibility with professional development, and be committed to high standards of performance. For this to occur, employees need to be engaged.

There are three additional predictors of life meaning associated with the pursuit self-directed goals including goal progress, lasting contributions, and affirmation (Ford & Smith, n.d.). Goal progress or positive results are important for sustaining and enhancing life meaning. Positive feedback, for example, can amplify the feeling that the goal a person may be trying to achieve is meaningful (Diener & Fujita, 1995). Life meaning is also associated with the perception of making a difference and the lasting contributions a person makes to others, the community, institutions, or to cultural and physical environments (Ford & Smith, n.d.). Finally, because the pursuit of goals occurs in a social context, personal or professional feedback from significant individuals is important for assessing progress and appreciating the importance of contributions.

The four main themes within the construct of social purpose including belongingness, altruism, equity, and social responsibility are also predictors of life
meaning (Ford & Smith, n.d.). According to Ford and Smith, relationships or social bonding is important because the greater number of authentic connections you have with people or groups the more likely it is that you will derive life meaning from those relationships (Stillman, Lambert, Fincham & Baumeister, 2011). Belongingness is also related to altruism. Individuals tend to care about people whom they are connected to and altruism generally flows from those social bonds, producing feelings of life meaning in the person who is giving, and because those feelings are powerful, life meaning motivates people to continue giving (Ford & Smith, n.d.). Life meaning can also be derived from efforts to promote fairness in the lives of people a person feels connected to and is often connected with altruistic motivation in ways that can amplify the life meaning that results from attending to those concerns (Ford & Smith, n.d.). Finally, responsibility to others is a predictor of life meaning. When responsibilities are seen as valuable, they are less burdensome and stress is manageable. According to Ford and Smith this can be especially powerful for amplifying life meaning when it is wedded together with altruism.

In summary, life meaning is connected to individual motivation. It is possible to experience greater life meaning by taking control of motivational mechanisms such goal-life alignment, and the ideals that bring coherence and comfort (Ford & Smith, n.d.). For teachers, this means having clearly defined goals, being engaged in their pedagogy and the context in which they teach, focusing on the contributions he or she can make to students, and taking time to enjoy the moments of affirmation and support.

Research Question
The contemporary teaching landscape is filled with education reforms that have increased accountability, as well as the complexity and emotional workload of teachers. In addition, attrition and retirement have changed the composition of the teaching workforce over the past several decades, leaving teachers in the middle phase of their careers filling more classrooms than those at either the beginning or ends of their professional life. Despite these changes, little is known about why some mid-career teachers are able to sustain resilience and exhibit an integrated amplification of the motivational qualities needed for persistence and success, regardless of the challenges. Based on a void in the research, this study seeks to answer the following question:

What role, if any, does resilience play in a mid-career teacher’s decision to remain in the teaching profession?

**Significance.** With the changing face of the teaching profession coupled with the high stakes testing and value-added evaluation currently driving our education system, it is increasingly important to understand how to keep good teachers in the profession. Despite our understanding of motivation and resilience, there is limited understanding of how teachers at the mid-career point view resilience. The purpose of this study is therefore to make a contribution to the literature on teacher motivation and resilience by providing the insights of three mid-career teachers through the conceptual lens of Ford’s (1992) Motivational Systems Theory and Ford and Smith’s (n.d.) recent theoretical elaborations that include Thriving with Social Purpose (TSP) and TSP’s Theory of Life Meaning.
Chapter Two

The purpose of this study was to understand the role that resilience plays in a teacher’s decision to remain in the teaching profession through the conceptual lens of Ford’s (1992) Motivational Systems Theory and Ford and Smith’s (n.d.) recent theoretical elaborations that include Thriving with Social Purpose (TSP) and TSP’s Theory of Life Meaning.

There are certain truths regarding teaching that would likely resonate with anyone who has been a part of that profession, including the understanding that it is challenging (Alexander, 2008). These challenges come from both internal and external sources and the widely accepted notion that many teachers are drawn to the profession for altruistic reasons (Alexander, Chant, & Cox, 1994; Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000; Richardson & Watt, 2006). In addition, teachers experience varying degrees of motivation and resilience in the face of arduous demands. In their seminal review, Brookhart and Freeman (1992) concluded that the individuals primarily choose teaching for altruistic, service-oriented, intrinsic motivation reasons. Watt and Richardson (2007) noted that over the past several decades there has been increasing interest in what inspires people to choose a career in education. In 2005, The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD; 2005) reported on studies throughout Europe and Canada that indicated a desire to work with children, the potential for intellectual fulfillment, and the
desire to make a social contribution as the most common reasons for choosing teaching. These same desires have also been identified in studies conducted in the United States (Watt & Richardson, 2007). Despite the attention given to why people choose teaching, little empirical research has been done to explore the role of resilience in mid-career teachers’ abilities to adjust to adverse situations, and what motivates them to persevere in the face of that adversity.

According to Watt and Richardson (2007), some early research on teacher motivation was conducted in Great Britain during the Depression and at the end of World War II when the supply of teachers was desperately low. As Butler (2014) noted, until recently, there has been little systematic, theory-driven research that has focused solely on teachers. A number of scholars have cited research on teacher motivation to be an understudied, yet very important issue (Butler, 2006; Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007; Watt & Richardson, 2007). In spite of this, little has been done that looks at teacher motivation other than more recent interest in self-efficacy and burnout (Richardson, Karabenick, & Watt, 2014). Although it is still emerging, in the past several years, interest in teacher motivation has gained momentum as an area of inquiry (Kaplan, 2014).

**Early Views of Motivation**

Developmentalists suggest that from the time of birth, children are naturally active, inquisitive, curious and playful, even when there are no specific rewards offered. Unfortunately, this early intrinsic motivation wanes as children age (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In this view, basic needs such as food, stimulation, and instincts are responsible for
guiding human motivation (Bayer, Ferguson, & Gollwitzer, 2003). However, this suggests a stagnant view of human evolution as people are far more complex and sophisticated beings than a basic needs framework postulates.

Pintrich and Schunk (2002) argued that these early views of motivation are behavioral in nature because theorists, at the time, relied on observable phenomena and neglected to include thoughts and feelings that also may have motivated the individual. From this perspective, researchers looked to the environment as a causal explanation for actions. Historically, little attention was given to the analysis of motivation and voluntary action. According Tolman (1925), purposeful behavior was solely used as a descriptive category that referred to actions that were carried out in a specific way such a task completed with great persistence. Also, since motivational theories at the time conceptualized humans as being driven by basic needs and instincts, this resulted in preventing the analysis of behavior in terms of choice or desire (Murray, 1938).

Initially, the experimental study of motivation was linked to a search for behavior that was associated with instinct, drive, need, and energization. Motivational psychologists wanted to understand what caused someone at rest to change to an active state (Weiner, 1990). It was believed that the presence of a need would invoke activity. As a result, the effects of need states in reference to motivation, including speed of learning and choice behavior, were examined (Weiner, 1990). According to Weiner, this gave rise to taxonomies of instincts and basic need states related to behavior and the value of action, and motivation psychologists examined conflict resolutions by looking at need and activity, approach and avoidance tendencies, homeostasis, and underlying
motivational mechanisms. Also during this time, it was believed that in order for learning occur, there had to be some sort of incentive or reward.

In the 1930s, the field of motivation separated from the field of learning. At that time, Tolman (1932) demonstrated that learning can occur without reward and drive reduction. He found that when incentives were introduced after an animal had an opportunity to explore a maze, performance rather than learning was affected (Weiner, 1990). According to Weiner, this was grounds for motivational psychologists at the time to argue that motivation and learning should be studied separately because “motivation examines the use, but not the development, of knowledge” (p. 618). Weiner contends that the study of motivation for the education researcher has often been confounded by the lack of separation between learning and motivation, suggesting that motivation is often inferred when learning occurs and learning is generally an indicator of motivation.

In the 1960s there was shift toward cognition in studying motivation. Deci (1975) posited that if reward was perceived as controlling, then it would undermine future effort, but reward perceived as positive feedback was motivating. Furthermore, according to Weiner (1990), rewards given for an easy task tended to signal to the individual that he or she had low ability and as a result inhibited activity, whereas rewards given for a difficult task signaled high ability and augmented motivation. Researchers at the time also focused on context as a contributing factor for motivation. According to Weiner, they found that rewards given in a competitive setting signaled high ability, but rewards in cooperative context signaled that the individual has tried hard and bettered him or herself.
Researchers at the time also began to devote attention to achievement-related tasks with different levels of difficulty and became the focus of the empirical study of motivation.

The idea of volition began to receive attention in the seventies with the work of Mischel (1973) and Bandura (1977), when social-cognition theories of personality characterized humans as being agentic. Researchers also began to systematically examine intentionality with respect to one’s own judgement and behavior (Bayer, Ferguson, & Gollwitzer, 2003). According to Bayer, et al., voluntary action also became an important issue because it mattered whether or not an action was perceived as voluntary when inferences were made about a person’s dispositions, and researchers had begun to examine the determinants of intentionality.

The more current perspective of cognitive theories stresses the mental processing of information and beliefs as influencing one’s motivation (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). From this perspective, motivation may not be visible, but rather is internal, and involves beliefs, perceptions, values, interests, and actions.

**Student Motivation**

The research on motivation in the educational psychology literature has mainly focused on students. This produced a wealth of empirical studies that sought to understand student motivation, engagement, and learning (Richardson, Karabenick, & Watt, 2014). The work on student motivation provides some evidence of the nature of the construct and suggests that student motivation is malleable and may be dispositional or situational (Opfer, 2014). Hidi and Harackiewicz (2000) found that while motivation can be rooted in temperament or context, positive academic behaviors were most consistent
when intrinsic motivation was present, which they suggest, is more stable and resistant to change. Hidi and Harackiewicz further suggested that motivation can result from situational and extrinsic forms of motivation. However, in order to have positive academic benefits, the motivator (extrinsic reward) must be continued and persist until motivation becomes intrinsic (Hidi & Harackiewicz). In Self-Determination Theory, Deci and Ryan (2000) posited a similar trajectory of progressive internalization, where extrinsic motives become internalized, or autonomous motivations. Furthermore, Pintrich (2003) argued that situational motivation may be an avenue for fostering intrinsic motivation, and could be helpful in creating interventions designed to help unmotivated students. If it is possible to nurture motivation in students, then the same rationale may also apply to teachers.

Intervention studies, although rare, would offer a means of establishing whether motivations can be changed (Opfer, 2014). According to Yeager and Walton (2011), within the past decade, several rigorous, randomized field experiments have demonstrated that brief exercises that target students’ thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about school have had substantial long-term effects on educational achievement. Blackwell, Trzesniewski, and Sweck (2007) found that students who attended a workshop that taught them how the brain works had sharp increases in math achievement, whereas the students in the control group who were trained in study skills did not demonstrate similar advances. Similarly, Walton and Cohen (2011) found that over a three year observation period, African-American students who attended a workshop
intended to reinforce their sense of social belonging in school, experienced an increase in their GPA relative to multiple control groups.

Research on student motivation has also targeted parents as antecedents. Harackiewicz, Rozek, Hulleman, and Hyde (2012) demonstrated that influencing parents’ values regarding the utility of particular math courses for future careers and college admission in turn influenced the child’s math participation. Using an expectancy-value perspective, Harackiewicz et al. speculated that parents may not have been able to bolster their child’s intrinsic motivation to want to learn math, or their self-efficacy about their math ability, but they were able to impact their child’s utility motivation, which includes the child’s understanding of the value of math, as well as course-taking behavior. In addition to being an important influence on student academic behavior, utility value has shown promise in the development of student interest (Hulleman, Schrager, Bodmann, & Harackiewicz, 2010).

Extant research also indicates a key relationship between a student’s motivational tendency and the teacher’s motivation. Pelletier, Legault, and Séguin-Lévesque (2002) found that when teachers are pressured by administrators, they are less self-determined towards their work in the same way that students could become less self-determined when exposed to controlling teachers. According to Pelletier et al., the teacher’s loss of self-determination has a negative effect on the student’s intrinsic motivation. From the studies on student motivation we know that motivation is pliable and influenced by context, and that more intervention studies are needed. Because of the link between student and teacher motivation, studies that focus on either group have the potential to

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inform the other. In addition, research at the preservice level also has the capacity to provide valuable insights regarding the motivation of future teachers.

**Preservice Teachers’ Motivations**

While research specific to teachers’ motivations is an emerging field, when considering teachers’ motivational propensities, it is important to consider their disposition when entering the field. A number of researchers who looked at teacher candidates’ reasons for choosing teaching have found that the desire to work with children and adolescents is what attracted them to the profession (Alexander, Chant, & Cox, 1994; Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000; Richardson & Watt, 2006). Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000) found three main reasons that people are motivated to enter the teaching profession: (1) intrinsic reasons related to subject knowledge and expertise and where a person does something because it is inherently satisfying; (2) extrinsic reasons such as work conditions, autonomy, pay, job security, and status; and (3) altruistic reasons such as the desire to help children or to contribute to a larger social cause. According to Müller, Alliata, and Benninghoff (2009), altruistic reasons for entering the field of education may be considered internalized extrinsic motivation within self-determination theory because it represents values that are usually associated with the profession of teaching. There is, however, a distinction between intrinsic motivation and altruism. Based on the literature, the majority of teachers who enter the profession do so with a great deal of passion to serve and develop student learning to the best of their abilities, suggesting the importance of both intrinsic and altruistic factors.
The idea of recruiting the “right” persons who are highly motivated and bring a sense of passion to the profession is a pervasive theme in the literature. The research, however, suggests that this approach may not be an optimal route for developing successful, long-term teachers (Kunter & Holzberger, 2014). According to Eccles (2005), this could lead to severe recruitment problems because it is highly unlikely that enough people have the purely intrinsic orientations that could sustain them throughout a long teaching career. This idea also suggests that intrinsic motivation is a stable construct which is not likely to change during the course of a teacher’s career (Kunter & Holzberger, 2014). However, according to Firestone and Pennell (1993), positive feedback, autonomy, collaboration, and learning opportunities can foster teachers’ intrinsic orientations. Conversely, pressure from administrators that devalues a teacher’s work is likely to reduce intrinsic motivation regardless of his or her motivational starting point (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Rather than focusing on the recruitment of individuals with a disposition towards intrinsic motivation, it may be more prudent to focus on supporting teachers in a way that fosters autonomy and mastery.

According to Ramsay (2000), salaries, contextual conditions, and the social status often attributed to teachers make the profession a less attractive career option for many people. Using longitudinal data collected from students who were beginning a teacher education program through the completion of the program, Richardson and Watt (2014) studied these students’ motivations for entering teaching and identified three distinct profiles of future teachers who differed in terms of their professional engagement as well
as their career aspirations. Watt and Richardson categorized them as highly engaged persisters, highly engaged switchers, and lower engaged desisters:

*Highly engaged persisters* – most motivated by intrinsic value, perceived teaching abilities, and social utility values and scored lowest on fallback career. Teaching for this group is their “dream ambition.”

*Highly engaged switchers* – scored as high as the highly engaged persisters on the altruistic motivations of enhance social equity and make social contributions, and in-between the other two profiles on intrinsic value, shape future of children/adolescents, and work with children/adolescents. Because this group has other career aspirations, they do not plan to stay in the field for the duration of their career. Demographically, this group came from the highest socio-economic background, was the youngest in age, was least likely to have children, to have come from non-English speaking backgrounds, or to have previously worked.

*Lower engaged desisters* – this negative motivational profile made up a large portion of the students studied. They were least motivated by intrinsic and social utility values and more likely to have chosen teaching as a fallback. Their satisfaction with choosing teaching as a career declined during their coursework citing reasons such as negative student teaching experiences, discovering how demanding teaching can be, lack of school structure support during their practica, difficulties working with children and adolescents, and perceived lack of career prospects/insecure employment as reasons.
These findings bring into question how well prospective teachers understand the multidimensional nature of teaching in the twenty-first century or how well aligned their motivations are with the diverse population of students they will be tasked with educating. Understanding these factors could help us to better understand inservice teacher motivation and to predict career attrition.

**Inservice Teachers’ Motivations**

Research has yet to fully understand the motivational factors that affect inservice teachers. Until recently, when researchers did include a measure of teacher motivation, it generally focused on motivation as an outcome by looking at indicators such as satisfaction, rather than considering it as a predictor (Butler, 2012). While motivation is generally future directed because it is a process that encourages behavior toward a particular objective, job satisfaction is defined as the degree to which expectations are met and result in positive feelings and is therefore more present directed (Müller, Alliata, and Benninghoff, 2009). According to Müller et al., teachers are more satisfied if they feel supported by administrators and parents, they have autonomy to perform their job, and student behavior is positive.

Butler (2014) asserts that motivation depends on what a person wants to achieve, and therefore his/her goals become determining factors in his/her level of achievement. Butler distinguishes between mastery goals and ability goals. Mastery goals are associated with evaluating competence based on prior outcomes, attributing outcomes to effort, preferring challenging tasks and interpreting difficulty as the need for increased effort, and actively seeking help when needed. With ability goals, the individual
evaluates competence relative to how others perform, credits outcomes to ability, interprets difficulty as low ability, and refrains from seeking help. Papaioannou and Christodoulidis (2007) summarized the distinction by positing that mastery goals are used when an individual is interested in a task for the sake of the activity, and ability goals are self-referenced and are employed when an individual wants to demonstrate superiority in outperforming others and they construe their ability through a process of social comparison. Furthermore, according to Papaioannou and Christodoulidis, mastery goals for teaching are associated with constructive patterns of coping, and thus teachers who try and ultimately develop professional competence and are able to cope with challenges will be more satisfied in the profession than teachers who are motivated by avoiding failure or to minimize time invested and effort.

Researchers who have explored the influence of teacher achievement goals on instructional practices have found mastery goals to be significantly associated with self-reports of a mastery approach to instruction (Retelsdorf & Günther, 2011). Retelsdorf, Butler, Streblow, & Schiefele (2010) investigated how teachers’ achievement goals are connected to classroom goal-supporting structures, such as assigning challenging and meaningful tasks to promote critical thinking and viewing mistakes as learning opportunities. They found that a mastery orientation, where a person is motivated to master a task, and work avoidance, where a person is only motivated to do as little as possible, were positive predictors of a teacher’s propensity to provide stimulating tasks and a classroom structure that supports student mastery goals. Similarly, Butler and Shibaz (2008) found teacher mastery and ability-avoidance goals to have a positive
impact on students’ reports of instructional practices. In the same survey study, Butler and Shibaz also found that teacher ability-avoidance goals, or trying to avoid demonstrating inferior professional skills, were related to student cheating, but that teacher goals were not predictors of students’ inclinations to seek help. Based on this work, there is reason to believe that teachers who set goals and are motivated to continue to develop their professional competence are better able to cope with challenges, and are more likely to positively influence student outcomes. In this way, motivation is closely aligned with resilience, because resilience in teachers considers both individual and contextual factors, and includes the capacity to overcome challenges.

Numerous studies in the past decade have explored the specific factors that motivate teachers (Eren & Tezel, 2010; Gokce, 2010; Hildebrandt & Eom 2011; Kocabas, 2009) and have identified two kinds of motivation - intrinsic and extrinsic - that place the source of motivation either inside or outside a person. But, according to Wei (2012), these studies have not had strong theoretical support because there was no consistency in the findings, thus making it difficult to generalize. Furthermore, many of the studies focused on a single factor and did not consider the multi-dimensional nature of teacher motivation (Wei, 2012). In his own work, Wei found that a teacher’s content competence, collaboration and school support, and classroom autonomy were found to be effective motivators. Factors that affected motivation at the school level included principal control over school activities and teacher participation in decision-making (Wei, 2012). Wei found that a principal’s control over setting students’ performance standards, establishing curriculum, determining content of professional development, evaluating
teachers, hiring new teachers, setting the discipline policy, and budgeting had a significant positive effect on teachers perceived school support. In addition, Wei found that when individual teachers had control over their lessons, instructional materials, teaching techniques, and grading policies, they tended to be more motivated.

There is also a body of research that suggests that the concept of self-motivation may be helpful in understanding teacher motivation. According to Dzubay (2001), self-motivation simply means to act with a sense of agency. While most of us try to maintain a sense of control over the external pressures in our everyday lives, we experience varying degrees of success in dealing with them. Dzubay asserts that the more we internalize these pressures, the higher the level of functioning. The essence of self-motivation is when we willingly undertake new tasks because we view them as important to achieving a personal goal (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Simply, we have a basic psychological need to be successful at what interests us, and this need subsequently prompts us to internalize the external demands that are likely to contribute to this effectiveness.

Empirical and observational research in the field of motivational psychology suggests that people possess three inherent psychological needs that they are driven to fulfill: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Ryan, 1995). Using these constructs, Dzubay (2001) posited that professional growth occurs when teachers choose their own career goals and connect or collaborate with others to accomplish them. On the other hand, Dzubay also suggests that counter-productive outcomes are likely to occur when participation is forced, thus causing a person’s motivation to fade.
Because learning is paramount to a teacher’s success, Jonett (2009) asserts that teachers must continually be motivated to be active in learning, reflecting, and trying new things. In the literature on occupational motivation, Hirschborn (1993) suggests that workers are intrinsically motivated and open to learning at their workplace if they can see a connection between the learning modality and being better at their job. Likewise, some teachers choose learning opportunities to improve their teaching with the result of internal psychological rewards that they connect to their students’ results and which contribute to better teaching (Ozcan, 1996).

When teachers’ psychological needs are met with the right conditions, chances are greater that they will be self-motivated to engage in classes or development opportunities to move their careers along the professional continuum. These conditions include autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and according to Dzubay (2001), instead of asking how we can motivate teachers, we should be asking how we can create the conditions which will elicit self-motivation. An operative understanding of teacher motivation therefore necessitates the analysis of the factors that contribute to self-determination based on intrinsic, extrinsic, and autonomous influences. The research on teacher motivation suggests several important factors to developing and maintaining motivation. These include a support system, both inside and outside the school context, clearly defined goals, and a sense of personal agency.

According to Watt and Richardson (2015), when teachers perform their job with the intrinsic value of helping their students succeed, they are autonomously motivated, which suggests self-determination because the teacher is engaged in a behavior or activity
because it is inherently fulfilling. Conversely, when teachers are externally regulated in the form of policies, curriculum requirements, and administrative practices and supervision, they experience a reduced sense of competence and autonomy (Fernet, Guay, Senécal, & Austin, 2012). Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, and Kaplan (2007) found that in studies of teachers, autonomous motivations, which are teachers’ thoughts and feeling about their own motivation for teaching, are associated with perceived achievement, self-efficacy, autonomy-supportive pedagogy, and reduced burnout. In addition, autonomous teacher motivation has been linked to autonomy-supportive, relevant teaching practices that encourage student choice (Fernet, et al., 2012; Roth et al., 2007).

Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, and Kaplan (2007) used self-determination theory to examine autonomous motivation for entering teaching and found it to be positively associated with a teacher’s sense of personal accomplishment. According to Roth (2014), autonomously motivated teachers have a greater understanding of the value of the subjects they teach and are also better able to employ different methods of instruction to help students master those subjects. These teachers are also more resilient in the face of high stakes testing and tend to be more vested in the students’ quality of learning (Roth, 2014). Furthermore, Roth et al. (2007) was among the first to find an autonomous motivation connection between teacher and student learning. But it is difficult, if not impossible, for teachers to be autonomously motivated if they do not work in an institution that fosters an autonomous environment. A logical conclusion then is that the more pressure teachers feel the less self-determined they will be.
Because of this, schools need to capitalize on this novice enthusiasm and cultivate a healthy environment to help them stay motivated and promote resilience. But what occurs at the mid-career point or with veteran teachers who are nearing retirement?

**Career stages**

The idea of teacher career trajectories first emerged as a subject of interest among researchers during the 1980s. Three contributors, Michael Huberman, Ralph Fessler, and Patricia Sikes presented models of teacher career stages from graduation through retirement. In general, they sought to identify patterns in the work lives of the teachers they studied. Of these researchers, it is the work of Michael Huberman that has garnered the most attention and provided some important insight into the role of career stage on motivation.

**Early work on career stages.** According to Huberman (1989), career entry (1 – 3 years) is one of survival and discovery marked by continuous trial and error. The focus is on self and one’s sense of adequacy, discrepancies between instructional goals and actual classroom performance, inappropriate instructional materials, and wide swings in classroom management techniques. There is a positive side to this stage as well. Huberman stated that novice teachers are often enthusiastic and filled with the excitement and challenge of discovery and thrilled at the prospect of finally having their own classroom and students.

The next career stage is stabilization (4 – 6 years). This is the time in a teaching career when teachers settle into the profession, have greater confidence and a growing sense of instructional mastery, are more flexible, and are able to accept the imperfections
of teaching (Huberman, 1989). This stage also marks an interesting juncture in a teacher’s career. According to Huberman, teachers often find themselves at the crossroads of making the personal decision to stay in the teaching profession and the administrative act of being granted tenure.

The career literature to this point is fairly consistent, but as educators enter the mid-career phase (7 - 18 years) trajectories become more diverse and more individualized. The diversification and change phase (sometimes referred to as the experimentation stage) is marked by an escalation in experimentation where the teacher attempts to increase effectiveness by trying new materials and lessons (Huberman, 1989). Cooper (1982) found that teachers in this phase were engaged in more ambitious projects that contributed to a desire to demonstrate instructional mastery as well as a latent fear of stagnation. Huberman, on the other hand, found that the fear of stagnation was more prevalent among teachers with 11 to 19 years of experience, and that these feelings emerged rather suddenly and gradually escalated.

According to Klassen, Durksen, and Tze (2014), in the latter years Huberman suggested two distinct stages. In this view, during the period between 19 and 30 years, teachers experience a sense of serenity where they feel a gradual loss of energy and enthusiasm but are also more confident (Klassen et al., 2014). Finally, in the late career stage (31 – 40 years), teachers experience disengagement, marked by either serenity or disappointment and bitterness (Klassen et al., 2014). Together, these stages in a teacher’s career evolution imply fluctuations in motivation at different stages.
The research on early career stages is fairly consistent and has shown that there is a general escalation in a teacher’s ability throughout the first seven to 10 years. We also know that teachers have different skills, knowledge, attitudes and concerns at different points in their careers. However, it is at the mid-career point where career trajectories tend to diverge and become nonlinear. More studies, particularly studies that focus on the middle years, as well as longitudinal studies that follow teachers for the duration of a career are needed.

**Recent work on career stages.** Day and Gu (2007) also made an important contribution to understanding variations in teachers’ professional lives, career stages, and sustaining commitment. In their mixed-method, four-year Longitudinal VITAE research conducted with 300 teachers across 100 schools in England, Day and Gu (2007) found that a teacher’s capacity to maintain commitment was influenced by his or her professional life phase and identity, and that these two factors were mediated by the context in which they lived and worked. According to Day and Gu, these mediating factors included personal factors (life outside the school), situated factors (life in school), and professional factors (values, beliefs, and the interactions between these and external policies). Further findings indicated that these dimensions were not static, but rather that teachers experienced fluctuations of different intensity within the dimensions as well as between them, and this in turn, affected the stability of their identity. Day and Gu concluded that age and experience do not necessarily predict a teacher’s effectiveness, and that a teacher’s capacity to manage the three mediating variables was the key to their resilience and ability to sustain their commitment and effectiveness.
Day and Gu (2007) have shown that supporting “teachers’ professional and personal learning needs at different times in their work and lives can help counter declining commitment trajectories, enhancing the continuity of positive development of teachers’ professional commitment and, thus, their effectiveness” (pp. 439-440). In their VITAE research, Day and Gu found that one in four students was being instructed by a teacher who either could not, or was not willing to continue to learn and develop his/her professional assets. The VITAE research demonstrated that teachers do not necessarily become more effective with experience because of the influence of varying personal, situated, or professional issues such as an ineffective administrator, classroom behavior issues, or dealing with pressures at home.

One of the most important conclusions of the VITAE research, according to Day and Gu (2007), was that a teacher’s:

- capacity to learn to build upon favorable influences and positive opportunities in their work and life contexts, overcome the emotional tensions of the scenarios in the environments which they experienced and maintain the sense of vocation which had originally attracted them into teaching (p. 440).

Support that focuses on creating and maintaining a learning climate and professional learning opportunities, which relate to a teacher’s need to sustain commitment, was also found to be a key mediating factor promoting effectiveness in supporting classroom and school improvement (Day & Gu, 2007). In addition, Day and Gu challenged Huberman’s final stage by identifying two veteran professional life stages of 24 to 30 years and 31+ years. According to Klassen et al. (2014), an optimal level of motivation and commitment
occurs in these final two phases that enables teachers to successfully cope with change. The influences on an educator’s professional life are multifaceted and can change throughout the various career stages. How a teacher manages these changes can play an important role in his/her effectiveness. Furthermore, when a teacher is not able to successfully contend with vicissitudes and sustain commitment, it can lead to career plateauing.

**Plateauing**

Stability over the course of a career can be a double-edged sword. It can be comforting, but at the same time, the routine of repeated tasks can also lead to a loss of intrinsic motivation, which can lead to stagnation or plateauing (Milstein, 1990). According to Milstein, teaching may be particularly susceptible to plateauing because it is a front-loaded occupation. Lortie (1975) posited that teachers experience professional privileges and perhaps even advantageous working conditions when they first enter the field, but these are not likely to improve in any significant way over time.

Bardwick (1986) identified three forms of plateauing: (1) Structural plateauing, which occurs when a person does not believe that a promotion is obtainable; (2) Content plateauing, which sets in when a person does not believe there are any challenges left or things to be learned in his/her job; and (3) Life plateauing, which indicates an overall sense of routine and sameness. While early research on plateauing was limited to studies conducted in business and industry, several findings highlighted characteristics that may be useful in identifying potential for plateauing in any profession, Bardwick found that those in well-defined positions for more than five years were susceptible to plateauing;
Near (1984) found that 65% of the employees over the age of 40 in her study self-
identified as having plateaued; and Slocum, Cron, Hansen, and Rawlings (1985) found
that those who work in low-growth organizations are prone to plateau.

Milstein (1990) argued that people who have plateaued experience an intrinsic
sense of loss and become skeptical about finding career fulfillment. According to Near
(1984), people who have plateaued or are in danger of doing so perceive themselves as
less important to their organizations, work fewer hours, have higher rates of absenteeism,
believe they are in poor health, and do not view their supervisors favorably. Orpen (1983)
and Veiga (1981) found that employees who were susceptible to plateauing had a greater
desire than other employees to leave their place of employment, but were also less
confident that they would be able to find an alternative, satisfactory position.

A great deal of research has been conducted that looks at early career stages and
retention issues (Farrell, 2014; Gu & Day, 2007; Hargreaves, 2005; Meister & Ahrens,
2011), but little has been done to explore why some mid-career teachers strive to move
along the professional continuum and improve their pedagogy while others are caught in
a futile cycle of stagnation or plateauing. According to Meister and Ahrens (2011), there
are three factors that can contribute to a teacher plateauing. First, in order to advance
within the school the teacher generally has to leave teaching and enter administration.
Second, the longer a person spends in a position the more likely he or she is to experience
plateauing. Finally, workers over the age of forty are more likely to experience feelings
of stagnation.
Research on plateauing also indicates that the constancy that a career in teaching can provide is a double-edged sword. While this stability may be rewarding, over time it can lead to a sense of routine and stagnation, and as a result, some teachers may perceive their career to be at a standstill and become skeptical about achieving career fulfillment (Meister & Ahrens, 2011). In an exploratory, phenomenological study, Meister and Ahrens found that four veteran teachers’ resistance to plateauing was a result of building leaders who provided autonomy, student affirmation, and external support systems.

In his study that investigated the phenomenon of plateauing, Farrell (2014) examined the topics of conversation of three mid-career ESL teachers who participated in a reflection group. According to Farrell, most of the teachers’ negative comments were focused on the school administration, saying they felt under-appreciated, that they were in conflict with the administrators over the goals of the ESL program, and that they felt a great deal of pressure as a result of standardized testing imposed by the administration. On the other hand, the teachers reported positive feelings and interactions with colleagues and students (Farrell, 2014). In addition, each of the three teachers had a strong sense of self-efficacy, and indicated that working with students through extra-curricular activities helped them to maintain their enthusiasm for teaching (Farrell, 2014).

Hargreaves (2005) posited that recognizing different stages of a teacher’s career, including plateauing, is essential to understanding how teachers experience, adapt, and respond to changes. This is important, according to Hargreaves, because these responses directly impact reform efforts in education. In a study of 50 elementary and secondary teachers across 15 schools in Canada, Hargreaves found that novice teachers are
generally enthusiastic and optimistic, and that teachers nearing the end of a career become resistant to change and concentrate more on past accomplishments. However, it is the mid-career teachers who are trapped between waning enthusiasm and become selective about changes in education. An important question to consider then is how do education leaders capitalize on the experience that a teacher has accrued by mid-career while at the same time preventing him/her from sliding down the slippery slope of waning enthusiasm.

Teacher plateauing can also have a negative effect on student achievement. William Sanders, widely known as the creator of the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System, posited that teacher effectiveness trumps all other factors as a predictor of student academic growth. According to Sanders (2006), typically a teacher’s effectiveness improves at a steady pace during the first 10 years of teaching, but then it plateaus. This can have dire consequences for a student because according to Rivers and Sanders (2002), the effect of student achievement is measureable for at least four years after spending a year with an ineffective teacher. Rivers and Sanders indicate that value-added studies in Tennessee have estimated that fifth grade students who had ineffective teachers for three years were likely to score approximately 50 percentile points lower than their peers who were taught by teachers deemed to be highly effective for the same period. Based on these findings, the consequences are potentially ruinous for students who are taught by ineffective teachers, or teachers who have plateaued.

The differences in career trajectories and learning needs within each career stage confirm the significant impact that influences can have on a teacher’s identity,
commitment, and effectiveness (Day & Gu, 2007). Understanding the needs of teachers at different professional stages could help to counter plateauing, enhance professional learning opportunities which are relevant and beneficial, and thus positively impact both teacher effectiveness and student achievement. The empirical basis for learning at different career stages is undeveloped at this time, yet understanding the contextual issues that support or inhibit a veteran teacher’s willingness to learn has the potential to provide compelling evidence that would be useful to school leaders and policymakers.

The research presented in this chapter indicates that while motivated teachers have a positive effect on student outcomes, teachers at the mid-career point are particularly susceptible to plateauing, where the routine and sameness of the job can lead to a lack of motivation. Teachers who are resilient, however, are often able to counteract the negative effects of plateauing.

**Resilience**

A great deal of research has explored attrition of teachers in their early career (Goddard & Foster, 2001; Ingersoll, 2003; Tait, 2008), but little has been done to explore how we can help teachers to develop and maintain resilience (Luthar & Brown, 2007); to get them over the hurdles, sustain and enable them to thrive, rather than to just survive for the duration of a career. The teacher workforce is aging (Population Research Bureau, 2002), and with so many teachers leaving the profession early in their careers, it is even more important now that we understand how we can help mid-career teachers to sustain their motivation, commitment, and resilience. But, rather than just considering retention for the sake of having teachers to fill classrooms, it is imperative to consider quality
retention where motivation and commitment are maintained and teachers are able to flourish (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011). According to Day (2008):

Research on teacher retention tends to focus on factors affecting teachers’ decisions to leave the teaching profession. Instead, what is required is a better understanding of the factors that have enabled the majority of teachers to sustain their motivation, commitment and, therefore, effectiveness in the profession (p. 256).

It is important to recognize the factors that nourish a career in teaching, rather than to emphasize the essentials of survival.

The roots of the construct of resilience can be found in the literature on psychological aspects of coping and the physiological aspects of stress (Tusaie & Dyer, 2004). The early studies on resilience from the psychological perspective focused on individuals that were able to cope better than would have been expected in adverse contexts. The findings can be divided into intrapersonal and environmental factors (Tusaie & Dyer, 2004). The intrapersonal factors included cognitive factors and competencies such as optimism (Schweizer, Beck-Seyffer, & Schneider, 1999), intelligence (McKnight & Loper, 2002), creativity (Simonton, 2000), humor, and a belief system of oneself (Myers, 2000). Furthermore, according to Tusaie and Dyer, competencies that contribute to resilience include coping strategies, social skills, educational abilities, and above average memory.

Tusaie and Dyer (2004) posited environmental factors such as perceived social support, a sense of connectedness and life events influence resilience. Social support is a
transaction between an individual and the environment and includes the person’s perception of that support (Procidano & Hellers, 1983). Individuals with a negative outlook toward support may reject it and therefore receive and perceive less support (Tusaie & Dyer). In a study that examined protective factors for substance use and antisocial behavior of children five years after their parents divorced, Neher and Short (1998) found parental support was moderately to strongly correlated ($r = 0.06-0.08$, $p < .001$) with adolescent resilience in all domains. However, parental overprotection that resulted in a lack of accomplishments and self-regulation by the child was significantly correlated ($r = .53$, $p < .001$) to substance abuse, antisocial behavior, and low psychosocial resilience (Neher & Short, 1998). This implies that protective factors change depending on the context.

Resilience has been viewed through a variety of theoretical lenses and studied in a variety of ways, including in-depth qualitative case studies as well as broader, quantitative measures (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011). In their review of 50 recent empirical studies focusing on teacher resilience, Mansfield et al. found that most research used a qualitative approach ($n = 29$) and a significant amount included interviews ($n = 34$). While few of the papers explored personal challenges directly, negative self-belief was the most frequently cited individual risk factor (Beltman, et al., 2011). There was a more thorough examination of the complex contextual challenges that teachers face in their lives and as well as on the job. While no single category was significant, the two most frequently identified were individual school or classroom context challenges such as disruptive students, and broader professional challenges such as workload (Beltman et al.,
The most frequently cited individual protective factors included personal attributes such as altruism as well as self-efficacy, and the most important contextual support was a strong, open, and well-organized administration (Beltman, et al., 2011). Finally, while Beltman et al. did not evaluate the 50 studies based on a particular career stage, an examination of the papers reviewed revealed that a substantial number of the studies (n = 28) focused on preservice or early career teachers. This demonstrates a void in the literature on resilience that focuses on experienced teachers.

Resilience assumes the presence of a threat to existing circumstances in which a person is able to have a positive response to adverse situations or conditions (Gu, 2014). It is a dynamic process that is influenced by the interaction between a person and his/her environment (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Furthermore, according to Cefai (2004), it is a construct that can be promoted, nurtured, and enhanced. Empirical research on adults suggests that resilience is not associated with generalized personal attributes (Luthar & Brown, 2007), but rather it is a dimension influenced by multiple factors that are specific to a given context (Ungar, 2004). This was affirmed by Neenan (2009) in his work on a cognitive-behavior approach to resilience by finding that it is not a quality that is reserved for a few, but rather is an attribute that can learned and achieved by many.

An important factor in resilience is the “presence of protective factors (personal, social, familial, and institutional safety nets) that enables individuals to resist life stress” (Kaplan, Turner, Norman, & Stillson, 1996, p. 158). In an important study on protective factors, Werner and Smith (1982) compared resilient students with those exposed to similar risks that developed behavioral problems. The children identified as resilient...
demonstrated several protective factors including independence, self-confidence, an easy
temperament, sociability, and an orientation to be active (Werner & Smith, 1982). In
addition, the resilient children had bonds with and support from adults, had high self-
esteeem and an internal locus of control (Doney, 2013).

Henderson and Milstein (2003) identified six protective factors as important in
establishing resiliency within individuals. These factors include: (1) purpose and
expectations; (2) nurture and support; (3) positive connections; (4) meaningful
participation; (5) life guiding skills; and (6) clear and consistent boundaries. According to
Henderson and Milstein, each of these components contributes equally to establishing
individual resiliency. In a study that examined the characteristics of resiliency of
preservice and inservice teachers based on Henderson and Milstein’s six factors, Müller,
Gorrow, and Fiala (2011) concluded that while each of six factors contributed to
developing resiliency for educators, they did so in an unequal manner and with
meaningful sub-groupings. Nurture and support and positive connections were found to
be important protective factors, and a clear and consistent boundary was not identified as
a distinct protective factor. This unequal representation of protective factors within
specific contexts had been noted by other researchers as well (Cano-Garcia, Padilla-
Munoz, and Carrasco-Ortiz, 2005; Tusaie & Dyer, 2004). It is therefore important to
consider resiliency within a specific context.

Research suggests that people’s coping strategies may also facilitate resilience in
successfully dealing with a stressful situation (Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008). Coping
involves the ability to identify, label, and find solutions to dealing with these feelings
It is defined as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141). Durr, Chang, and Carson (2014) identified three types of coping: problem-focused coping attempts to gather information about the situation and make changes; emotion-focused coping aims to regulate emotions that occur as a result of a particular incident or context; and proactive coping (Greenglass, 2002). The latter type of coping is future-oriented and promotes building resources intended to facilitate personal growth.

In a study that sought to understand the essence of why some teachers choose to remain in the teaching profession, Sell (2013) found that the study participants depended on some sort of coping mechanism to sustain them. According to Sell, each of the teachers had an unwavering commitment to the teaching profession and a support system from individuals inside and/or outside the school setting. This study also confirmed the findings of Day and Gu (2009), who found that positive personal and professional interactions nurtured teachers by stimulating resilient qualities that helped them to overcome work-related frustrations.

According to Bobek (2002), individuals must learn to adjust to adverse conditions by using resources that can inform their perspectives and choices. Bobek further asserts that there are five specific resources that can help individuals develop resilience: (1) significant adult relationships; (2) a sense of personal responsibility; (3) social and problem solving skills; (4) a sense of competence, expectations and goals, confidence, and a sense of humor; and (5) a sense of accomplishment. Bobek argues that teacher
resiliency is critical to teacher retention. Experienced teachers are therefore needed to help new teachers develop resilience by fostering relationships and sharing insights into the profession.

**Teachers’ resilience.** Research on teachers’ resilience often focuses on individual strengths and in a number of studies has been defined as the ability to adapt to any situation, and to do so with competence, often in the face of adversity (Bobek, 2002; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). Bobek (2002), in fact, suggested that this ability to adapt may actually increase a teacher’s level of competence. Other researchers (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Tait, 2008) have argued that self-efficacy is a characteristic of resilience because these teachers see stressful situations as challenges rather than added pressures (Doney, 2013). There is also evidence that protective factors and learned strategies are key components in teacher resilience. Further, Howard and Johnson (2004), building on the work done with child and adolescent resilience, explored the protective factors of teachers who were able to cope well under adverse conditions. The pervasive themes in their findings were a deep sense of agency where the teachers believed they had the ability to control what happened to them, a strong support group, and a belief in one’s own competence and worth.

Luther (1996) distinguished between ego-resiliency and resilience, supporting the multi-dimensional nature of the construct’s qualities. According to Luther, ego-resiliency is a personality characteristic that does not take into account exposure to aversive situations, but resilience does presuppose the occurrence of negative conditions. This distinction implies that resilience is not innate, but rather that this quality can be learned.
Higgins (1994) posited that resilience can be learned or acquired, and according to Gu and Day (2007), “achieved through providing relevant and practical protective factors, such as caring and attentive educational settings, positive and high expectations, positive learning environments, a strong supportive social community, and supportive peer relationships” (p. 1305).

Gu (2014) posited that there are three distinctive characteristics of teacher resilience. First, it is context specific and includes the individual classroom, the school, and the broader professional work context (Gu, 2014). Brunetti (2006) found that leadership, trust and support for learning and development, and positive parent and student feedback had positive influences on teachers’ motivation and resilience. In addition, Gu and Johansson (2013) found that successful principals are able to mediate policy contexts and create a positive school culture which nurtures a teacher’s capacity for resilience. Second, Gu (2014) suggested that teacher resilience is closely tied to vocational commitment and a person’s altruistic reasons for choosing the profession. Research indicates that a desire and belief that they can help children to succeed, is one of the most important factors influencing a teacher’s propensity toward resilience (Hong, 2012; Morgan, Ludlow, Kitching, O’Leary, & Clark, 2010). Resilient teachers do not merely hang on, but rather “they display capacity for growth and fulfillment in pursuit of personal and professionally meaningful goals” (Gu, 2014, p. 508). Third, in addition to being able to bounce back from adverse conditions or difficulties, resilient teachers have the capacity to maintain stability and a sense of commitment and agency in their everyday work lives (Gu & Day, 2013). Gu and Li (2013), in their study of 568 primary
and secondary teachers in Beijing, found that although the scenarios in which the challenges manifest may be different, the physical, emotional, and intellectual energy that is necessary to navigate these trials is similar.

It is impossible to consider a teacher’s propensity for resilience without recognizing the role of relationships in their professional lives. Teaching is built of these relationships: teacher and student, teacher and parents, teacher and colleague, teacher and administration (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Luthar and Brown (2007) argue that relationships are a fundamental to resilience:

> Relationships lie at the ‘roots’ of resilience: when everyday relationships reflect ongoing abuse, rancor, and insecurity, this profoundly threatens resilience as well as the personal attributes that might otherwise have fostered it. Conversely, the presence of support, love, and security fosters resilience in part, reinforcing people’s innate strengths (such as self-efficacy, positive emotions and emotion regulation) with these personal attributes measured biologically and/or behaviorally (p. 947).

Relationships, however, are external, and the role of individual agency should not be dismissed.

Jordan (2012) argues that “resilience resides not in the individual but in the capacity for connection” (p. 73). In this way, resilience means more than bouncing back; rather it involves moving beyond the stressful situation to a more comprehensive, personal state (Gu, 2014). This personal transformation in turn, promotes a greater connection and enhanced relationships (Jordan, 2004). As a result, there is little doubt
that educators today need a degree of resilience to cope with the emotionally, physically, and intellectually demanding job of teaching (Gu, 2014).

The construct of teacher resilience recognizes the importance of interaction between the individual’s personal, professional, and situational factors, and contextualizes teachers’ attempts to sustain professional commitment (Gu & Day, 2007). A teacher may exhibit resilience in a given situation, but respond in a completely different manner in a different context or a different career stage. Whether or not an individual perceives a situation as adverse and how he or she responds, depends on the development of the person’s resiliency. Understanding the interplay of context and coping strategies in the face of difficult situations, could help teacher educators, administrators, and policymakers, to support resiliency in educators. Furthermore, according to Resnick (2011), there is increasing evidence that resilience is related to motivation.

**Resilience and Motivation**

There has been some effort in recent years on the part of education researchers to study resilience as an explanatory variable for teacher motivation (Bobek, 2002, Brunetti, 2006, Gu & Day, 2007). According to Gu and Day (2007), teachers who are resilient tend to respond in a positive manner to adverse classroom and school situations, are more effective in their jobs, and tend to derive greater satisfaction from their work. In a qualitative survey study, Mansfield, Beltman, and McConney (2012) found that resilience involves processes that are the result of interaction over time between a person and the
context in which they are interacting, and this is demonstrated by how these individuals respond to challenging or difficult situations.

In a review of 50 empirical studies, Beltman, Mansfield, and Price (2011) combined conceptualizations and definitions to develop a summary of teacher resilience which states that this construct “is a dynamic process or outcome that is the result of interaction over time between a person and environment” (p. 188). Beltman et al. further posited that self-efficacy, confidence, and coping strategies are important for dealing with challenges and setbacks, where adaptation occurs despite obstacles, and supportive personal and professional relationships are important. This is evidence that individual and contextual factors work in tandem in complex, dynamic ways to shape resilience in teachers.

In an ethnographic study that addressed core problems associated with teacher attrition in urban schools wrought with adverse conditions, Cohen (2009) compared the cases of two veteran teachers in an effort to understand why some teachers maintain their commitment and enthusiasm about their work while others suffer from burnout. Results suggested that these teachers maintained their motivation and eagerness for teaching by putting themselves first, loving the subject they taught, and considering race to be a non-issue (Cohen, 2009). While Cohen’s study identified a relationship between the attitudes of the teachers studied and their commitment to the profession, it does little to isolate factors which may contribute to veteran teachers’ apathy and lack of resilience. If researchers are going to find a solution to the problem, then it is incumbent upon them to identify these causal factors.
While many studies focus on teachers’ personal characteristics (Day & Gu, 2009), others identify the working environment, including class size, resources, autonomy, bureaucracy, and salary as a pivotal factors in teacher attrition (Dinham & Scott, 2000). In a four-year, mixed-methods study conducted in England, researchers explored the associations between teachers’ work lives and effectiveness of 300 primary and secondary teachers in 100 schools, and found that veteran teachers were at greater risk of diminishing commitment and effectiveness (Day, Sammons, Stobert, Kington, & Gu, 2007). According to Day et al., these effects were measured in terms of both perceived effectiveness in the classroom and effectiveness as measured by student progress and attainment. An important finding of this research suggests that in-school support is the key to maintaining commitment for veteran teachers (Day et al., 2007).

Resilience can be strengthened with experience in the field, but little is known about the extent to which resilience is an inherent personality predisposition. Resilience in teaching is important because it is not realistic to expect students to exhibit resilience if their teachers are not modeling its characteristics. Furthermore, a shift from the focus on teacher stress and burnout to resilience is an important first step in understanding the ways teachers manage and maintain their motivation and commitment, even in challenging times (Gu & Day, 2007). It also has the potential to turn the conversation from the negativity associated with teacher burnout, to a dialogue that is positive and hopefully promotes proactivity.

It is important that everyone involved in the field of education, but especially policymakers, pay attention to the growing number of mid-career teachers who make up a
large pool of our teaching workforce. These should be the teachers who with the benefit of experience, and hopefully wisdom, should be modeling their practice for future generations of educators. Rosenholtz (1984) asserted that if older teachers do not grow and learn, they may become tired of their jobs and as a result, fail to continually improve their performance. Not to explore the factors which may build resilience in these mid-career teachers leaves a large gap in the literature on understanding the degree to which teachers’ resilience influences other aspects of teacher professionalism.

There is a need for more research on individual risk factors and intervention studies that explore personal characteristics that contribute to resilience. In addition, much attention has been given to factors affecting teachers’ decisions to leave the teaching profession, but less on the factors that affect a teacher’s decision to stay. More work is needed to understand the impact that resilience has on a teacher’s inclination to continue in the classroom, or to seek another profession.

Despite its importance, teacher motivation is an understudied domain (Butler, 2014; Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007; Watt & Richardson, 2007). Extant research reveals a number of studies that have been done on adult motivation to participate in adult education programs, yet no major studies have thoroughly examined the relationship among adult motivations (Wlodkowski, 2008). According to Wlodkowski (2008), most studies that have examined this relationship come from the study of youth motivation, and the evidence there suggests a substantial and consistently positive correlation between motivation and educational achievement.

**Summary**
While the study of teacher motivation and resilience is still an emerging field of inquiry, the work thus far has revealed the complexity of a teacher’s professional journey and identity. Given the value of keeping quality teachers in the classroom, it is important to explore the connection between teacher motivation and resilience. Understanding the learning and professional needs of teachers at different career stages has the potential to stem the tide of plateauing and stagnation that render some educators ineffective. Finally, it is important to explore interventions that could either facilitate or hinder motivation. Interventions worth studying include providing mentors for early career teachers, targeted professional development to meet the needs of struggling teachers, and collegial support programs at all stages of teaching.

At this time we have a general understanding of the goals teachers have at varying stages of their careers, that teachers who are autonomously and intrinsically motivated are generally more enthusiastic about their jobs, and that self-efficacy plays an important role in job satisfaction with efficacious teachers less likely to suffer from burnout (Urdan, 2014). Urdan also notes that research on teacher motivation has provided some important insight into the challenges teachers face and the kinds of support that help them to overcome these challenges. There is, however, more work to be done because little is known about the causes and consequences of teacher motivation.

Little more than a decade ago, Pintrich (2003) proposed a new lens through which to conceptualize student motivation which drew from a variety of existing theoretical perspectives (Kaplan, 2014). He proposed seven questions to integrate existing knowledge from current theories, and based on this work, Kaplan (2014) suggests the
following questions to guide the theoretical development and empirical work of future research specific to the domain of teacher motivation:

“(1) What do teachers want?; (2) What motivates teachers in their teaching context?; (3) How do teachers get what they want?; (4) Do teachers know what they want or what motivates them?; (5) How do teachers’ motivation, learning, and development affect each other?; (6) How does teacher motivation change and develop? and; (7) What is the role of context and culture?” (pp. 55-61).

Adopting a new perspective that addresses the multi-faceted phenomenon of teacher motivation holds the promise of helping us to better understand this complex construct, and consequently, the promise of effective teachers who are committed to teaching in the 21st century.

In the current system of accountability in the United States and many other countries, the research agenda of policymakers has fixated on a teacher’s ability to raise student scores on standardized tests. The problem with this approach is that it is impossible to standardize the students who are sitting in the classroom or the teacher who is standing at the front of it. The very idea of standardization is in direct conflict with what motivates individuals to teach in the first place and fails to take into account teacher job satisfaction. According to Darling-Hammond (1997), effective teachers are not routine, and students are not passive, and therefore their interactions and relationships cannot be packaged. A prudent approach to reform, then, should consider the motivational factors that would sustain a teacher throughout his or her career and with that may come the student success on which our future is relying.
Currently, there is a void in the research that seeks to understand the role that resilience plays in a teacher’s decision to remain in the profession. This study seeks to answer the following research question by giving a voice to three mid-career teachers whose own perspectives on their professional lives can inform the body of research on teacher’s motivation to remain in the profession:

What role, if any, does resilience play in a mid-career teacher’s decision to remain in the teaching profession?
Chapter Three

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of three mid-career teachers with 11-20 years’ experience to gain insight into what motivates educators to remain in the profession and the role that resilience plays in their decisions. We know a great deal about why educators leave the teaching profession, but little research has been done that addresses the reasons teachers remain (Sell, 2013) or explores how to help teachers to develop and maintain resilience (Luthar & Brown, 2007). This is important because not only is teacher attrition costly, but more importantly, students benefit from having quality teachers in the classroom. Extant research has demonstrated that effectiveness continues to improve through the first decade of a teacher’s career (Sanders, 2006), but that mid-career teachers are most susceptible to the negative feelings and influences that are often associated with plateauing (Farrell, 2014).

A qualitative design was used for this study in an effort to gain an in-depth understanding of why some mid-career teachers remain in the teaching profession. Qualitative research situates the researcher within the world of inquiry and addresses the meaning that individuals ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell, it involves the process of collecting data in a natural setting and includes both inductive and deductive analysis in an effort to establish patterns or themes. It is believed that qualitative measures provide more depth to the evaluation of
motivation because they are based on the subject’s own constructs of experience (Shedivy, 2004). A qualitative methodology therefore enabled me to gain a comprehensive understanding of motivation and resilience, and the role each played in keeping three mid-career educators in the teaching profession.

I incorporated a phenomenological approach for this study in order to understand my research question from multiple perspectives and approaches in context. Through interviews, I documented the rich details of the teaching experiences of the study participants as well as the meanings attributed to those experiences. According to Creswell (2013), phenomenological research is defined as a study intended to describe the common meaning of several individuals who have lived the experiences that the research questions intend to address. A phenomenological approach provides a flexible, holistic methodology to the study of motivation which emphasizes the individuals’ experiences, meanings, and perceptions (Yeung, 2004). Furthermore, phenomenology focuses on understanding the meaning and essence of participants’ experiences rather than measurements and explanations (Moustakas, 1994) and seeks to disclose the core nature of these experiences (Kendler, 2005). A phenomenological design was appropriate for this study because I sought to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of resilience and the essence of the lived experiences of three mid-career teachers.

According to Creswell (2013), phenomenology has a robust philosophical component and draws on the work of the German mathematician, Edmund Husserl. Husserl, however, lacked a clear philosophical argument, and was known to call any study he was working on “phenomenology” (Natanson, 1973). Writers today apply
different philosophical arguments for the use of phenomenology, but according to Creswell, they rest on the common ground that it is the study of lived experiences, the experiences are conscious ones (van Manen, 1990), and that the goal is to describe the essences of these experiences rather than to provide explanations or analyses (Moustakas, 1994). Based on the work of Stewart and Mickunas (1990), this study adhered to the following philosophical perspectives in phenomenology:

- A philosophy without presuppositions – to suspend all judgments about what is real
- The intentionality of consciousness – consciousness is always directed toward an object and as a result, reality of an object is related to one’s consciousness, and
- Refusal of the subject-object dichotomy – the reality of an object is tied to the meaning that an individual ascribes to the experience.

Based on a void in research which has not fully investigated the connection between teacher motivation and resilience, this study sought to answer the following research question by exploring the lived experiences of three mid-career teachers who have remained in the teaching profession for up to 20 years, despite sometimes challenging contexts:

What role, if any, does resilience play in a mid-career teacher’s decision to remain in the teaching profession?

I sought to understand the role that resilience plays in a mid-career teacher’s ability to persevere over the course of her career. Because qualitative research seeks to “make
sense of actions, narratives, and the ways in which they intersect” (Glesne, 2011, p. 1),
this method was appropriate for my research question.

Giorgi (2009) characterized a phenomenological approach as the study of the
manifestation of things as they are revealed in consciousness and communicated by
multiple individuals in their everyday lives. Based on this assumption, it was important to
seek out the lived experiences of the study participants in an effort to gain an
understanding of what factors contribute to their resilience.

**Researcher Identity**

My research interests are deeply rooted in my own career path in education.
Teaching is a second career for me, so I brought to the classroom a variety of viewpoints
including a corporate/business perspective as well as that of being a mother. I believe my
observations about the teaching profession are, in part, the result of those perspectives.
First, it is my observation that new teachers are not prepared for the rigors of working in
an education environment, and secondly, many mid-career teachers are simply apathetic
about their jobs; unwilling to progress along a learning and developmental continuum.

My own transition into teaching was relatively smooth, and I quickly became
passionate about the profession as I relished the challenge it provides. I was curious from
the start, though, about why my experiences were so different from teachers who were
newly graduated from college. I believed then that it had something to do with a level of
maturity or perhaps that my perspective was dissimilar because I am also a mother. At the
time I had three elementary-aged children of my own, so perhaps my entry into the
teaching profession was helped by seeing my children in the eyes of those sitting in my
classroom. But, as I got to know some of these novice teachers, I began to realize that they simply were not prepared for the long hours, challenging classroom behaviors, angry parents, unsupportive administrators, the isolation of being a teacher, the pressure of high stakes testing, or the lack of respect and autonomy they received. If I am to be completely honest, I relied more on my experience in broadcasting and public relations during those first years more than I did on what I learned in education courses.

It has always been my nature to want to be part of the solution rather than to complain about the problem, so I became involved in my school district’s mentoring program. Through this program, I was able to work with teachers for their first three years in the classroom. This was both a confirmatory as well as a rewarding experience. While the teachers I worked with were well-schooled in content knowledge and theory, they lacked the social, and in many cases, the cultural capital to navigate their first years in the teaching profession. In a one-on-one mentorship, however, the issues of capital are surmountable hurdles. But, what about teachers who begin their careers without a mentor, or worse, enter an unwelcoming environment? In hindsight, I realize how fortunate I was because all of the new teachers I had the opportunity to work with openly welcomed the support I gave. As a result, it became a reciprocal relationship where a mutual respect developed.

Despite the positive experiences I had through the mentor program, I was still very much bothered by the apathy of some mid-career teachers I worked with and encountered throughout the school division. In observing them, I began to believe that their poor attitudes were contagious and had a negative effect on other teachers. I became
curious about how these teachers, some of whom self-identified as being enthusiastic and passionate teachers earlier in their careers, could turn this corner – thus, my research interest was ignited.

As I observed and tried to grapple with how and why these teachers transformed during the course of their careers, I also realized that I needed to address my own bias. Through reflection I have come to understand that I have little respect for the conduct and attitudes of these teachers. I ultimately decided that I would not be able to eradicate my negative feelings and would prefer to approach the problem from a positive stance. As a result, I refocused my interests on teachers who are motivated to continue along a learning trajectory and who have shown resilience in the context of challenging teaching scenarios.

**Research Design**

A qualitative research design was used to address my research question. This study used interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a research approach to explore how three mid-career teachers remain motivated and the role that resilience played in their decision to remain in the teaching profession. Strongly influenced by phenomenology, IPA is a qualitative methodology developed for psychological research. Its aim is to explore, in detail, how people make sense of their personal and social world with emphasis placed on particular experiences and events (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

IPA is further concerned with how data are interpreted. According to Smith and Osborn (2003), a two-stage process, or double hermeneutic is involved in the interpretation of the data. The participants are trying to make sense of their world and the
researcher is also trying to make sense of the participants’ worlds. As a result, IPA is intellectually connected to hermeneutics and theories of interpretation (Smith & Osborn, 2003). In this study, I sought to gain an in-depth understanding of the role that resilience plays in a teacher’s decision to remain in the teaching profession.

IPA is also a research method that is suitable for analyzing semi-structured interviews and when the aim of the study is to understand something about a particular process and context of a situation from the participants’ perspectives. According to Weiss (1994), “Interviewing gives us access to the observations of others. Through interviewing we can learn about places we have not been and could not go and about settings in which we have not lived” (p. 1). Semi-structured interviews particularly, allow the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue and allow the researcher to modify questions and to probe for meaning or interpretation.

**Data collection.** After receiving IRB approval (Appendix A), data were collected through three audio-recorded, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with each of the three participants. The semi-structured format afforded me the flexibility to ask follow up questions and to probe more deeply for meaning based on the interviewees’ responses (Maxwell, 2013).

I formulated my interview questions to help me gain an understanding of the participants’ beliefs as they pertained to my research question:

What role, if any, does resilience play in a mid-career teacher’s decision to remain in the teaching profession?
The Interview Protocol (Appendix A) was based on Motivational Systems Theory, the conceptual framework for this study. The first set of questions were intended to understand the participant’s journey to becoming a teacher, past and present teaching experiences, self-perception as a teacher, personal goals, and how the participant’s goals align with those of the her current teaching context. The second set of questions pertained to personal agency beliefs, including both capability and context beliefs. These questions were intended to further probe an understanding of the participant’s short and long term goals, confidence in achieving those goals, feelings of empowerment, challenges, optimism, beliefs about student success, and lasting contributions to students and school. The final set of interview questions were intended to understand the participant’s emotions and included probes about both positive and negative teaching experiences, satisfying and discouraging experiences, teaching incidents that may have provoked feelings of guilt, and sources of emotional support.

In writing the interview questions, I tried to anticipate how the respondents might reply to my inquiries. I also field tested the questions by interviewing two colleagues whom I believed to be both motivated and resilient educators. The interviews lasted approximately two hours and were completed in one interview session. During these interviews I did not probe for additional meaning to the actual responses, but rather queried the participants about the wording and understanding of the questions. Based on this feedback, I made minor revisions to the original questions.

**Participant selection.** Because IPA relies on the lived experiences of a phenomenon by individuals and the meanings of those experiences, purposeful selection
(Maxwell, 2013) was used to determine participants who would most likely be able to provide information that is relevant to my research question. My goal for purposeful selection was to find a representative sample of the population that exemplified what I wanted to understand. I chose three mid-career elementary school teachers because they met the following criteria: (1) mid-career teachers because, according to Huberman (1989), this is where individual trajectories are more diverse; it is marked by an escalation in experimentation where the teacher attempts to increase effectiveness by trying new materials and lessons, and is where the fear of stagnation is more prevalent; (2) teachers who are described by their colleagues and administrators, through informal surveying, as being motivated professionals, and; (3) have a track record of being effective teachers based on student summative data, such as district and state standardized test results.

I began the selection process by considering teachers whom I know, either personally or by reputation. I generated a list of 12 teachers in three school districts who I believed met the criteria identified above. Because of the importance of the teaching context, however, I determined that all participants should work in the same district. This narrowed my list to seven teachers. I met with the administrator of the school where most of the teacher’s on my list were currently employed, and asked her to identify teachers who she believed met my criteria for purposeful selection. In doing so, this served as an external check on my selection process. She gave me the names of nine teachers, three of whom were matches from my original list of 12 possible participants.
I knew each of these teachers prior to contacting them to participate in this study. The first teacher (Marie) I knew because her son was at one time a student in my class one day a week, the second (Rachel) through a mutual friend, and the third teacher (Julie) I knew only by reputation. When I approached each teacher as a possible study participant, I asked her if she would be able to answer questions with as great a degree of honesty as possible; as though we did not have a preexisting connection or relationship. Each participant responded affirmatively and indicated that she felt comfortable in her ability to answer questions honestly and without reservation. Pseudonyms are used for the following teachers who were the participants in this study:

**Marie.** Marie has 19 years of teaching experience. She earned a degree in sociology from a four year university and then went on to earn a master’s degree in education. She is certified to teach prekindergarten through eighth grade, and also has a reading specialist endorsement. During her career she has taught in three different school divisions.

**Rachel.** Rachel attended a four year university following high school and is certified to teach prekindergarten through sixth grade. She has been teaching for eleven years. The first eight years of her career she taught in a neighboring school district, but moved to her current position when she married.

**Julie.** Julie followed a traditional path to becoming a teacher, attending a four year university. She is certified to teach prekindergarten through third grade. She is currently a kindergarten teacher with twenty years of experience. She has taught in the same school and in the same classroom for all twenty years.
Site selection. The participants each teach in a small suburban school district, serving just fewer than 7500 students, located approximately 30 miles from a major metropolitan area in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Nearly sixty percent of the division’s students identify as Hispanic, 20 percent as White, and just over 12 percent as Black. Thirty-two percent of the students are English speakers of other languages, just over 15 percent receive special education services, and nearly 60 percent qualify for free and reduced lunch. During the past school year, several of the schools within the division were placed on the state’s list of low-performing focus schools. In addition, the division did not meet the federal Annual Measureable Objectives target in reading and math for all Proficiency Gap Groups (Virginia Department of Education, 2015). This has resulted in challenging teaching contexts as educators within the division strive to meet the needs of this diverse population.

Validity

To conduct research without attention given to the credibility of the findings is fruitless. Therefore, it was essential that as a researcher I made every possible attempt to address the validity of my conclusions, with particular attention given to possible threats or ways in which I may have misinterpreted the data (Maxwell, 2013). According to Maxwell (2013), while methods and procedures do not guarantee validity, they are important for ruling out threats and increasing the credibility of the researcher’s conclusions (p. 125).

The intention of this study was to shed light on how experienced teachers find the motivational sustenance and resilience to remain in the profession. In planning this
research, I identified two possible validity threats. These included reactivity during the interviews and researcher bias.

Reactivity likely presented the greatest validity threat to my study. Reactivity refers to the influence that the researcher potentially has on the setting or person being interviewed (Maxwell, 2013, p. 124). According to Maxwell, it is not possible to completely eliminate this potential, but it is possible to understand and use it productively. My concern was that the participants may not answer interview questions truthfully, and may give what they believe is an expected answer because they are being recorded or because they know me. This was important because I may not have gotten accurate or authentic responses to my questions. One way I can tried to counter this was by asking a few questions prior to the interview protocol questions to which I could anticipate answers, or at least have a good idea of how the participant would answer. Another way I countered this was by doing member checks (Maxwell, 2013). Respondent validation is important for ensuring that you have accurately captured the participants meaning (Maxwell, 2013; Silverman, 2006). I sent each of the participants the transcripts of their interviews for review. None of the three had any changes and each participant confirmed that the data accurately reflected her intended meaning.

Another possible threat to validity in this study was researcher bias. According to Maxwell (2013), understanding how my values and expectations influence my conduct and conclusions is important to avoiding invalid conclusions. This is important because biases can corrupt conclusions. I confronted possible biases throughout the study with
memo writing that addressed personal values and expectations, reflection, and analytic insight. In addition, I utilized peer review throughout the study.

In order to address possible threats, strategies, and rationales for addressing those threats, I created a validity matrix (Appendix B). According to Maxwell (2013), a matrix imposes a linear ordering of the components, and allows the researcher to develop and show the connectivity between the specific parts of each component. In developing a validity matrix, I wanted to connect my research question to anticipated validity threats, possible strategies for dealing with those threats, and the rationale for the strategies intended to counter the threats. In doing so, it was also necessary to consider the connection between my research question, why I was seeking answers to that question, the data that was needed to address the question, and my plans for how I would analyze the data that I collected.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing throughout this study and began as soon as the initial interview was completed. Immediately following each interview I recorded my thoughts and observations in a memo. I listened to the interview recording within a day of the interview and added to my post interview memo. I also used these memos to address any biases that may have affected my questioning and the interpretation of the answers. Next, the interview was transcribed and I checked the transcriptions by relistening to the recordings while following along with the typed script. I conducted member checks (Maxwell, 2013) by sending each participant her transcript to ensure that I had accurately captured what each had intended to convey. Based on these initial notes as well as the
transcriptions I began to develop tentative ideas about categories and relationships (Maxwell, 2013).

**Etic and emic approaches.** Etic and emic approaches were used in the analysis of the data. An etic approach, also known as an outsider approach, uses theories, hypothesis, perspectives and concept from the outside as its starting point (Lett, 1990). For this study, Motivational Systems Theory (Ford, 1992) and its constructs of personal goals, personal agency beliefs, and emotions, provided the framework for the initial analysis. The data were also analyzed in the context of the amplification of Ford’s (1992) Motivational Systems Theory known as Thriving with Social Purpose (TSP) and TSP’s Theory of Life Meaning (Ford & Smith, 2007). These constructs included an active approach to goals, personal optimism, mindful tenacity, emotional wisdom, and social purpose.

The data were also analyzed using an emic, or insider approach to analysis. In an emic approach the perspectives and the words of the participant are the starting point for analysis (Lett, 1990). According to Lett, “Emic constructs are accounts, descriptions, and analyses expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the native members of the culture whose beliefs and behaviors are being studied” (p. 130). In an emic approach, the participants speak for themselves, thus allowing themes or unexpected findings to emerge. The major themes that emerged in the present study were personal strength including a positive self-image and perception of the future, social competence including positive student and peer relationships, a structured style, and positive social resources including family cohesion
and negative social resources including a lack of support or feedback from administration.

**Coding**

Coding has been described as the critical link between data collection and the explanation of meaning the researcher hopes to glean from the study (Charmaz, 2001). According to Saldaña (2013), “a code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytic processes” (p. 4). Just as a title represents content, a code similarly represents the data’s content and essence (Saldaña, 2013). Three forms of coding were used in this study: (1) structural; (2) axial; and (3) analytic memo writing.

**Structural coding.** Structural coding was used as the initial coding method. Structural coding, sometimes referred to as utilitarian coding, applies a conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a particular segment of the data as it relates to the specific research question used to frame the interview (MacQueen, McLellan-Lemal, Bartholow, & Milstein, 2008, p. 124). Following the initial analysis, the similarly coded segments are then organized for more detailed coding and analysis (Saldaña, 2013).

According to Saldaña (2013), Structural coding is appropriate for all qualitative studies, but especially for those studies with multiple participants and is particularly suitable for semi-structured data collection protocols. In Structural coding, the data are both coded and categorized to examine comparable segments, commonalities, and differences among participants (Saldaña, 2013). “Structural coding generally results in
the identification of large segments of text on broad topics; these segments can then form the basis for an in-depth analysis within or across topics” (MacQueen, et al., 2008, p. 125).

**Axial coding.** Axial Coding was used for the second cycle of coding. According to Saldaña (2013), the purpose of Axial Coding is to extend the analytic work from the initial, and for the purpose of this study, Structural Coding. Strauss and Corbin (1998), posit that the Axial Coding is intended to strategically reassemble the data from the first cycle that was “split” or “fractured” (p. 124). According to Boeije (2010), the purpose is to determine which codes are dominant and which are less important, and to reorganize the data set. During this stage the “synonyms are crossed out, redundant codes are removed and the best representative codes are selected” (Boeije, 2010, p. 109).

According to Saldaña (2013) the “axis of Axial Coding is a category that is identified during the first cycle of coding. During the process, the researcher relates categories to subcategories and specifies the properties and dimensions of each (Saldaña, 2013). Charmaz (2006) defines properties as characteristics or attributes and dimensions as the location of a property along a continuum or range. Together the properties and dimensions of a category refer to the “contexts, conditions, interactions, and consequences of a process” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60). According to Charmaz, this information enables the researcher to know “if, when, how, and why” something happens (p. 62).

**Analytic memo writing.** Analytic memo writing is a critical component of Axial Coding (Saldaña, 2013). However, the focus, according to Saldaña, is on emergent and
emerging codes as well as the categories’ properties and dimensions. Taking note of quotes from interview transcripts, the participant often does the work for the researcher by describing how one category relates to another. Analytic memo writing also enables the researcher to “think through” four additive elements of process or causation suggested by the data (Boeije, 2010, pp. 112-113):

- the *contexts* – settings and boundaries in which the action or process occurs; plus
- the *conditions* – routines and situations that happen or do not happen within the contexts; plus
- the *interactions* – the specific types, qualities, and strategies or exchanges between people in these contexts and conditions; equals
- the *consequences* – the outcomes or results of the contexts, conditions, and interactions.

An important goal of axial coding is to achieve saturation where no new information emerges – “when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences are seen in the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 136).
Chapter Four

The purpose of this study was to explore the professional experiences of three mid-career teachers to gain an understanding of the role that resilience may play in her decision to remain teaching despite challenging contexts. This chapter presents the findings for the study participants: Marie, Rachel, and Julie. During their careers, each of these teachers has faced many challenges and has had to overcome hurdles, yet each has thrived. During the individual interviews, each participant addressed questions organized into three categories. First, each teacher defined her short and long term, core goals and responded to questions intended to understand the participant’s professional self-concept, as well as her current teaching context perception. Next, the participants were asked to address their optimism for achieving goals within that context, to discuss the challenges and adversity she faced, the contributions she has made to students and her school, and to share her social resources. Finally, each participant was asked to view her professional journey through the lens of both positive and negative emotional teaching experiences.

A phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994) was used to analyze the data for this study that sought to answer the following research question:

What role, if any, does resilience play in a mid-career teacher’s decision to remain in the teaching profession?
The challenges and adversity that Marie, Rachel, and Julie have faced and their responses to those incidents during their teaching careers have been organized using the conceptual framework for this study. These categories include personal goals, personal agency beliefs, and emotions. Personal goals include the properties of content and process and consist of a person’s thoughts about possible outcomes that direct a person’s effort toward achieving or avoiding a particular outcome (Ford, 1992). According to Ford and Smith (2007), understanding core personal goals can remove possible barriers to motivation and achievement. In Motivational Systems Theory, the concept that a better future is attainable is represented by personal agency beliefs that include both capability and context beliefs (Ford & Smith, 2007). According to Ford and Smith, capability beliefs are a person’s expectations as to whether a goal is attainable, while context beliefs are evaluative expectancies about whether the context in which a person works will support or hinder goal achievement. Finally, emotions, according to Frijda (1988) are most often apparent when something occurs that is important to an individual’s goals, intentions, or worries. Positive emotions encourage the pursuit of goals while negative emotions can inhibit the pursuit of goals, but emotions such as anger, fear, or loneliness can have the effect of helping a person to deal with threats to his or her core goals (Ford & Smith, 2007).

Next, each participant’s responses were examined in the context of Thriving with Social Purpose (Ford & Smith, 2007), the amplification of Ford’s Motivational System Theory (1992). According to Ford and Smith, transforming motivational patterns into blueprints that foster discovery and competence development can support a broader range
of goals in a variety of contexts. These motivational components include an active approach to goals, personal optimism and mindful tenacity that influences personal agency beliefs, emotional wisdom, and the activation of integrative social relationship goals known as social purpose (Ford, 1992). Finally, each participant is described in terms of the life meaning that she has derived from her teaching career. Life meaning is connected to motivation and is an important byproduct of Thriving with Social Purpose.

Marie

Marie, a Caucasian female in her early 40s, is in her nineteenth year of teaching. She is married with three children; a son in seventh grade, a son in fifth grade, and a daughter in second grade. Her husband recently completed a Master’s degree in education and is now teaching middle school English in the same school district in which Marie works. For most of her marriage, Marie has provided the primary income for the family. Her husband dabbled in the bicycling business, working for a retail store as a bicycle mechanic, and then occasionally worked as a substitute teacher during the time he was working on his master’s degree.

Biography. During high school when most students were thinking about their future academic or career path, the idea of teaching was the farthest thing from Marie’s mind. In fact, her high school guidance counselor told her “not to bother going to college” because she “wasn’t college material.”

Perception of self. Comparing herself to her three sisters whom Marie describes as very bright, her self-concept was that she was not at all like them, but rather she was
the “nice, kind girl who was not very good academically, but had the potential to be good academically. So, I thought that's my role in life; I'm not the smart one and that's fine.”

**Perception of future.** Marie attended community college and then held a variety of jobs including a telemarketing position, a receptionist in a doctor’s office, and working for an insurance company. With each of these jobs she found a new challenge, but became bored very quickly. “I was in my mid-twenties and had only gone to community college. I was not a very good student in high school or in community college.” But, when she was working for the insurance company she realized she needed to go back to college and complete a four year degree:

But I still had no idea what I wanted to be. I thought I wanted to be, of all things, a corporate executive, like a CEO which is so not me, but at the time I thought, yea, I could totally see me doing that. So I took one more business course at the University of Buffalo and decided, yea, that's not going to be it for me, and I'm really not the business person.

During this time, one of her sisters suggested that she should consider teaching, but Marie’s response was, “no way, I hate teaching, I hate school, I don’t remember anything…I feel like I didn’t learn anything.” It was this same sister who helped her to realize that those were the very reasons why she should become a teacher – because she could teach from the perspective of being a student who did not perform well academically, and knowing what she did not like about school, she could help students who might feel the same to see their potential. “That appealed to me. She [her sister] only said it once…and I thought, so I would be in charge, and I could be the teacher I wanted
to be and I could maybe make a difference for kids.” This advice and support, along with her love of children, sustained her as she completed Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees: “I finished my four year degree and they didn't have a degree in education so I got one in sociology, which I also really loved and then I got my master's in like a year and a half.”

**Structured style.** The first challenge that Marie faced after completing her degree was finding a teaching position. She completed her degree in December, so she worked as a substitute teacher in New York State where she lived for the remainder of that school year. Then, she applied to seventy-two school districts noting, “Back then it was all typing your letters, sending your letters, making the phone calls… and I kept track of everything. I kept all the paperwork because I was so proud of how hard I worked.” That work resulted in two interviews, one of which was in the mid-Atlantic region. She made the eight hour drive to her first professional interview. “It was a really hot day and I was wearing my sister’s not-well-fitting peach-colored suit.” The principal that she interviewed with told her “the interview went well, but not to be surprised if I didn't get called right away because there were about a thousand applicants for every job, and I had decided to make it a positive thing.” She turned the trip into a small vacation and did some sightseeing and hiking in the area before making the return journey home. As soon as she made it back to upstate New York, she was invited on another interview in the same school district. Marie said that the second interview also went well, but “I was his second choice and he picked a gentleman and you know, I thought, okay...well, at least I've gotten two interviews under my belt.” The principal called her back and said, “The gentleman chose a different job and my opportunity opened up, in which case, I jumped
on it.” While she had her heart set on teaching kindergarten, this job was for a fifth grade position and she thought, “I'll figure it out”...and ended up loving fifth grade. Marie taught fifth grade at Summit Elementary with the Frisco County Public Schools for five years.

**Social competence.** Marie formed a close bond with the principal at Summit Elementary, and when he announced his retirement, she decided to pursue a job in a neighboring school district, Centre County Public Schools. There, at Pattee Elementary, she was given a class of thirty fifth-graders. Her students included children who were emotionally disturbed, learning disabled, gifted and talented, and “the average bear,” making it a challenging year for Marie. That was also the point at which she recognized that she was susceptible to being a part of the statistics that represent the large number of teachers who leave the professional early in their career. She said that when she began to focus on how taxing and emotionally draining her job was, she knew that she needed to give herself a break or she would likely abandon teaching permanently:

> You know it's funny, you hear about teachers sometimes only lasting five years...that was the point where I thought, I don't know if I can do this forever because it's so taxing...I love the teaching part, but the emotional...I get way too involved with my kids.

At that time Marie was newly engaged, and after one year at Pattee Elementary, she decided to take a break from teaching.

**Family cohesion.** Marie was out of the profession for two years, and during that time she got married, had a child, and worked for a restaurant company. Marie said that
because she likes “challenges and new things,” this was a positive change for her. But after her child was born, she decided that it was time to go back and see if she could “still teach.”

It's a perfect job for being a mom and all of my passion was still there and I was rejuvenated. So where I left kind of right when I probably should have because I didn't ever get burned out, but I was feeling it was coming…and I still feel rejuvenated and still feel positive. I think that's what kept me here so long.

Two years later she moved to another neighboring school district, Ennisville Public Schools, and has been there for the past 12 years. During that time she has taught first, third, and fourth grades, and was also a math interventionist at Hyattsburg Elementary. Marie also completed a reading specialist endorsement, and this year she moved to the division’s Intermediate School, Sierra, where she is teaching sixth grade language arts. The following section describes Marie’s goals, agentic beliefs, and emotions through the challenges she has faced and her responses to those adversities.

**Goals.** Marie has both short and long term professional goals. The following data will show that her short term goals change depending on her current teaching assignment, but her core, long term goal of positively influencing uninterested and under-achieving students, has remained constant throughout her career. Those goals are described next.

**Short term goals.** During the interview, Marie acknowledged that she must be willing to adapt her short term goals to whatever teaching challenge in which she finds herself. As she said, “It’s important for me to be willing to reset my short term goals each time I move schools or grade levels…and this includes learning a new curriculum and
understanding the developmental level, both cognitively and emotionally, of that age group."

*Changing grade levels and schools.* When she joined Ennisville Public Schools she was given a fifth grade position and remained there for three years. When fifth grade students were moved to the new intermediate school, she found herself in the position of either moving to the new school, or teaching a different grade level. Because her own children were just beginning elementary school, she decided to stay and teach first grade. Marie ended up teaching first grade for five years and said it was “a big eye opener because they don't know how to read...and I'm thinking, I don't know how to teach them how to read.” At that time, her short term goal was to become proficient at teaching children to read. She stated, “I figured it out pretty quickly…and I loved the moment that they learned how to read. Unfortunately for a lot of them it didn't happen until spring, so I'd be panicking, and then they'd get there.”

Marie then moved to fourth grade. “At that point I was ready to go back to the older kids.” Again, she reset her short term goal to learn the curriculum and understand the emotional and cognitive needs of her students. However, when Marie was asked to go to third grade, she “wasn’t really that excited about it,” but found an incentive in being promised that if she liked her class, she could loop to fourth grade with them. She offered, “I wasn’t really excited about it because I had just gotten fourth grade. So I went to third grade, and I only taught that for one year, and it was my least favorite grade level.” Marie explained that it was her least favorite because “developmentally, they're not ready for the things we're expecting them to do.” So, “in a way,” she explained, “I
was meeting my goal of understanding my students cognitively and emotionally, but I
didn’t like what I found.” Marie was able to loop to fourth grade with that class, but at the
end of that year, the principal wanted to move her back to third grade. This created a
conflict for Marie because, “what I found by pursuing my short term goal was not aligned
with what I believe is best for children. It was also too many changes every single year,
so I took the math interventionists job thinking, I like teaching math, and I really liked
that.” Marie held that position for two years before accepting a job this year at the
intermediate school teaching sixth grade language arts.

*Immediate short term goal.* Marie described an immediate short term goal as to
reach a “comfort level” with the sixth grade language arts curriculum she is currently
teaching and to “get everything in and the whole timing of everything” she needs to
teach:

> How I do it is I kind of figure that out as I go along. I don’t think I can plan that
ahead, but I’m still struggling with, you know, I don’t really want to teach this
that way, but I need to hurry up and catch up to this. So the whole timing and the
knowledge of the curriculum is a short term goal. I’m sure that won’t happen until
the end of the school year, but that’s okay.

In this sixth grade language arts position, Marie describes another short term goal
of getting “my students excited about reading and writing and that’s pretty much the
bottom line… if they don't get hooked on reading and they don't learn to be a decent
writer...everything is a struggle, forever...so my job can be stressful.” She went on to
explain that much of this stress is related to the lack of autonomy:
All the other things come into play and you have to write LFS [Learning Focused Schools] plans and you have to use Springboard. If somebody tells me I have to do it a certain way, I will conform and do it that way, but when I'm not being forced to do it in a different way, I do what I think is best, and it's all for the students and that's part of my frustration...you know, everything is touted in the name of the best thing for our students, but it's not true and nobody is really thinking about our students or our population.

Marie went on to explain that “conforming” does not mean “sacrificing her goals.” With experience she has learned to “work within the confines of what is expected” while remaining steadfast in pursuit of her goals.

**Long term goal.** Marie has one clearly defined core teaching goal that she describes as “reaching children who represent the under-achieving and uninterested student that I once was.”

**Challenges to long term goal.** Marie’s long term goal is often threatened by the student’s conduct and attitude:

I think the biggest challenge of teaching where I am right now, and also just today in general, is the kid’s behavior and their lack of desire to learn. I’m generally enthusiastic and optimistic about reaching my goal though. I really want my students to love learning. I even have that in my classroom...love learning and be kind. I like setting up a community where we are going to succeed and we're going to support each other.
Marie said that her core goal is also sometimes threatened by what she describes as a “lack of autonomy:”

The least rewarding and the least enjoyable part of my job is knowing what would be right for me to do as a teacher and knowing that I'm expected to do things that I don't necessarily agree are beneficial for my students. So, following a book the way they want me to, you know, a teacher manual the way they want me to, or doing LFS [Learning Focused Schools] plans exactly the way they want me to do. I don't think that's going to make me a great teacher. It will help remind me that I'm not good at closure and I really need to make sure I include that, and I'm always wanting to get better, but it hinders good teachers from doing what they know is right.

Marie added that although these things frustrate her, she tries to “find a balance between what administrators want me to do and what I think is best for the students.”

*Student bonds.* Marie acknowledged multiple times during the interview that she uses her own journey as a young student as a source of resilience for believing that she can help her students to succeed.

When I connect with a student...so it might be a student who hates reading and I finally see their interest in a book...or a student who maybe has really low self-esteem that I can help build up...and there's plenty of them...just, you know, my thing is from my own experience, they're never going to be able to be like I was in my mid-thirties and say...no one ever told me I was smart, because I tell them all the time. Like, you know, maybe reading isn't your thing, but you can get good at
it. But, I know you're a great basketball player and I know you're smart in math, and so that's probably one of...I get way too emotionally attached. But, that whole self-esteem thing is huge. And if you look at the kids we have the most behavior issues with, it's the kids who are reluctant readers. They don't really like to write, and it's because they don't feel they can do it.

**Perception of self.** When asked to describe herself as a teacher, Marie said that “the first words that come to mind are caring and, hopefully, motivational. I don't know if I am. I mean I think I am for some students, but I think being caring goes much further than just the day-to-day routine.” But, this all “takes a toll” and Marie admits that she is emotionally drained at the end of many days, but that she loves teaching and still has “lots to learn.” Regardless of how taxing some days are, when asked if these days ever threaten her core goal, she was quick to say, “No, never my core personal goal.”

**Altruistic roots.** In just a few minutes of talking with Marie about her teaching career, it was evident that her career has deep altruistic roots. She said that no matter what challenges she faces, she just has to remind herself that “I'm really just here for the kids. And when they know they’re in a supportive environment, they will succeed.”

Marie said that one of first steps to setting up a supportive environment is recognizing that each person is an individual. She learned about the importance of relationships her first year of teaching when she had a student whose twin brother was in the classroom down the hall and who was the child who always received a great deal of recognition:
I didn't see her as a twin, I saw her as her own person and her parents told me that was her best year ever because she wasn't compared to her older sister or her brother, the twin. And because she did very well in school that year, she found her voice. She wrote and we stayed in touch...she actually came to my wedding with three other students from that year because we just stayed in touch, and now, she is a teacher. She gives me the credit for that, which I'm only part of that, but she said I taught her what a good teacher is and so she often lets me know that. She's kept in touch with me all along the way...like, you know, I'm still going to be a teacher and I'm going to teach this and I can't wait, and I want to be just like you. For Marie, if just one student feels this way, then all the challenges and stress along the way have been worth it. “Every day I tell myself, I'm doing this for them [the students], and the bottom line is that they are what matters...even if I just reach that one little Marie...it’s what is best for them.”

*Student success.* While Marie appears to be consistent in always trying to achieve her goals, she explained that the real reward in teaching for her is the students and seeing them “get the connection.” She also found a way to have an influence on students at her school beyond those in her classroom by creating a learning garden for any interested class to use. The students are responsible for planting, tending the garden throughout the growth process, and then harvesting the vegetables. “I think doing the garden was a lasting contribution to the school.” While this is not a unique idea, Marie is proud that she developed the learning garden at her school. She said, “The students love to get their hands dirty and take such pride in pulling a tomato from a vine that they planted.”
says the students were always so engaged when she took them to the garden for a science lesson. Marie added that she is hopeful that there will always be teachers who are interested in taking their students to the garden to learn, and in this way, she will have made a lasting imprint on her school.

*Goal alignment.* When asked about the importance of her personal goals being aligned with those of the school where she works, Marie responded by saying:

It's important enough to me that last year I met with several people on the school board and in central office to discuss my concerns and I didn't get any response other than...they listened. And I battle with that every day of knowing my personal goals for teaching and for meeting my students’ needs and my children's needs - my own children’s needs - are not in alignment with this particular school system.

This was so important for Marie that last year she and her husband “talked about moving because nobody wants to hear it, and I at least can say that I tried.”

*Goal perseverance.* When asked if she ever considered abandoning her goals, Marie responded by saying, “not my goals, I will not give up on my goals. I've considered leaving teaching because I feel sometimes feel like I'm fighting a losing battle.” She added that she also feels a social responsibility to speak for those who cannot or will not voice their concerns in support of students. “All the people that I know that are in the same boat as me, all of my colleagues, are afraid to voice their concern.” Marie believes that because she is in the classroom every day, her ideas about what is best for students should be heard. She admits to feeling a great deal of frustration because:
The people that can make the changes are not listening. I feel like I'm fighting a losing battle because nobody wants to hear me, and when I'm brave and I get up and I read a letter to the superintendent... nothing happens.

Marie added that she knows she could get another job, but the simple truth is that she loves teaching.

Dealing with frustration. When asked how she deals with the frustrations that she has experienced during her teaching career, Marie indicated that she has a number of ways:

I have to take it day-by-day. Sometimes I cry and say I want to quit, and other days I focus on the student who says, ‘This is my favorite book!’ I exercise regularly with friends and that has helped me tremendously. I also go to therapy to help me work out my issues and frustrations.

Marie also said that she just likes to talk about the teaching profession with any willing listener because that is also helpful to her. She stated, “It is what I do, it is what I know, it is what I love. I would also encourage young people to consider teaching because if they don’t, what does that leave for our future?”

Summary. Marie’s short term goals include being flexible and adapting to her current teaching situation by becoming proficient in the curriculum and developing an understanding of the student’s cognitive and emotional levels, as well as getting her students excited about learning. Her core goal is to reach under-achieving students. The role that her capability and context beliefs have played in achieving those goals are explained in the following section.
**Personal agency beliefs.** Personal agency beliefs are comprised of capability beliefs, or a person’s expectations of achieving a goal, and context beliefs, which are person’s expectancy about whether or not their work environment will support or hinder the pursuit of goals (Ford & Smith, 2007). Six themes emerged in Marie’s responses to the questions intended to elicit her personal agency beliefs. These themes include challenging parents, student success, and contextual expectations versus personal beliefs, professional collaboration, emotions, and student relationships.

Marie has a deep sense of her own personal ability as a teacher, yet readily admits to the need for collegial, familial, and institutional safety nets, as well as the need to be a lifelong learner. “I don't think you ever master anything in teaching,” but according to Marie, it is important to get to a comfort level with the curriculum you’re teaching and the timing of your lessons. “I kind of figure it out as I go along in my new position.” Marie admits that she struggles with the way she wants to teach and the speed with which she has to cover the material. Despite that, she’s hopeful that she will be able to achieve her short term goal of mastering her new curriculum by the end of the school year.

**Challenging parents.** Marie believes that one of the greatest challenges to achieving her goals has come from unwarranted adversity from parents:

I had one girl in particular who I had no problems with. She was not a shining star, top of the class or anything, but she was a nice girl. She worked fairly hard when she wanted to. She wasn't a behavior issue. But, for some reason the mom didn't like me and kept writing me notes saying like, my daughter feels like you don't like her; she says you're always picking other girls to do things.
For Marie, this caused her to second-guess her goals in regard to her students and question what the priority of schools should be:

I would never want a student to have hurt feelings, but I would think to myself that the whole thing was very bizarre because she [the student] came in every day and hugged me. I picked other kids to do stuff, but I picked her too. So, it was like the mom was on a mission.

During this time, Marie also experienced a personal loss through a miscarriage. She knew that this student’s mother was aware of the circumstances, and forewarned her principal that if it was brought up in a pending meeting that she would leave the meeting:

We had meeting, after meeting, after meeting...the principal always had to be there...the dad would come...and sure enough, at the next meeting the mother said, I know you had a miscarriage…I picked up my stuff and I walked out...and the principal came to me later and he said, that was really unprofessional.

Marie explained that in this circumstance she “did not feel supported by her administrator,” and this in turn caused her to further question her goals and continually ask herself what she was trying to accomplish, why she was pursuing those goals, and was the emotional toll worth it? She admitted that when she found out the issue was going to mediation, she was apprehensive:

A lady came from the division and it was actually awesome. She asked the mom, what is it that Marie is doing that is affecting your daughter's academic success? The mom complained about the things I’ve already mentioned and the mediator said, I understand that, but what is Marie doing that is affecting your daughter’s
academic success? And she just kept asking that and asking that and asking that...and finally she said, alright, I think this is done. We will not be talking about this again, this is resolved. It is over.

Marie confessed, “This was one of the most challenging situations of my career.”

Ultimately, this served to strengthen her convictions and goals as a teacher. “I actually had another teacher who offered to give me money for a lawyer, but I said no. I haven’t done anything wrong. I don’t need a lawyer. I was going to stand by my convictions and not waver in my goals.”

**Student success.** Marie describes herself as a generally optimistic person, but shared that this year she is somewhat uncertain about reaching her goals because she is at a different school, teaching a different grade level, and working with a new curriculum. She added that if she is not able to obtain her goals this year that at least she is certain she would be able to justify the reasons:

I’m optimistic about my students succeeding, but I’m also very confident that if someone came in my room and said, you didn’t do this or these three kids didn’t pass, I could say, well, this one just had a relative die, this one came in with a cold, and that one hadn't slept the night before. I guess my confidence is in knowing my students, because those relationships are so important, and that leads me to be optimistic about their success.

Marie prides herself on being attuned to her students, so if they come into school and are not quite themselves, she is going to do her best to find out what the issue might be. To her, knowing her students on both a personal and academic level is essential to helping
them succeed. When the students reach their goals, the effect is that Marie does too. As she stated,

I think the most important thing is to teach them to love learning and how powerful that is. Depending on the baggage they bring, their level of confidence, and the support they have outside of school – wanting to learn can often lead to their success, and then I feel as though I’ve accomplished what I set out to do.”

Marie is honest with her students about her own education because she knows what it is like to tell a teacher she is not interested in the book, when really by the time she would get to the bottom of the page she had no idea what she had read. It took her until she took her first sociology class in college to care and want to read and learn more. “I want my students to feel that now,” she said. She added that she wrote a quote on the board about people who read live a thousand lives and people who do not read live just one. She asked the students what they thought the meaning of that quote was:

They're so funny. They're like, I don't know, how can you live a thousand lives? But, then some of them got it. And they were, like, because when you're reading you can be this character, you can be in this world, you can be here, you can be there, you can totally close off the rest of the world and I said, ‘exactly!’ And those of you who haven't given that a chance yet, when you do, your whole world is going to change.

Marie believes that she can help her students to accomplish that because she is never going to stop trying. “I do think I'm going to reach that goal because I keep showing them good books and you know, I think I told you, I'm even doing stuff with like, picture
books, and we keep going back to them and they just love it.” For Marie, much of her personal optimism comes from bolstering the self-esteem of her students. She stated, “It's not about me being successful. I'm successful when they're successful, and seeing them feel good about what they’ve done or can do, makes me optimistic about the future.”

**Contextual expectations versus personal beliefs.** Marie is continually evaluating her pedagogy and explained that the expectations within her current teaching context are sometimes in conflict with what she believes is necessary for her goals to be attainable. She elaborated on the lesson plans that are required by her school division as an example and confessed that she is sometimes uncertain if she will even teach the lesson the way it was written, when she said, “These are my [lesson] plans, they're not really what I want to do, you know. Like I drive to school and say, you know what I'm going to do today, it's not on any plan.” It is a struggle for Marie to reconcile the written plan and what she wants to do with her students. “I’m continually trying to figure out what I’m doing and thinking about my teaching. I drive to school and say, you know what, I want to do this today, but then, oh, it's not in the plan I turned in.” When she was hired for this position the administrator told her:

> I am all about you. You know how to teach, so I'm trusting that you know how to teach and that you're going to teach the best way you know, and that your kids are going to learn a lot, and they're going to learn what they need. And it may be using the Springboard; it may be using a lot of the Springboard. I'm not going to tell you what to do. That's why I love being over there. I have a good principal.
For Marie, this confidence and encouragement from her principal helped her to feel “optimistic because I really like where I'm at.” Also:

I’m not afraid of change and I feel like five years is my thing. After five years of first grade, I thought, okay, I’ve mastered it as much as I can...like I’ve found my groove and I’ve got it, now I'm ready for my next challenge and I know not everyone is like that. But for people like me, it gives me an opportunity like, oh, this is open, I want to try that, and then I do that for five years. I'm hoping that I'll love sixth grade and I'll stay there for 15 more years, but who knows.

Professional collaboration. During the interview it became clear that Marie also embraces help from colleagues in refining her pedagogy and explained that an English as a second language specialist and a learning disabled specialist helped her to monitor her teaching and to make adjustments based on what she learned from them:

She helped me with writing. She would come in and she had great ideas. I would start something and then she'd come up and make it better; like I'm going to use this color marker because that helps them realize that this is different...and I'd think, duh...or Jane would say, you know I was thinking, and I would have done it this way, and I’d be like, thank you, because you’re right; that’s a whole other way to do it.

Marie believes that continual monitoring is an essential part of teaching, and that being open to listening to the ideas of colleagues has the potential to make a person a better teacher:
I will never be the best. I guess I can be the best teacher I can be, but I can always get better...that’s why I like when teachers come in and lend their hand because, it’s like, oh my gosh, you’re so right.

Marie’s peers did see her as the best, and an event that really caused her to think about her goals and teaching career was when she was named the top teacher in the division, a recognition that has had a lasting impact on her. She worries that she does not fall victim to what she has seen in others who have won this particular award. She stated, “Some of them have really just declined since then and their passion is gone, and I think, ‘I hope that doesn’t happen to me because I never did what I did to earn an award.’”

Shortly after winning the award, Marie took the position as a math interventionist and that made her feel as though she was letting herself down because she was not in a position to do everything she could for the students. As an interventionist she did not have a single group of students for the entire year, but rather pulled small groups of students to work with from many classrooms across different grade levels who were struggling in math. She explained that a lot of the other specialists she knows like the job because it is less stressful than being a regular classroom teacher. While Marie stated, “I do feel rejuvenated again,” she could not justify her reasons for becoming a teacher, her reasons for remaining in the profession, or her goals as a teacher, with what she was asked to do in that position.

**Emotions.** Emotions can play an important role in prompting a person to want to accomplish a goal. Marie believes that for her, the lack of support from the school district
and the lack of autonomy at the building level have actually served to sustain her passion for teaching:

What always comes to my mind are the students. I feel like there are students who still need me…not needed because I'm better or more important, but just because I really do care and some teachers don't care as much, it's not their passion. I don't know why they're teaching...some of them.

In many ways, it appears that the more challenges that are put in Marie’s way, the more determined she is to “channel those emotions into being the best teacher I can be for my students.”

Marie credits her family for enabling her to navigate the sometimes emotional turmoil of teaching. She stated, “My family has always been very supportive and they know I work hard.” She said that both of her sons have told her that she is a great teacher, and when she asked how they could possibly know that, each responded by telling her that they see how hard she works and how much she cares. She shared that her sons said something like, “We know that you sit at home and do all this planning, and we know that you get upset when your kids don’t do well or they’re misbehaving, because you care.” Marie added, “it makes me feel good that they are able to recognize this.”

**Student relationships.** For Marie, relationships are one of the most important reasons that she has chosen to remain in the teaching profession, and one of the most important aspects of her job is forming relationships with her students:

I love being a teacher and that feeling of like, yeah, they drove me crazy today, but I like them and I know they can do better and they just were goofballs. So you
know, like that's not a bad thing, it's a bad day. I tell them, I go home and I think about you guys. I think about what happened to this kid today. This is not his usual behavior, or you know, I'm worried about her because she doesn't seem herself lately, or you know, I'm going to have to tell this kid he failed his writing, and it kind of stays with you always, even if you don't bring your homework home, you still bring your kids home with you.

Marie said that she believes the reason she so often takes her students home with her is because she takes the time to get to know each of them and to forge a relationship that she hopes is equally as strong for them.

There are some students, though, who have remained with Marie long after they moved onto the next grade level. For her, these are often the students who had special needs or stood out for reasons that were not necessarily positive. One particular student was a child that she taught for two years when she looped with her class from third to fourth grade. She described him as a good kid and a hard worker in third grade, but then in fourth grade he suddenly became “a jerk.” She immediately knew that something was wrong and when she asked him what was going on he shared with her that his dad was in jail.” Marie told him:

I know you’re only nine, but probably one of the most important lessons for you to learn right now is that you can’t control what your parents do or what happens to them, because they’re adults and you’re a child. The only thing you have control over right now is yourself, and what you can control in your life right now is getting a good education.
Marie was rubbing the goosebumps on her arm as she was telling the story. On Mother’s Day, he gave her a note that said, “thank you for helping me learn how important learning is.” Marie has continued to follow this student’s academic career and was beaming when she reported that he is now in seventh grade, and according to all of his teachers, “he’s doing great and has actually become a leader.”

**Summary.** Marie has a strong, positive sense of her ability as a teacher, despite the challenging contextual issues she has faced. For her, difficult parents, student success, contextual expectations versus personal beliefs, professional collaboration, emotions, and student relationships have all contributed to her personal capability and context beliefs. The role that emotions have played in Marie’s professional life will be explored in detail in the following section.

**Emotions.** According to Ford (1992), emotions are motivational processes that provide an individual with evaluative information that can be helpful in responding to both problems and opportunities. Through the interview questions that pertained to emotions, five themes emerged including student bonds, personal doubt, support, emotional control, and championing a cause.

**Student bonds.** While most teachers have a new set of students each year, Marie had one of her students three different years - as a first grader, and then again in third and fourth grades when she looped with her students. She described this student as a “mess,” explaining that he had ADHD and a mother who would experiment with medicine to combat the symptoms “when she felt like it.” When Marie had the student in third grade he was sucking his thumb, and in fourth grade he was hiding his head in order to suck his
thump. Marie added that he was constantly interrupting the class and that no one liked him. When she stated “I loved him and he knew it and his mother knew it, so he was thrilled that he was with me because I was not like... well, any other teacher would have ripped him apart.” Marie said that she does not mean to criticize other teachers who had trouble dealing with him because he did make it difficult to remain focused on goals. Furthermore, “you had to be willing to explore alternatives in order to help a child with challenges such as his.” Fortunately, when he was in fourth grade his mother got him on medication and “this kid totally turned around, like as smart as can be. He became a leader, he became a helper, and he was so amazing. It broke my heart because I thought, he could have had that since first grade.” For Marie, the important thing is that “he got there” and “his peers now see him as a great kid.” Marie confessed that students such the young man described here take an emotional toll on her, but they are also the ones that make her thankful she became a teacher.

**Personal doubt.** One of Marie’s worst emotional experiences as a teacher was the situation with the mother (described under Personal Agency Beliefs) who made her “doubt everything, even though I knew I was in the right.” Marie described another incident with a mother who called her one day to say her daughter was afraid to come to class because “she feels like you are accusing her of stealing something.” She told the mother that her daughter did lie to her. She reported, “I saw her sneaking out of my room one day and then noticed that something that belonged to another student that was sitting on my desk was missing.” Marie admits that it could have been hers, but when asked about it, the girl denied it. Later, Marie confronted her again and she responded by
saying, “do you really want to know the truth?” Marie’s response was “I wanted to know it the first time I asked.” While these encounters are emotionally draining, remaining true to her convictions and believing in herself has helped to sustain her. “No one wants to deal with parent issues, but it makes me feel more confident and optimistic that I will be able to handle any other parent issues that might happen in the future.”

**Support.** For Marie, being in touch with her own emotional needs is an important part of being a teacher. “You know, I actually go to therapy, and therapy is my rock.” Her husband was not very understanding when she would come home every day and talk about her students. But, recently, he became a teacher and now “I can’t shut him up.” Jokingly she told him, “Welcome to my world, so now you understand why I’m the lunatic that I am.” Therapy is important to Marie because it gives her someone to talk to who can tell her she is overreacting or that she is allowing a situation to encroach on her feelings of confidence or security:

> I’m a self-helper and I want to be a good person and that’s why I go to therapy. It helps me keep things in check and a therapist doesn’t love me like my husband. They can help me to see the why part of my feelings and they understand the frustration, and yea, it makes me feel better.

Marie noted that she thinks it is important for everyone to continually monitor their emotional well-being and to have someone to talk to. For her, it is helpful to have both sympathetic and objective listeners.
**Emotional control.** During the interview, Marie, indicated that it is also important to regulate your emotions because you can so easily let them impact the choices you make. As she explained:

I had a student that I had had for two years and he was very ED, but was in my room...probably should have been self-contained, but wasn't. And, I loved that boy. He saw his dad try to kill himself when he was three, his mom was bipolar, the parents were getting a divorce...you talk about anything and it had happened to this boy. He was the cutest, sweetest boy who just was a mess, and I really cared about him.

In fourth grade, his behavior escalated. According to Marie he would throw things or knock over his desk to take everything out. She said, “One day he really lost it and he ripped up the whole classroom. I had flower pots that we were going to make for mother's day and he slammed those down.” When things like this occurred, Marie would remove the other students from the classroom as quickly as possible, and then stay with him until someone such as the school counselor or an administrator got there. She continued, “But this particular time I just started to cry. He needed so much help. He had a teacher who cared, but that was about it. He needed psychiatric help. He needed a family who was supporting him.” Marie describes this as one of her worst teaching days. She said, “I went home and cried and went to bed early because I was depressed because I couldn’t help him.” In reflecting on this child, Marie acknowledges these situations have helped to make her more resilient because, while draining, she believes she has emerged as a teacher better equipped to deal with emotional experiences.
Championing a cause. As she has gained confidence during the course of her teaching career, Marie feels it is important to give a voice to those who are not comfortable expressing themselves. She described a number of colleagues who share her concerns about the direction of the school division, and in particular, the lack of autonomy that its teachers experience. Many of them, who give her constant support are “too afraid to say something,” but as she has gotten older and gained experience, she feels “braver:”

I’m a totally different person than when I first started. You know, you doubt everything. I’m certainly not cocky, but I'm confident that I know what I'm doing is better than what they're telling me I have to do, but they don’t want to hear me say that. So, when I go to meetings and say, school is not fun anymore, and then I realize that didn't sound professional enough. But, everybody there knows what I mean, and she [the superintendent] pooh poohs me and says, you're just, you're a teacher. And I say no, actually I'm a parent of three of her students and I'm a taxpayer. And then she stopped calling on me.

Marie said she will never stop advocating what she believes is best for her students, even if it means raising the ire of the superintendent.

Summary. Marie readily admits that teaching is an “emotional job.” She cares deeply about her students and is equally as concerned with a child’s emotional wellbeing as she is with his or her academic performance. This at times leaves Marie with powerful emotions such as joy and satisfaction, or anger and frustration that she must contend with.
**Thriving with Social Purpose.** Ford (1992) argues that the most effective approach to optimal functioning is through the *integrated amplification* of motivational components known as Thriving with Social Purpose, and includes an active approach to goals, personal optimism and mindful tenacity that influence personal agency beliefs, and emotional wisdom. Applying these etic to Marie’s case suggests that she is Thriving with Social Purpose.

**Active approach to goals.** According to Ford and Smith (2007), people who view challenges and uncertainty as possibilities rather than threats are more likely to develop competence. This active approach to promoting engagement while working toward self-improvement includes a clear understanding of core personal goals, the ability to remain focused on those goals, willingness to explore alternatives and take risks, and the ability to not become hindered by evaluative thoughts or influenced by circumstances out of a person’s control (Ford & Smith, 2007). Marie describes her short term goals as flexible and changing depending on the context, but she is unwavering in her core goal of reaching children who are under-achieving and uninterested.

Marie stated that she believes she is continually evolving and that it is important to look at the challenges of her latest teaching as an opportunity for her to improve her teaching skills:

I think I take an active approach to my goals. For instance, my goal this year is to turn students on to reading great books. I will accomplish this by making lit circles the first thing I do each day, after language review and vocab lessons, before I teach the lessons mandated. Recently the entire sixth grade did a novel
study and my students were so engaged. One student who had been sent to the office asked if he could come to my class because ‘we're doing something very important that I can't miss.’ It was the novel. I read it to those students who wouldn't be successful on their own and allowed the other students to work independently in the pod. The experience has confirmed for me that exposing the students to great books without tearing apart the book each and every day is the best way I can get them to take ownership of their reading. We’ll start lit circles when we return from the break. The students are so excited.

For Marie, this was a new approach to teaching reading because she recognized she needed to find an alternative way of reaching her non-readers. “It was a risk, but I think it’s going to pay off.” While Marie’s short term goals often take different trajectories, her core goal remains constant, as is her optimism that she is able to accomplish them.

**Personal optimism.** According to Ford and Smith (2007) personal optimism, or positive expectancies grounded in reality, is an important component in developing self-trust in one’s ability to work toward personal goals with an appropriate amount of effort. In the case of Marie, this characteristic was revealed through the following comment:

I think I’m usually optimistic about teaching and my future as an educator.

Having this be my first year with a new grade level and school, I feel as if I'm not doing as much as I could. I've decided to balance my personal life and work life more than in the past. Because of this commitment, I don't always work as hard as I have in the past. However, I am reminded that when students are actively engaged, it's not extra work for the teacher. They do the work with my guidance,
which adds to their learning. When we get further into lit circles, the students can
choose their books. I will provide the focus of questioning, but the students will
produce the work.

With her focus on student engagement, Marie is hopeful that her students will succeed
this year and that she will have taken another step toward her core goal of reaching “all
the little Maries.”

**Mindful tenacity.** Mindful tenacity is the continual monitoring of the conditions
of the context, supports, and the feedback needed to progress toward a goal. According to
Ford and Smith (2007), this monitoring function is important because persistence in less
than optimal conditions includes being able to find alternative pathways in which to work
toward personal goals. This characteristic was disclosed through the following statement:

I will ‘play the game’ to a minimum, if necessary, but I will do what I know
works. It's not solely using the text the school division has provided. I will
incorporate what is related to our standards of learning while using rich novels
and plenty of time to read. My unit assessments have improved and I think one
reason is because the students are enjoying what we're learning, and therefore put
value on my class. When I focus on the textbook and the many ‘rigorous’ writing
activities, we lose the time to be creative and read great books. Writing tied into
the books they're reading makes more sense.

Marie added that she is constantly “thinking about my teaching” and monitoring the
context in which she works. At the same time, she is very empathetic and readily admits
that she gets “emotionally involved” with her students.
**Emotional wisdom.** Emotions play an important role in energizing the motivational system. Emotions support an active approach to goal orientation and facilitate growth in personal optimism and social support (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Emotional wisdom includes reflective understanding, empathy, and emotional regulation, and is dependent upon an individual’s functioning and context (Takahashi & Overton, 2002). According to Ford and Smith (2007), emotions play an important role in Thriving with Social Purpose, and emotional wisdom is dependent upon context and a person’s current circumstances of functioning. Empathy, in particular, represents a pattern of amplification that focuses on aligning goals with others, and is important for promoting effective functioning that involves an individual’s identity and how he or she relates to others (Ford & Smith, 2007). Marie recounts how she manages her emotions to build her resilience as a teacher:

I get way too emotionally attached to some students. When I know they lack self-confidence, have a challenging home life, or struggle with learning, I feel for them. One special needs student in my class has typically expected to get so much support that he rarely tries on his own. I know him from Hyattsburg Elementary, so he's been recently recognizing my efforts to help him take on the learning process with minimal support. He has flourished. He still has read aloud for everything, but he seeks out the support he needs to accomplish the work he's capable of. It took twelve weeks to get there, but it was well worth the persistence on my part. We've connected enough that he trusts me to help him succeed. He prefers me to his case manager, who has very little empathy for him.
Marie has a great deal of empathy for any student who struggles, whether it is academically, emotionally, or from adverse circumstances outside of school, and is quick to form a bond with those students. While some of this attachment may be attributed to her personal journey through school, she also shared her feelings about the importance that a commitment to social responsibility plays in her teaching.

**Social purpose.** According to Ryff and Singer (2002) social purpose is widely regarded as an essential component of optimal living and includes belongingness, social responsibility, equity, and resource provision (Ford & Smith, 2007). Social purpose enables people to experience life differently with the potential for transformative behavior that can lead to positive results that have significant meaning (Ford & Smith, 2007).

I want to build relationships with the community, with students and their parents. By supporting after school activities, hosting potlucks and teas, building a school garden, I enjoy becoming a positive influence in the community we live in. I also hope that with modeling and guidance, I can help children and their families see the value of such connections with other community members. This is as important to me as the teaching component.

For Marie, the social responsibility of teaching is as significant as the academic part of her job. She stated that the components of social responsibility have “influenced my teaching and given meaning to my work.” Importantly, finding meaning in life is a principal byproduct of Thriving with Social Purpose.
**Life meaning.** Life meaning is a feeling that a person gets when he or she believes that their life makes sense, has purpose, and is worthwhile, and those who experience these feelings are more positive, hopeful, and resilient in difficult times (Ford & Smith, n.d.). Marie has demonstrated adaptability to changes in her life and the challenging situations she has experienced throughout her career. She stated:

The reason I stay is I do still love teaching and I feel like I’m a good teacher.

When our division adopts a new program, it is often assumed on the parts of the decision makers that their new product can be made to fit each student. Or worse, each student can be made to fit with each new product or method. Educators know that isn't a reality. Although some educators who prefer not to "rock the boat" will try their best to make the method fit with their students and if all else fails, just move on under the directive of administrators, I refuse to work this way. I don't cause waves, but knowing I'm not doing what's best for my students when I have 20 nearly years of experience with students is unacceptable. I often close my door and do it the way that will get the best results.

In describing the ideal scenario in which to work, Marie said:

I would be teaching in a school, in a school system that believed that teachers are as unique as their students, and that they all have their strengths and their weaknesses. I would be treated as a professional. I feel like I used to be treated as a professional, but I don’t feel that anymore. And that my judgment would at least be considered. I would get to help make decisions, and I would get to advocate for my students. It would be a school system where the focus was truly the students,
and depending on the population - the population doesn’t even matter to me - I mean I don’t think I would want to teach at a school where everyone was perfect because it would be boring, but where there’s also consistency with discipline.

For Marie, the road to resilience was a personal journey where she relied more on outside therapy than familial support to sustain her in difficult times, saying that “therapy is my rock.” She is a self-described “self-helper” with a capacity to establish goals and then to make realistic “plans to carry them out.” She readily admits, however, that her commitment to the teaching profession is irrefutably linked to her ability to reach her goals. She explained that if she is not able to do so, “It will diminish my self-esteem because I pride myself on being a hard worker and accomplishing my goals.” Marie was quick to point out her own weaknesses saying, “I wish I was more of a disciplinarian; that’s a big weakness for me.” Yet, her own sense of self-efficacy was evident as she expressed confidence in her ability to make and achieve goals. She is a lifelong learner who thinks critically, yet is not afraid to accept assistance from colleagues. She averred, “When I had fourth grade GT, LD inclusion, it was probably one of the most successful years because I had a really strong LD and a really strong ESOL teacher, and together, we kicked butt.” Finally, during the course of her teaching career she has developed the capacity to manage her feelings and emotions. At times this has meant releasing her frustration through crying and at other times by listening to the objective views of a therapist. She allows herself the luxury of strong feelings, but also recognizes the value of reflecting as a means of reenergizing. Marie has gained courage and insight with
experience and this has helped her to persevere and overcome the adversity she has encountered in teaching. She noted:

I think having lived through many adverse events has made be able to better relate to my students. I have experienced divorced parents, abandonment of a father at age 5, gaining a step-dad, death of a step-father at age 18, and an alcoholic, suicidal mother, and an unstable sister. Overall, I feel my empathy for students going through challenging times is sincere and present.

An important derivative of Thriving with Social Purpose is Life Meaning (ref) and Marie readily acknowledges that her career has given meaning to her life and as a result, she is positive, hopeful, and resilient in difficult times. Marie has found both comfort and stability in her determination not to waver from her core goals, and is energized to continue in the teaching profession, even in arduous times. While Marie believes that being the best teacher she can possibly be will be a lifelong pursuit, she is engaged and committed to the process. Marie’s success is decidedly linked to her student’s success, and not only has she experienced positive outcomes, she has also been recognized by her peers and school division for her teaching.

“I felt empowered when I won the Agnes Meyer award because I got to give a speech at the convocation and I got to kind of tell my story about – I was that kid in the class who was really quiet, who’s not always performing to her best, but kind of slipping through the cracks because I don’t want anyone to see me – and I got to share that with the entire school division. It was empowering for me because I felt like I got to give a message to all the teachers that are kind of
getting burned out and forgetting why we do this. We’re doing this for the little Marie’s in our rooms that just need somebody to say, you can do more.”

Marie believes that she makes a difference in the lives of her students:

Knowing I have made a difference in some students’ lives is what keeps me going. Today I had every student improve on their Student Growth Assessment from the fall. That affirmation coupled with the success of getting many students paired with a great book, is a good start. My two neediest special education students have also connected with my enthusiasm for language arts and are finally finding success in a subject typically very frustrating for them.

Finally, for Marie, one of the hardest parts of teaching is letting them go at the end of the year because, she said, “What if no other teacher loves them as much as I do?”

Rachel

Rachel, a Caucasian female in her early thirties, has been teaching for eleven years. The first eight years of her career she taught in the Blue Ridge County Public Schools division, but moved to her current position at Hyattsburg Elementary, Ennisville Public Schools three years ago when she married. Her husband is also a teacher with Ennisville Public Schools, with a position at the division’s intermediate school.

Biography. Rachel grew up in upstate Pennsylvania and said she first knew she wanted to be a teacher when she was eight years old and in third grade:

I really looked up to my teacher. I was that kid that would stay after school and help her cause I lived close to my school. I was a kid that always did everything perfectly. All the rules and I'm still a rule follower. But, I always wanted to be
like her, and so I was very excited when my first job was a third grade teacher because I wanted to be just like her. Rachel added that she loves kids and that the part time jobs that she had throughout high school all involved working with children. She stated, “I worked as a summer recreation director so I could work with kids. I also babysat.”

**Perception of future.** Rachel attended a four year university in Pennsylvania where she received a Bachelor’s Degree in Education. Like Marie, getting her first job was more difficult than she anticipated. She said, “I was hoping I was one of those lucky people that got hired right away. But I'm from a small town, and so I was a substitute teacher for a year. That was okay, but I wanted my own classroom.” Rachel worked in any of five local school districts as a substitute, depending on her called her first:

- Some schools were five minutes away, but the furthest was about thirty to forty five minutes away. I did it every day because I was trying to get my foot in the door because I so badly wanted a job. I really thought within that year of being at those five different school districts, that somebody would hire me. And it never happened. There were openings. Even my own elementary school and my principal even said…he was my first grade teacher…and he was like it’s always so nice to have people come back. And he didn’t hire me.

After she stopped substituting, Rachel worked at the daycare center where she was a teacher of three year old children.
**Perception of self.** Rachel said, “I thought I never would move because I'm a homebody,” but she heard that some friends had easily gotten jobs in a state in the mid-Atlantic region, and decided to start looking for a job there:

I sent out tons and tons of resumes and packets of information to a lot of different random places. And then I went on the computer. I figured I'm like a little fish in a big sea. So I got on the computer and I went to just random schools that I could find and I emailed individual principals. I had a letter that I just kept emailing and I heard back from principals, a lot of them right away. And, ‘Hey, we have a job interview next week, would you like to come?’ Yes.”

Rachel interviewed and got a job “instantly” with Blue Ridge County Public Schools.

Rachel said that her one regret during the two years it took her to get her first teaching job was that she did not get a Master’s degree:

If I had known ahead of time that I was not going to get a job for two years, I would have just continued on with school. But I thought I was going to be one of the teachers to get a job and then I'm going to go back to school and they’re going to pay for it because that was like what I thought, and that’s not what it is.”

Rachel added that she is not concerned about getting her Master’s any time soon because, “I don’t think it’s going to make or break me.”

When asked how she would describe herself as a teacher, Rachel responded by saying “fun, loving, caring, and highly, highly dedicated:”

The fun part because the kids need to see that it's not just like military school, rigid. And I have humor. So I think it helps the kids because I can relate to them.
And you know we have moments where we laugh together and I think that's important because some rooms I feel like it's just strictly business and this is not military school. The kids need to enjoy being here. Number one. The loving part because I feel like I'm a very caring person. And I feel like a lot of these kids go home to parents who don't care. Siblings who don't care. I mean its reality. So I feel like some of the kids just know that you care and I tell them all the time, even if they do badly on a test. I am so proud of you. And don't worry about when you go home when your parents are mad at you because they don't understand how much you tried, and how much work that you put into it, and it's a lot of information you're being given. And if I was eight years old I may not pass the test. It’s a lot. So, just being that loving person that I would want someone to be to me. And then dedication. Why are you here? It's for the kids not for the money. We all know it’s not for the money and it’s not for the summer vacation because we get like no time anyway so I mean that's reality I mean the whole fun-loving and the dedication are words that really sum up who I am because I feel like I'm a fun person, I'm a loving person and I'm very dedicated to what I'm doing.

Rachel added that the most important thing for her is that she is able to make a difference in the lives of the children she teaches.

**Teaching challenges.** Rachel describes her current teaching position in fourth grade as being, “A lot of work” and the everyday responsibilities as being “overwhelming:”
You are the secretary. You are the nurse. You are the janitor. You are every job in this building, and one person. You have ups and downs with your children, depending on your behavior issues. But it's the outside work that I have to do…grading papers, lesson planning…and even though we plan as a team, we don't always have time to plan as a team. And we don't have time to talk about ideas or no time to share ideas. So therefore just everything outside of being here from eight to four makes the job stressful.

She explained that it’s not a job where you can just sit at your desk if you are having a bad day, but rather as one where, “You have to be on your A game every day.”

**Student success.** Rachel describes the most enjoyable aspect of teaching as seeing “the kids get it” and the pride that they have when that happens:

If they have that one day where the light bulb just turns on, it's like the most rewarding thing. That moment of success for them makes you feel so good. Or even when kids just want to be around you and they want to tell you their problems and they trust you. It just melts everything else away because it's just about that kid.

**Lack of positive reinforcement.** On the other hand, Rachel described the least rewarding part of teaching as the lack of feedback from administration:

Administration gives you no feedback about how you're doing. There's no positive reinforcement like you're doing a great job. Never once since I have been here have I ever been applauded for what I do. I know because I hear it from other people. They're [administrators] not on my case so I know that I'm doing a good
job and I know that they appreciate everything I'm doing. But you never get to hear it. And I think never getting to hear it, it's like a problem. She added that any type of positive reinforcement, even just a word in passing, would go a long way in making her feeling appreciated.

**Goals.** Rachel has both short and long term professional goals, both of which are very general. Her short term goal includes “getting through” each day, while her core goal is to continually improve her craft. Each of these goals is elaborated on next.

**Short term goal.** Rachel describes her short term goal as feeling good about her teaching as she progresses through the school year. She said, “I just take it day-to-day and think about what happened during the day and hope that I feel good about what happened. And then you look ahead, and if I get to Christmas and everything's good…” Most important to her immediate future is that she is able to “continue with what I'm doing:”

There are times when I feel like I want to be, for example, like a math specialist. But then it's hard because I look and see what they do as a job. I don't like the fact that they don't get to work with kids, and depending on what you're doing at that particular school, that could determine whether you're with kids or not with kids. You're the data person, and I'm just not interested in all that because I feel like it's going take away my passion for why I'm here. So that's why I cringe about even furthering my education.

Rachel went on to explain that she is afraid of getting pigeonholed because she has a particular degree. “Let's say I went to go get hired somewhere else, they know that's a
degree you have and they're more prone to say, hey, I need a math specialist and that's the job it’s going to be, right?”

*Personal goal.* Rachel also discussed her desire to have children of her own in the near future and said:

Part of me wants to be a stay home mom sometimes, but part of me never wants to leave what I'm doing now. I'm happy with what I'm doing. Do I get stressed out like everybody else? Absolutely. Do I want to cry some days like, oh my God, I can't do this anymore? Absolutely. But do I love what I do? Absolutely. Would I change what I do? Probably not.

Rachel added that she has never wanted to be anything other than a teacher and attributes this passion to her love for children and the influence of her third grade teacher.

*Empowerment.* Rachel said that she feels empowered to pursue her short term goal of having positive days with her students. She feels as though she can make professional choices because she does her job at all times to the best of her ability. “I know they're [administration] not going to question what I'm doing because they know I would have a very good reason why I’m doing certain things the way that I’m doing it.” Rachel added, “even though I question myself sometimes, I still know that no one’s breathing down my neck.”

*Long term goal.* Admitting that it is general, Rachel indicated that her core goal is “to be better at what I'm doing” and to “continue learning.” She said, “I know that there are things I need to improve.” Just recently she requested a meeting with the school’s reading specialist and told her:
Hey, I've been doing guided reading for ten years, but I know that I can be so much better because I know that there are so many things that I probably could be doing. And I think once again it just comes with time and with resources from other people and seeing other people, you know model those for me,

Rachel added that in this way she needs to learn much in the same way that her students learn – she needs to be taught.

*Collegial support.* Rachel added that she feels fortunate because she is surrounded by people “that are excellent resources. I know those people would be more than willing to help, but due to time and everyone's busy schedules, it's very hard.”

Rachel said that she wants to be one of those teachers “who has just got it:” They can just go up there and just do their thing and they don't have to think about it and maybe it just comes with experience. They're just that type of person that they just have a way with their kids. They have it together and they're just that ideal teacher that you want be like you. How do you just know what to do for everything? How do you know just to pull these kids and do what you need to do? These are the teachers that “amaze” Rachel and the kind of teacher that she aspires to be.

*Professional development.* Rachel said that she does not think professional development is a means to help her achieving her goal of continuing to improve her pedagogy:

I feel like it's not helpful. I go in there like everybody else and I just hear it and it goes out the other ear and I don't have time for that. And they throw it at me and expect me to know how to do it and it doesn't work that way.
Rachel explained that she needs “to be like a student.” It is not enough for her to just hear it, but rather she needs to “go through the process to understand and to implement it.”

*Goal reevaluation.* Rachel is content with her goals, but said that she is bothered when others imply that she should reevaluate those goals. She said that people are always asking her when she is going to get her Master’s degree:

I’m very stubborn. And even if you tell me to do something, I’m going to rebel against it because until I am ready, I’m not going to do it. So if you tell me to go pick up that shirt that’s on the floor, I’m not going to do it until I want to do it. That’s how I work. So, somebody saying you need to go get your Masters, and I’m going to say, well you know what, I’ll get my Masters when I feel like getting my Masters, and if I get my Masters I get it, and if I don’t, I don’t. It doesn’t make me a bad person.

Rachel said that she is content with where she is right now, and on a personal level, is looking forward to having children:

I would love to be a stay at home mom, but I don’t think that’s what’s going to happen. I would actually be afraid. Education changes so much year after year. I would be afraid even if I like only take off one year. Number one, I wouldn’t get a job back at my school necessarily. And number two, things have changed already. I’ve heard from people that have stayed home with their kids until their kids were able to go off, and then when they went back it was like a huge struggle. So part of me wishes that I could be a stay at home mom.
*Perseverance.* Rachel remains steadfast in the pursuit of her core goal because she loves what she does. She said that the amount of work that she has to do outside of the school day is sometimes difficult. “I want to be able to come to my job, enjoy what I do and go home and have a life. And yes that can happen because I can make that happen.” For Rachel the price that she pays is, “I feel like the dedication part goes out the window if I do that.” She described her perseverance as coming “from within.”

I come from a home that just being dedicated and having a good work ethic was always what I was brought up with. And no matter what job it was, I always did the best that I could. Even as a student I remember I would go home and I would rewrite my homework because I wanted everything just to be perfect. And I've always been that way.

Rachel readily admits that there are days when she thinks, “I’m out of here.” These feelings are often linked to her perception of equity:

I had a really bad day and it had to do with just different behaviors that happened and just different issues that occurred throughout the day, and I didn't get any teaching done and that killed me. But, I felt like what I wanted to accomplish that day didn't happen and I sacrificed all that time having to deal with the negativity in the room. And I went home and I even told my husband that I feel bad for all those kids that were here to learn because they got nothing today. And he's like you need to stop feeling guilty. I'm like, no, but I do feel guilty because those kids shouldn’t have taken away from that, but they did.
Rachel went on to explain that tough days like the one just described can derail you from pursuing your goals. For her, “crying and a good night’s sleep” have provided a worthy antidote.

Lack of support from administration. Rachel described lack of support from administration as a significant barrier to goal achievement in her current teaching position. “I don't really know how they [administrators] feel about me even though I've heard people say good things that they [administrators] say about me.” Rachel is confident that she is doing her job to the best of her ability saying, “I know that's why they're not on my case, because they know that I'm doing my job. And I'm doing the best that I can with what I'm dealt. However, when there's no type of feedback…” According to Rachel, it doesn’t have to be praise, but rather just some acknowledgement, “Even just to come in and say, hey, ‘I noticed you were having a bad today,’ anything would be great.”

Student behavior. Rachel described her class this year as having a “lot of behavior problems.” She explained that the problems are not only in her classroom, but that three particular students have “created trouble throughout the building and with the specialists as well.” Rachel described one day when the students were especially challenging:

It was the start of the day. I was working with two kids over at the table so of course I'm not looking. They were all sitting there doing their work. I thought everything was great, we’re having a great day, awesome. And one student apparently gets up and goes over to the other student and just pushes him. So the other kid pushes back. And then that kid proceeds to take their head and smashes
it on the desk. And the kid had a huge welt or bump on his eye. Another day its little things like I have stars that they use for lunch choices. One kids thinks - and it’s the same three people - one kid thinks it’s okay to go hide someone else's and then I’m like, ‘go get it right now. This is not funny. You just walked in the door and you’re starting already.’ Because they start as soon as they walk in the door and hide it, and then he threw it at the kid. So then on his way back, he purposely tripped the kid.

During that day, Rachel said in passing she stuck her head in the door of an administrator’s office and said: “They're eating me alive right now. This is a long day. I was almost like crying for help but not like I need you to rescue me. I just wanted her to say something.” Rachel said she would have been satisfied with “just some reassurance or positive reinforcement;” just something to keep her going:

My team, we praise each other all the time because we know that we're all doing the job that we need to do and we're doing the best that we can, given what we have to deal with. But, it’d be nice to hear from somebody else that has a higher power.

Rachel reiterated that in the end it does not really matter because she “is doing it for the kids.” She elaborated by saying, “I love what I do. I'm being honest. If it wasn't for the kids, I wouldn't be here. I love the school environment. I love being around kids. I love teaching. Beyond that, ewe.”

**Summary.** Rachel’s short term goal is to succeed as a teacher on a daily basis. For her, this includes providing an environment that is conducive to learning by
managing student behavior and getting through her lesson plans. Rachel’s core goal is to continue to learn and develop as a teacher. While she does not believe she will ever get to a point where she is satisfied with her teaching, she is firm in her commitment to persevere in the pursuit of excellence. Rachel’s personal agency beliefs in regards to achieving those goals are addressed next.

**Personal agency beliefs.** Rachel is relatively confident that she will be able to reach her goals. When asked if she believes she can become that teacher who she describes as someone who “has just got it,” she responded by saying:

> Let's say there are skills that go from zero to ten with zero being the weakest and ten being the greatest. Obviously I know people are critical of themselves. I definitely know I'm not a ten because I know that I have improvements and I know that I can better myself in so many ways, so I would probably range between like a seven or eight.

Rachel finds reassurance that she is able to reach her goals because “other people tell me that I can” and because “I’m doing it for myself and for the kids. I just hope to get better. Even though I know I'm a good teacher, I feel like I could improve.” If she wasn’t able to reach her goals she would be disappointed in herself saying, “I think I'd beat myself up more inside. Why did I let myself go or why did I let myself not be the person that I do want to become.”

**Student success.** Rachel explained that her optimism about her future as a teacher and achieving her goals is linked to her students:
As you go through the school year, having that reassurance that the kids got it. I mean even if it sounds silly, but the end of last school year, I knew that I worked so, so hard. And I wanted those kids to achieve the highest that they could. For example, in the SOL tests, and for my kids to do so well. And I know that over all the four subjects, I only had, and it was like pretty much the same kids, but it was only like two or three that did not pass their SOLs. That made me feel so good inside because it made me feel that I did what I was supposed to do. And even those kids that people doubted, those kids are still the ones that you know, persevered and made it. It just makes me feel good.

As an afterthought, Rachel added, “I mean not only did the kids do awesome, but I'm like oh, that's reflected on me.”

Rachel said that she feels most successful as a teacher when she is working one-on-one with a student:

It doesn’t happen very often because we don’t have the time. But I mean, just seeing if that kid gets it. It's like almost everything else disappears because I'm glad that they, even if it’s one concept, that they got it. That is an accomplishment in my eyes. Just seeing them being proud of themselves and having something to feel positive about. A lot of these kids, whether they don't like school or they're not good at this, but that one time that they have that moment, even if it's for that one day. It makes you feel good inside. It makes you want to come back and continue.
**Administrator support.** Rachel also said that her belief in herself as a teacher was challenged when she was new to the profession, but at that time it was an administrator who helped her to persevere:

I was working in Blue Ridge County and I had sort of a rough group my first year, which I feel they do that to everybody. It was just behavior problems and just everything in general was overwhelming, and I think just because I didn’t know what to expect when I came in as a first year teacher. Like everybody else, it’s just the unknown. I think it was Christmas break and I went to my principal, who I was very comfortable with, because we got hired at the same time. She got hired as the assistant principal and I got hired as a third grade teacher, so it was kind of like a team situation a little bit. And I remember going to her and just saying, I can't do this anymore. Like I just I can't, I can't do it. And I remember crying, and I was crying to her because I just needed someone to talk to. I just was having a difficult time and I'm like I can't do this. I need help; like this is so difficult, like I can't get the kids to… it was just all overwhelming. And, I remember her just saying, go home. You have your two weeks or whatever. Please come back. Relax. Just forget about school, just do what you have to do, but please come back. I came back and I just started fresh and something inside me must have just pushed me along. Don't let it get the best of you, because this is what you’ve wanted to do for the longest time. Every year is difficult, but I remember that first year in general. I wanted to quit.
For Rachel, empathy and just hearing encouraging words from an administrator helped to sustain her. “She just basically said I know it's overwhelming. You need to know that you're going to get through it and we'll help you any way that we can.”

**Positive feedback.** Rachel explained that she always received positive feedback about her teaching when she was with Blue Ridge County Schools. During her eight years there she always had the special education inclusion students in her classroom:

The special ed teacher always said, you are so good with the kids, and that she really loved that fact about me - that the kids came in and they just felt comfortable. I loved them, and I didn't look at them differently, and I didn't treat them any differently. So, that was always a positive reinforcement for me

Rachel said that makes her feel good because “that's the kind of person I am. I’m a loving person and I'm going to accept whomever I'm given, even though it’s hard sometimes.”

During her time with Blue Ridge County Schools, Rachel said positive feedback was a regular occurrence. “You got positive reinforcement consistently from different specialists and the principals. Here [Hyattsburg Elementary] my team and people that I work closely with will compliment me, but I don't ever hear from the higher up powers.”

When asked if that has made her consider leaving, Rachel responded:

It doesn't make me want to leave because I would never let someone else bring me down. And the thing is, I don't have problems with anybody in the building, and I don’t have issues with administration. I just think they don't realize that just them saying something nice would go a long way. But even though I know how they feel, they've never…I mean other than at the end of the school year when I
have an evaluation, I never hear it. I only know how she feels because I hear from other people. And I don't think that's right.

Rachel cited an example from the previous year of being nominated for a teaching award:

I said to her, can I ask you who nominated me because I'm just curious. And she was like, actually this time, because it just happened so quickly and I think we had a lot of snow days or something, and she said the coaches and the administration chose.

Rachel said that made her “feel good that people think highly of her,” but that she had to “seek out the information.”

**Student success.** Rachel believes that there are a number of necessary ingredients in order for students to succeed and she is confident that she can help them achieve success:

Number one, have a very dedicated teacher who loves what they do and is willing to be here and sacrifice even if they don't feel well or whatever the problem is. I really think it goes along with the word loving. Just knowing that their teacher cares. I think it goes a long way because if they come to school and they don't think you care, they don't care. So I think that goes a long way. Also to be successful, just knowing that you're proud of them no matter what. And I think just having an environment where they feel safe, and they just enjoy being here. I mean, they may not know everything, but neither do I.
Rachel said that all she asks of her students if to “give it a whirl and just try it, that’s all I’m asking.” She added that, “I hope that I make a difference every day, with every child.”

**Student bonds.** Rachel described a particularly strong connection that she formed with a student while working with Blue Ridge Public Schools:

You know how you have those really strong connections with certain students. I had a really strong connection with Tamara, and she was one of my lower students. Over the years, when I would see her - she would come back to the school or I'd see her out in the community - and even years later when she was a high schooler and she saw me and screamed my name. She said, I always tell people that I've always loved you since I had you. And I'm like, oh my God, I love you too. I've always had a connection with her and it's just one of those things where I’ve always kept track of her.

Rachel said there were two other girls that she formed similar bonds with and “whenever I would run into their parents they would say, ‘oh my gosh, my daughter still talks about you to this day.’”

**Mentoring.** Rachel said that one aspect of her job that she particularly enjoys and which has fortified her belief in herself is being a mentor to new teachers saying, “I love being a role model.” She was a mentor at Blue Ridge and is currently mentoring a third grade teacher at Hyattsburg Elementary. Rachel said she feels it is important to share personal stories with Lesley, her mentee, so that Lesley knows she’s not alone when she’s
feeling overwhelmed. “I went over to her classroom the other day after a particularly long conference day and vented to her, like isn’t this crazy?” Then Rachel thought:

I’m the veteran teacher and I just vented to the first year teacher! But, I wanted her to know that she isn’t alone. Because, even though this is my eleventh year of teaching, some days I feel like a first year teacher and I feel like I’m drowning. I want you to know it's okay to have terrible days because here's my terrible day, and I'm here again the next day, and I’m great.

In addition to being a mentor, Rachel also represented her school for improvement projects with Blue Ridge Public Schools. “I had to go to different sessions with other schools to talk about different ways to get our teachers joining together to do what we needed to do to improve our kids.”

Rachel said that if she was to give advice to preservice teachers she would tell them, “please do not come into the education field and become a teacher if you don't love kids.” For her, this would be doing the children a “disservice.” Second, she would advise them to “be dedicated because if you're not dedicated, you're hurting your children - going through the motions isn't enough.” Finally, “have a heart. If you don't, if you're not in it to win it, don’t come.”

**Summary.** Rachel is confident in her ability as a teacher and explained that her personal success is linked to her student’s success. She has experienced both support and lack of support from administrators, and while she would welcome feedback from her current school administrators, she is determined to not let that deter her in the pursuit of her goals. Finally, Rachel has found satisfaction in mentoring new teachers and believes
those interactions positively contribute to her professional success. Next, Rachel explains the role that emotions have played in her career.

**Emotions.** The venting of emotions has played a significant role in helping Rachel to overcome challenges in teaching. She said, “telling someone – a colleague or my husband – as long as I can get some of it out.” Rachel elaborated by saying, “It lets me process what happened. I'm not one of those people who holds it in. If I hold it in, it’s trouble.” Rachel also said that crying provides a great release for her:

> I have to cry it out. I am able to tell my husband some stuff, but I don’t always want to go through the whole story because then it's back all over again, my anger. Like when some students don’t get what they need from me because I’m dealing with discipline problems and I feel guilty about that.

Rachel said that she is able to release these negative feelings if she can “just cry.” It makes me feel so much better and then I can move on with a fresh start.”

**Student success and self-doubt.** These emotions are sometimes triggered when things do not go as well for her students as she expects them to:

> My kids just took a test at the end of the school day today. And to see their scores as low as they were blew my mind because there was never a point where I thought that those are the scores that they were going to get. So it makes me question myself. Did I not teach it correctly? Did I not give them enough information? And I feel like I know that I covered the information pretty well and I feel they have so many materials that they've used.
Rachel added that this particular group of students is “a lower group than what I'm used to,” and acknowledged that it has been a valuable learning curve.

Crying. Rachel described one of her worst emotional teaching experiences as occurring during her employment with Blue Ridge Public Schools. While she could not remember the exact incident that triggered her reaction, she said:

I remember I was just so frustrated and so stressed out. This has never happened before in my teaching career other than this one day. I was so frustrated with the kids or whatever happened at that moment. And I just felt like I was going to lose it and in my anger I like just started crying because I was so mad. And the kids just froze because they didn't know what to do because I was in tears. I had to turn because I was so upset. And they felt so bad. After I pulled myself together I told them, ‘you guys don't realize, but just because I'm an adult doesn't mean I don't have feelings. And you hurt my feelings. And I'm sorry that I just cried in front of you, but you know what you need to see that you hurt my feelings. And it's not okay.’ You know how many apologies I got as they walked out the door? Every single kid apologized; even the good kids that didn't do anything wrong. And they came in the next day and even apologized the next day. So I feel like that was a moment that probably should have never happened, but I think I was so angry and so stressed out with whatever happened that day. The emotion came to me and I just cried because I couldn’t take it anymore. Like I wanted to crawl in a hole and be myself, and I couldn't because I had twenty five kids looking at me and I just cried. I had never raised my voice before and I think that's probably what
happened before I cried. I just lost it and when I get angry, I just cry because I can't do it anymore. And I cry because that's just the emotion that comes next.

Despite this isolated incident, Rachel said that looking back on her career so far, her days are “definitely more positive” than negative.

**Positive emotions.** Rachel describes those positive days as being able to “get through everything” she has planned. She defined a successful day as when, “There are no interruptions. There are no behavioral problems per se. The kids are engaged in their learning. And I feel good about what I taught. And I felt good about what they learned.” She added, “If I go home in a good mood I know that I had a good day.” Rachel has also experienced days that have made her want to “cry with joy:”

I had nine kids [last year] that did not pass the reading SOL. Well they did a retake and I actually had to give the retake test. And they all passed. Diana came down and told me ten minutes after they took it and I was like, ‘oh my God, can I tell my kids?’ I really thought I was going to burst into tears. I literally was like oh my gosh, raise your hand - who just took the reading test? Guess what, you all passed! And they were like, really? And I almost cried.

Rachel described a similar situation when she presented a citizenship award to one of her students at an end-of-year ceremony last year:

I was trying to read my little speech at the end of the school year, you know. I cried when I was trying to talk about my student and give her an award, and I bawled. It's just seeing and just knowing that they work so hard. Some of them cried when they didn't pass it [SOL] and I'm like you have to take another test.
And they go through whatever remediation they had to do. And then just to be able to tell all of them that they passed was like - I was very happy.

Rachel added that it was great that those students got a second chance. “Part of me didn't agree with retakes until we took the retakes.”

**Discouragement.** For Rachel, the combination of the discipline problems this year and the lack administrative support has left her feeling like she’s in “a vicious cycle.”

I mean I'm not going to them [administration] and like complaining about it because number one, I'm not that type of person. And I'm not that type of person that wants to look like I'm defeated, because I mean I don't feel defeated.

Rachel said she feels “angry at the fact that these kids [who are the behavior problems] can’t get their lives together.” She added that she has tried being motherly and has many times tried talking to them individually:

And like even motherly. I just talked to all three of their parents on conferences just a couple days ago. It's always the same thing. We're working on it and we're doing this at home. There are still issues and I just feel like it's never going to stop. It's just going to continue every day. And who cares if they get put out for lunch or recess, they’re going to do it again tomorrow. Why do they care? It’s discouraging when it just doesn’t get through to them and they still come in the next day and it happens all over again. So it's a vicious cycle, and like I said, when I was drowning the other day and nobody helped. I felt like I needed just someone to let me come out of the room or just take them out of my room.
Rachel said that she did not directly ask for help, but rather that she “was just hoping for it.”

**Worst teaching day.** When asked to describe a scenario that would represent one of her worst days in the classroom, Rachel responded by saying, “When the good kids are being neglected. They're not getting anything that they need because your attention is directed elsewhere.” Rachel again referenced the discipline problems she has been experiencing recently and stated:

I'm doing my best to try to make connections with them [problem students] and try to, you know, when they're having their good shining moments, reinforce that. Like today one of these students was on his A game all day and I said, oh my gosh, this is so wonderful. Isn’t this great and you got two stickers today and doesn’t it feel good to get all two’s on your behavior card, and I don't have to yell, and it isn't that wonderful?

She reiterated that the feeling of guilt over not giving the students that are there to learn what they need, constitutes her worst emotions associated with teaching saying, “Neglecting students is number one the worst.”

**Support.** Rachel said that she turns to her husband “for certain aspects, but not all of it.” She has many colleagues whom she can talk to, but noted that there is one coworker who has been particularly helpful. “I feel like Purcella and I just get each other and I think that’s helpful. We don’t have a lot of time to talk, but I do go to her when I really feel like I need to release something.”
**Summary.** For Rachel, crying has provided an emotional release during times when she has felt frustrated or under a great deal of stress, as well as when she is overwhelmed with positive emotions. She attributes most of her negative teaching experiences to not being able to provide an environment that promotes student learning because of some behavior problems. Rachel also expressed her disappointment in a lack of support from administrators, but does seek solace from her husband and colleagues.

**Thriving with Social Purpose.** Applying the etic of an active approach to goals, personal optimism and mindful tenacity that influence personal agency beliefs, and emotional wisdom to Rachel’s case suggests that she is Thriving with Social Purpose.

**Active approach to goals.** Rachel explained that she is most active in her approach to short term goals.

I'm determined to fulfill daily goals I set for myself and when I'm not one hundred percent successful, I feel defeated and guilty inside, but know that I'm not perfect and I do the best that I can. I tell myself, tomorrow is a new day, and push myself that much harder the next day.

Rachel added that it is sometimes difficult, however, to think ahead and make specific goals for the future. She elaborated by saying:

When I first graduated from college in the spring of 2003, I was set on getting my Master’s degree, but overtime I've lost the drive to pursue it. I guess some would say that I'm staying in my comfort zone or being lazy. In reality, I'm bogged down with all the expectations that come with being an educator and don't want the
added stress. Plus, I don't feel that I'm any less of an educator without a Master’s degree.

Rachel added that some of her reluctance to starting an advanced degree is because she would like to start a family. “Right now when I think about the future I don’t think about a degree, I think about having a family.”

**Personal optimism.** When asked if she sees herself as an optimistic person, Rachel responded by saying:

I do believe that I am optimistic about teaching and my future as an educator because this is what I've always wanted to be and I don't want to give up on my students. Just as I am making an impact on their lives, they are making a big impact on my life. Being an educator is part of my identity. Just like I looked up to my childhood teacher, I hope to have that same impact on my students.

Rachel said that she believes she remains optimistic even though teaching is “definitely challenging and very demanding,” because “I feel like I have one of the most rewarding jobs out there.”

**Mindful tenacity.** Rachel described herself as a reflective practitioner who is not afraid to alter her course in order to meet the needs of her students, even though it may sometimes be difficult to do so. In addition, she believes that sometimes impromptu plans turn out to be the most effective:

I would say every day lends itself to self-reflection and learning what works and what doesn't. If I notice most students aren't getting it, I try to figure out a way that I can better present the information. I'm a pretty organized person and when
things don't go as planned it is hard for me to let it go, but in the end I know that sometimes it just doesn't work. What worked for past year’s kids doesn't always work so I need to be prepared. Sometimes when I’m thinking on the spot and not focusing so much on the plan I'm required to follow, produces the best results from my students. I also feel that it's okay that I don't have all the answers and I have a great support system that I can turn to when needed.

Rachel also described herself as being the kind of person who takes things one day at a time saying, “Every day I put my best foot forward and try to remind myself that I’m doing the best I can, and that's all I can do.”

**Emotional wisdom.** When asked to choose a word that she would use to describe herself in terms of emotions, Rachel said, “Empathetic.” She added:

I care so much about others and try to put myself in their shoes regardless of the situation. With my students, I know that I can't truly understand everything that they go through outside of school, but I do try to be compassionate, patient, and as understanding as I can. I'm the type of person who cries when others cry at the drop of a hat. Back several years ago, I had one of my favorite students who I always joked around with come to school a couple hours late. When he walked in, he was all dressed up and I jokingly said, "You look so nice, were you out on a date?" He looked back at me and caught me off guard when his eyes watered up and he told me he was at a funeral for a family member.
Rachel said that she could not help but to cry right along with him: “I felt terrible, and because of the connection I had made with this student that year, my heart sank and I got emotional with him. I was unable to hold back my tears.”

**Social Purpose.** Rachel expressed on numerous occasions throughout the interviews that being an educator is part of her “identity.” She elaborated by saying:

I have always wanted to work with kids and knew teaching was my calling. As a teacher, I feel that I have become a better-rounded individual who continues to learn every day. I always looked up to my teachers and wanted to be just like them. For me, teaching provides a sense of belongingness and acceptance in the community. I feel being a teacher gives me the opportunity to experience new things every day and allows me to learn more about myself.

Rachel also said that she appreciates the “long term job and financial stability” that comes along with teaching. But, more importantly she said, is the “personal happiness.” On that same level, she added, “I feel working with kids every day is preparing me for when I have my own kids one day.”

**Life meaning.** Rachel was definitive when asked if teaching gives her life meaning by responding, “Absolutely.” For her, that meaning is closely linked to her identity as a teacher:

I think it's funny because outside of school, unlike other people…I have other friends that are teachers and I feel like sometimes they forget what their role is. I'm always very conscientious about it when I'm out in public. I'm not talking about students. I’m not talking about my bad day, or mentioning where I work. I
don't advertise where I work because I know that I have a respectful job and people outside of school, like parents and the community, if they find out you're a teacher they know who you are, they're always going to be looking at you as that…my kids teacher or that teacher at that school. And so I feel like as an individual person who really cares about how I’m being perceived in the outside world, I really take into account when I'm outside of my house or outside of school like, this is how people view me. And I'm not going to have anything affect that. I mean I don't have Facebook. I've never had My Space. I don't advertise my life because of my job. I feel like my job does reflect a lot of who I am. And people think it's so weird that I don't do all the online things, but I tell them all the time, I don't want my life plastered on a website that somebody can view, and then make judgment calls on that because that's not who I am. Because if I went to a party, God forbid, if I went to a party and I decided to have a drink, which rarely happens anyway, and I decide to have a good time and then pictures were taken of me and then they were posted, and then other people, employer, parents see it. I mean it happens. And it's just, it's not who I am and I don't want to be portrayed that way. So I feel like being a teacher is almost like next to my name. And I know a lot people don't look at that way, but I do.

At the end of the interview, Rachel said she couldn’t imagine ever being anything other than a teacher because, “My heart is full of love for kids and teaching gives me a sense of purpose in life.”

Julie
Julie is a Caucasian female in her early forties and is in her twentieth year of teaching. During that time she has always taught kindergarten at Hyattsburg Elementary, Ennisville Public Schools. She is also the single mother of two sons, both of whom are teenagers attending high school in the same school division where she teaches. She was born and raised in Parkville, the town adjacent to Hyattsburg.

**Biography.** Much like Rachel, Julie knew she wanted to be a teacher from a very young age. “I was just a little girl and I already knew I wanted to be a teacher. I loved creating things and making things.” She also loved to babysit:

I babysit a lot the kids from church. I think I started babysitting when I was like 13 or 14, and had the regulars all the way up until my twenties. The same group, same families. They always called me and the kids always wanted me.

**Perception of future.** Julie also knew from an early age that it was kindergarten she wanted to teach:

I just knew from the get go that I always wanted to teach kindergarten. So, I went to Stone College and did the education classes there. I did lots of observations at different schools around the area. I did some observations at Walker Elementary and George Elementary. I focused on Hyattsburg because I knew that’s where I wanted to work. But I think those are the only two schools I did observations at when we had to do it through Stone College. And then I was a student teacher at Walker Elementary for kindergarten and first grade.

Despite her determination to become a kindergarten teacher, her mother encouraged her to keep an open mind and to “try something different.”
**Structured style.** Julie was not only set on teaching kindergarten, she was equally as set on teaching at Hyattsburg Elementary:

I just kept coming here to interview for any jobs that were open. I would interview for a teacher’s assistant position and he [the principal] would say you don’t need to do that. We just need to get you a job. I just wanted to get my foot in the door. So, I said I can just be an assistant, and he said no, you need to be a teacher. So, I just stuck it out here and my mom was like go to other counties. But, I didn’t want to get stuck there. So, it took me three years to get this job because there were not many things open.

She started working part time, teaching kindergarten in the afternoons. When the teacher who taught the morning class moved, it became a full time position for Julie.

**Perception of self.** Julie said that her teacher self-concept is closely aligned with how she identifies herself on a personal level, especially “the caring and helpful part because I’m always thinking about someone else. I never think of myself. I never do. I always want to help others. That puts me down sometimes because I’m exhausted.”

Julie said that one of the reasons she has stayed in the same school for so long is because of her reluctance to interview. She stated, “I’m not a person who likes to interview. I get nervous. I freak out.” She added that “teaching is totally different than it was 20 years ago so you have to change. But, I’m not going anywhere else unless they kick me out.” When asked to expand on what she meant that teaching is so different now she said, “I love my job, but I hate what I have to do.” With further probing Julie added:
You have to make the little children do things that sometimes they’re not ready to do. Developmentally they’re not ready. I feel like I’m constantly pushing them. I’m constantly, not forcing them because you’re guiding them, but they get so nervous and stressed because they can’t accomplish something you have to do. But, you have those, and you can tell right off the bat, that they’re so young that it’s like you’re already stressing them out. I guess that’s what I mean by I hate what I have to do because I’m already kind of stressing some of the kids out.

Julie cited a recent example of a little boy’s reaction when she was teaching her class about the five senses:

I told them to draw something that you can smell, draw something that you can see, and he was doing something and I said, now, can you really do that? He started crying and I’m like, whoa, let’s back the train up, it’s okay. What do you not understand? But they can’t verbalize this to you either. It’s stressful for me because I’m constantly having kids that aren’t developmentally ready to do this higher level stuff and you have to move them along. I feel nervous because I’m moving them along, but one day it’s going to hit them. It’s going to catch up to them and they’re going to struggle.

Part of this belief is based on Julie’s personal experience:

I have two of my own at home and my older one has an IEP. He’s in eleventh grade, but he still doesn’t get it. But, they’re still pushing him along. And he’s okay with it, but I get frustrated because I know what he needs to do as a teacher, and he’s not getting stuff. So, I feel like if you start right here, and you force and
force and force, and then when they get to third grade they get in trouble and are in lower groups because they’re not meeting their goals. But, had you waited a year or so…

Julie added that the expectations for kindergarten are higher than they used to be and said, “Kindergarten is the new first grade, or even second grade.”

**Negative impact on students.** In Julie’s opinion, these changes have had a negative impact on fostering social skills:

It used to be that you’d have the play center, the color center, the paint center, the play dough center…all the playing around with your fingers, the fine motor, and they’d get to talk with each other and have communication with each other.

Teachers incorporate the skills but it’s like the LEQ [lesson essential question] is how can you classify objects? Really? What’s green, what’s red, what’s blue? Or like, how can you describe the physical properties of the object? What does it feel like, sound like? They’re using all their senses, but the vocabulary words are way up here. But, that’s the stress that I’ve always felt. I think they’re just little babies. Half of them have never been to preschool before they walk into my room. They can’t write their name, can’t hold a pencil, can’t use scissors, and you don’t have time to teach that anymore. It used to be that we would have them trace the line, we would show them how to hold a pencil, we would spend a day just cutting. We’d cut out pictures in the newspaper and you would put them on paper. You would just have them cut and they would get used to that so they would know the feeling. I guess that’s what’s hard. I hate what I have to push them to do.
Julie continually reiterated that she loves teaching kindergarten saying, “It’s great when the light bulb goes boom. But it’s getting to that point where sometimes I feel like I’m pushing them and I’m sending them on when they’re not ready.”

*Student bonds.* During the past twenty years, the joy Julie has experienced in teaching has come directly from the children. She said, “Just seeing their little faces when they walk in the door…they’re just so happy. I mean they come in crying at the beginning of the year, but once they get past that…I’m here for them and they know it.” Julie finds affirmation in the fact that, “They come back from first grade, from second grade, from third grade, from fourth grade, to see you. It’s just nice to know that they still want to come back and see you.” She said that she also hears things at church such as, “Miss Julie is a great kindergarten teacher. You need to get your kid into Miss Julie’s class because she’s great.”

*Social competence.* When asked to describe herself as a teacher, Julie responded by saying, “A good team player, very caring, very loving, and kind.” She also added that she is not perfect. “Some days I may have an attitude about my children, or I’m grumpy. But, I love the kids and they can tell it, and it doesn’t bother them if you’re grumpy some days.” She also added that sometimes you have to be tough on the kids. She described one her students, Johnny, as a “crier:”

I taught his sister and the parents live in my neighborhood. I told him one day when he came in and was crying…I said Johnny, I don’t want to see it. You’re fine. I’m just not going to pay attention to you. So, he went home that day and
they [his parents] said how did you do? Did you cry? And he said, yep. And they said what did Miss Julie do? She ignored me. And, he’s over it.

Julie admitted that she was comfortable with that approach because she knows the parents. She described another incident where she believes she was responsible for making a child cry:

The one I made cry about the sentences. I didn’t know he was so sensitive. But, I don’t know his family and I don’t know his home life. And then you think oh my gosh, what kind of home does he come from? I always have to sit and think about that. What do they come from in the morning? If I’m fussing at them…hurry up, let’s go, let’s go…did they have breakfast, did they get up early, did they get up late? For parent conferences you hear, well I work till ten and my teenage children take care of my daughter. And she [the mother] comes home at ten and the little girl is waiting up. So, they have their family life. It’s so sad if there’s no mom at home who takes care of them. I have to sit and think, what did they come from?

Regardless of their home life, Julie thinks that sometimes the best thing you can do for a child is to allow him or her to develop self-help skills:

Sometimes I have to say, I’m not going to help you. You can open that jar by yourself. But, that’s life skills. In kindergarten they love to raise their hand, but if they’re panting or they’re up on their knees. I say, I will not call on you on your knees and I will not call on you when you’re panting. And then they sit down and they learn. And if the next day they start it again, I say, what did I say yesterday,
and they go, oh, and sit down. So, I mean its training. And, you know, you wonder like, they don’t do that at home…they pretty much get their way at home, or it’s done for them. I’m guilty of that myself with my own kids. I mean they’re older teenagers and it’s like, can you go put the clothes in the wash? I’ll do it in a minute. No, you need to do it now. So I walk over to what they’re doing and say, I can do it like in two seconds, so I just go do it.

Lacking qualities. There are also two qualities that Julie thinks she is lacking. First, she said, “I need to be a little bit more organized.” Julie added that she was much more organized early in her career and before she had children of her own. She went on to say, “Nowadays, it’s hard to be organized because there’s so much stuff you have to do…paperwork and computers and emails and data, and it’s so hard.” Julie also said that she needs to “find a way to say no.”

I would like to be able to say ‘no’ and be stronger. I’m not always very strong in defending myself. I take it. People can put me down and put me down and put me down and I’m like, okay. I’m not combative. I don’t like controversy or confrontation. I’m just say, okay. But yet, I want to help everybody out. I want to help my kids’ friends out by taking them home or somewhere after the baseball game, or bringing them treats and stuff. I don’t have the money to do that, but I do. It’s who I am. I’m like come to my house, we’ll have pizza and you can play video games with my kids. People are like, you have high school kids at your house and yea, I’d rather them be with me so I know where my kids are. I’m very
blessed. My kids could care less about being out, hanging out places, being with friends somewhere else. They’d just rather be at home.

Julie added that while she gets frustrated because “they’re not doing their homework and they’re not turning it in, and they’re getting zeroes, there are worse things in life.”

**Challenging teaching context.** For Julie, most of her career has been exactly what she had hoped it would be because she was “helping kids.” However, she noted that the teaching context has changed dramatically over the last couple of years, and this has created a challenge for her. Julie said it happened “when all of the LFS [Learning Focused Schools] stuff started, and all the paperwork started, and the larger classroom sizes. I’m like oh my gosh, what was I thinking?” None of this was so bad that she wanted to quit, but it did cause her to think, “How many years is it until I can retire?”

**Social resources.** Some of the “stress that it causes” her has been alleviated by the new kindergarten aide that was assigned to her this year:

It’s helped me out a lot because she’s more organized. She takes charge. So, it depends on the person you have. I loved my [former] assistant, don’t get me wrong. We had a good relationship, but she wouldn’t do anything without me telling her to. Maybe it was because that’s her personality. But, this year has helped me out a lot. I think a lot of the stress was because I was doing everything. So it’s not as stressful this year because I thought, oh my gosh, I’m not going to be able to do this. There’s too much paperwork, and you hear all these new things coming down the pike. Now you have to do this, now you have to meet with this person. Enough.
Despite the stress of recent years, Julie said, “It’s the best job ever to be with kids. And, you have the summers off. People are like, do you teach summer school? Absolutely not. I need a break.”

**Goals.** Julie has both short and long term professional goals. Her short term goal is to prepare her students to be successful in first grade. Her long term goal is to create a connectedness with her students and to have a lasting impact on them.

**Short term goal.** In responding to a question about her short term goals, Julie said that it remains the same each year. “It’s definitely getting the class where they need to be to move on.” She elaborated by saying this includes more than academics, it’s “making sure they have their social skills before they even have the academic skills.”

**Challenges to short term goal.** Julie admits to sometimes “going outside the box” of what the administration expects because she believes “that’s how the students learn.” In speaking about administration expectations she said, “I feel like we’re robots and being told what to do, even though I don’t think it’s the right thing. It’s frustrating because we have to do things a certain way.” Julie cited the reading program the school has adopted as an example:

> These are the books and these are the plans you have to follow. I don't always follow the textbook exactly. I pull my own things in because they're going to learn more. The books are stupid. I mean some of them don't make any sense. We even talk about that in our team meetings. This book made no sense and the kids look at me like, what?
Julie noted that sometimes the problem is that they do not have the resources they are supposed to use:

We had a full set of books we were supposed to use for reading and three years ago one teammate moved within the first week of school to one of the other elementary schools, so we had to give her some of ours [books] to make her a whole set, but now we don't have a whole set because they never ordered them again. You don't have what you need, but you're supposed to be using it.

Julie said that she and her grade level team have similar problems with the prescribed math program. She stated, “The math books we’re supposed to use as a resource are Common Core based. We're not Common Core, so why are we buying Common Core books? So, I'll use some, but I'm going to bring in more of my own.” Despite these differences, Julie does acknowledge that it is important to try to “follow suit with the school goals.” “But,” she added:

It frustrates me because if I don't use what they want, am I going to be in trouble? I need to teach my kids the letters and the sounds and sight words. It’s very stressful because if I don’t do it their way, am I going to get dinged?

Despite the pressure from administration, Julie said, “I would never abandon my goals. It's all about my kiddos.” She added that she is always willing to go the extra mile by trying a different activity, pulling a student aside for one-on-one, or reteaching in a small group. “You've got to see that lightbulb go off someday. I don't want to put them in a mold of learning so ultimately my goal is to help the children, no matter what I need to do,” she said.
**Long term goal.** Julie’s long term, core goal is to make a lasting connection with her students. She said, “I know I’ve accomplished that when my children from the past come back and see me, or Facebook me, or invite me to their wedding.” Julie said that she has some students who “come back every year” and some that come back “every couple of years:”

Just to have them do that or parents at church, or parents who know each other say, you have to have Miss Julie as a teacher because she's going to teach your child social skills, and she's going to teach them how to care about other people. It's not all about academics. It's just being nurturing and kind.

Julie said it not uncommon for third or fourth graders to stop by and give her a hug because they are in the same building. But, she added:

It’s those who come back in later years, when they get older, when they’re in college, and when they’ve graduated and have families of their own. To know they still think of me makes me think that I made an impact on them.

For Julie, teaching is “more than just my job. I love kids. I've always loved kids. You teach them how to get along, you teach them how to share, and then you go the academic route.”

**Summary.** Students are the focus of Julie’s short and long term goals. In the short term it is important for her to get students to the point where they are able to be successful in the next grade level, focusing equally on social skills and academics. Her core goal is to have a lasting impact on her students. Julie cites evidence that she is achieving this as the lasting relationships she forms with some students.
**Personal agency beliefs.** Julie stated that she feels confident that she is able to achieve both her short and long term goals:

I'm pretty confident I can do it, but every class is different. So, it gets harder every year due to your language barriers or your ESL [English as a second language learners] population, your economic population, but it's so different because I always say kindergarten is a different entity. They're just babies and they want to have fun. So when you make it fun, they want to learn.

She added, however, that she has to be cautious about “stepping outside that box.” She explained:

If they [administrators] come in and see you, can you explain what you're doing and why you're doing it? I guess if you can, you're fine. But sometimes I feel like when they walk in I'm like oh no, where's my LEQ [Lesson Essential Question], like, am I doing this right? Back in a day, I never did that.

**Lack of empowerment.** Julie also explained that she perseveres “despite the lack of empowerment” she feels with the current administration:

There’s no trust. Not with the administration now. When Dr. Beck was here she would say you just get your job done. You're here for the kids. I sometimes wonder what they [administration] get from up above. Why are they like this? I feel like Angela trusts me, and I did have her son. But, I felt like she knew that I could handle her son, maybe having two boys of my own. I think she feels like kindergarten is getting it done because we're down in the trenches.
Julie added that in her opinion, “That's what kindergarten teachers do. You just do whatever. You bring it all in. You play with it, you throw it at them, and you show it to them.”

**Positive feedback.** Julie said that it would be nice to hear something positive other than during teacher appreciation week when everyone receives the generic kudos:

Like a quick note or a sticky on your door or a smiley face that says have a good day, just something. Have a positive day. Have a nice day. I know they’re busy. They can’t come in and do walkthroughs like other schools do, not that I want that anyway, but just some personal note.

Julie added that feedback, and in particular positive feedback, was part of the school culture with the former administration. But now, no one gets the, “Oh, you're doing a great job. I don't know if it's because they're stressed from on top. I just don't know.” She added that she gets lots of positive feedback from parents and students. “I keep the notes they write me. I have saved all of them. They make me feel good. They’re the things I always remember.”

**Context does not support collegiality.** It is the little things, according to Julie, that go a long way. She said that, “A teammate came into my room the other day and I was busy talking to someone else. Finally, I turned to her and asked if she needed anything and she said I just stopped by to say hi.” Julie added that the current administration “discourages that kind of talking.” She expressed her disappointment that things are not like they used to be:
Back in a day, we'd do goodies in the morning and that was actually like you went down there, you sat down, and you ate breakfast with your colleagues. Now it's like get and go. So, it's like there's no connecting anymore with the faculty. You have that on a team level. But, there's nothing anymore. And, I think that comes from the top down. You're scared. You don't know what to say. You don't know which way to turn because you don't know what you're going to get dinged about.

Julie added that you hear the same story from everyone in the building, and “that's just not a fun environment to be in.”

_A barrier of fear._ Julie reiterated often throughout each of the interviews that “I love what I do, but I hate what I have to do.” She expressed her confidence in getting students to where they need to be if she is allowed to teach in a way she believes is best:

I can get them there so if I’m getting them there by playing with Playdough or working with crayons, or if they're playing with paint...if they're getting the colors down and they're able to say it, and they're able to tell me what's red or what's blue...but that’s not the way it is.

Julie said she worries about administration doing walkthroughs. “If I know they’re coming I make sure I’m doing it their way. But there’s always that underlying fear. Is this what they want to see?”

_Unrealistic student expectations._ In Julie’s opinion, the fact that the students are being asked to do stuff that is “way up here, when they’re down here,” causes her stress. The school division has implemented a writing standard, yet her students “don't even know their letters yet.” She added that some “can't write their name yet.” Julie elaborated
by saying, “Today we had a writing assignment and the kids said Miss Julie, we don’t know how to write yet.” She told the students, “I know you don’t, but try to sound out one of the letters and put it there.” Julie said this makes her sad because:

They want to make sure it’s done correctly, and if not, they’re thinking they’re doing it wrong. This is where they falter. Then, by the time they get to third and they don’t pass an SOL test, then people are questioning why they didn’t pass. It’s because they didn’t get it down here. This is where it starts. I don’t know where this all comes from or how to get through to them [administration]. And it's not changing, it's just getting worse. Then they wonder why when they [students] get older, why there are suicides, why are kids rude, why are they taking drugs?

Julie said she believes it is because the students are not starting school by “experiencing success, but rather they are set up to fail.” She described a recent reading comprehension test she had to give to her students:

One of the questions was to tell me two events that happened in the middle of the story. They know beginning, middle, and end, for the most part. But why do you have to throw in two events? If they pick one of the two, but they can't get the second one, it's not counted as an answer that's correct. So their score is already low because they're missing the other one.

Julie expressed frustration at this and said the problem is that “they’re missing a step.”

The tests are taking the students to places “they’re not ready to be.”
Julie also said that children need to “feel like they’re loved and cared for and have positive reinforcement here and at home.” Based on her experience, she believes that the students may not always be getting that at home.

You don't know what their home life is like, but you can kind of tell that some of them don't get it because they look at you like, am I doing it right, am I doing it wrong. Will they get yelled at or will they get in trouble?

Julie added that she cannot know exactly what goes on in their homes lives, “But just to know that somebody cares about them and takes the time to tie their shoe or do something nice, can go a long way.”

**Retirement.** Julie said that when she thinks about her future as a teacher she is “optimistic to a point.” One of the problems she talked about was the division’s constant initiatives that they “just throw at you and don't train you, but they still expect you to do it all.” For instance, “Now they want us to put our plans on Google drive, but I don't know anything about Google drive, and no one’s going to train me.” Julie confessed that she has thought about retirement because of “all of the garbage that's loaded on you,” but also said that she “probably couldn’t afford to.” Julie added that, “While I’m optimistic, I’m also looking at my next step, like what’s the route to retirement?” The greatest barrier to retirement for Julie, in addition to the financial implication, is that she doesn’t “want to not help kids.” She said, “What can I do to help them that is not in a school setting because they do need help and I want to help them to learn.”

**Feeling successful.** Julie said that her feelings of success in teaching come from her colleagues and students:
I don't give myself credit so I don't feel like I'm doing a good job, but then when my teammates come in because they need something and they know I’ll have it, or I’ve already started typing something up that we can all use. They always tell me I’m doing a great job, but I guess I just don’t give myself credit because I don’t feel as organized as I was when I was younger.

For Julie, success is also measured in her student’s success:

Just to see the ah ha moments and when they love what we’re doing. We were counting pumpkin lines today; counting how many blocks tall the pumpkin was. Just that they get excited about certain stuff. And they know what's coming up next. They know our schedule and why we have to do stuff and they’ll say why didn't I get my stamp today for my chart and my clip going up? They just want to have that positive feedback and they want to know that somebody cares about them.

Julie went on to say that while her colleagues and students make her feel good, all the things that are “loaded on” her can be discouraging.

*Discouragement, anxiety, and change.* The amount of school initiatives have sometimes led Julie to feel discouraged, but not to the point where she would “consider leaving.” It’s more the “anxiety I feel because sometimes I feel like I’m barking at the kids.” She attributes this to “my mindset that says I have to do this because I'm told I have to do this, but yet I don’t feel this is best.” Julie says then, wrongly, sometimes she “fusses at the kids.” The result is a “feeling of anxiety.” When this happens, Julie said she
just feels “exhausted.” Then she goes home and also has to take care of her two sons. “If I had more help at home… I think it all kind of goes together.”

When asked if she ever considered changing grade levels or jobs, Julie responded by saying:

No, because that scares me. This is a lot of work, but it’s also not a lot of work. Things are changing like now you have to put grades in the computer instead of the handwritten ones. You have to do grades every week. I never had that before. Besides that, the kids are just needy. They can’t blow their nose, they can’t tie their shoes, and they can’t go to the bathroom. Now the academics are the hard part for them and you’re pushing it on them. I thought about changing, but to be a coach, that’s a lot of work, too. That’s like more computer work and that’s more talking with adults.

Julie much prefers to work with the students and said, “A coach is constantly in meetings with teachers and with the principals. I know what my kids need and I know who can’t get it.”

**Lasting contributions.** Julie said that she believes she has made a significant difference in the lives of a number of children and recounted one particular experience:

I had one that I had retained, Kelly. She had a really bad home life and this was back probably when I first started teaching because we were half day. Kelly was raised by her dad. I’m not sure of the whole situation, but we retained her and they requested us again, and we would just guide her, and teach her. She just had a brother and the dad. The dad was just so loving and wanted to do everything that
he could, but he had to work and so we would bring her clothes. My assistant had
two girls and she would bring Kelly clothes so she would have clean clothes to
wear. She [Kelly] kind of took off, and just to see her blossom and actually get it,
because she didn't have anything when she came to kindergarten. Kelly was one
of those who didn't go to preschool, so of course they come in and can't write their
name and don't know how to cut. I would just sit and work with her. That was
back when you could play and talk about sharing, social skills, and how do you
talk to your friends. She moved, so I don’t see her anymore. But, Kelly’s probably
one that sticks out in my mind the most.

Julie said that she feels as though she tries to give equally as much to all of her students.
Occasionally though, “you have one that you couldn't do anything with, but you tried.”

Making a contribution to her school is important to Julie, and she tries to foster a
“connectedness” among staff members. As part of the social committee she tries to “have
one day a month to do something for the school.” But again, the conversation turned to
the school’s current climate:

I know things have changed over the years and I get that. Everybody has a
different family situation. When we had Christmas parties or end-of-year parties,
sixty to seventy people would be there. Now you might get twenty or thirty. And
again, it goes back to them [administration]. Why does it not come from there?

Why is it not important to those people?

Julie did note that things are better in small groups and “among grade levels, so that’s a
start.”

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Julie is positive about her ability as a teacher and still” loves kids” and wants to “help children.” However, her contextual beliefs are rather negative. “Education is not about helping kids anymore. It's about what's the score, what's the number, can we get up high enough to make this goal, to make AYP, to get money from the state? It is sad.” Julie said she would love to see education return to being “student-centered and not just a business.”

**Summary.** Julie is optimistic about her ability to achieve both her short and long term goals. However, she believes that student expectations are currently at a level that surpasses readiness. She further asserts that the current context in which she works presents a serious barrier to professional goal achievement. While she has found ways of circumventing those obstacles, she is continually worried about negative feedback from her administrators. At the same time, the lack of positive feedback building-wide has resulted in an unhappy school climate. Julie continues to measure her own success through her student’s success and feedback from colleagues.

**Emotions.** Julie describes her best days as when “the students come in and everybody is happy, they follow directions, and they get it.” She added that most importantly, “I just like it when they’re happy. I like it when they want to high five and hug you.” On a personal level, Julie said, “I don’t think about me. I think about others. I think about these kids constantly and I want to impress upon them what they need in life.” Julie described a positive emotional experience as, “Seeing that emotional caring transferred; they would see me as a role model and want to emulate it.” Julie enjoys when children tell her they “want to be a teacher just like you.” But more significantly, “I like
to see when they’ll help their friend next to them who does struggle a little bit, without even being asked.” While Julie said most of her days are filled with “positive emotional experiences,” there are some negatives.

**Guilt.** Julie confessed that she sometimes has a difficult time when dealing with English as a second language students (ESL), and that makes her feel bad. “When I’m trying to talk to an ESL student and they just don’t get me and I don’t get them because they’re nonverbal, I feel bad.” She added that, “It has got to be frustrating and I’m not helping because I’m asking them what something says and it’s just a blank stare. It’s sad.”

Julie said that she also feels bad if she “fusses at a child.” She added, “I think back to my own kids and wonder if they’re getting fussied at in school? And then there are the kids that come in and are crying or they're just sad all the time.” For Julie, these are the negative emotional aspects of teaching. One of the problems, according to Julie, is that the school day is too long and the kids struggle after lunch:

That’s when they have their specials and then they could go home. They’re done. They don't want to learn anymore math or science, so getting anything out of them by the end of the day, well that’s when the frustration sets in for everyone. That is when Julie said she is likely to “fuss” at the kids. “I know not to do that, but when I do I feel bad.”

**Dealing with emotions.** Julie said that while she sometimes worries that a parent will “complain to the principal” if she “fusses at a child,” her tendency is to “let that stuff go. I don't dwell on it.” Besides praying, when she does feel the need to “talk to
someone,” she turns to her mother. “My mom is like a good friend. She says you can always come to me and tell me everything, but don't say anything at school.” Julie’s mom spent her career as an administrative secretary at a nearby high school, so believes “she knows the back door.” She cautions Julie that if she says something it might “get back to the principal. I tell her like really mom, my teammates are not going to do that. We all say stuff. It’s between us.” Julie added that you “have to talk to somebody:”

I mean I talk to my mom, but she’s not here. And my kids are boys. They [her children] don't care about anything. They think their job of going to high school is harder than my job. We worked harder than you did today mom. What’d you do? I had to walk from the east wing to the west wing. Really son? Okay, fine, your job is harder. I get it.

**Challenging parents.** Upsetting parents is something that Julie worries about. “I worry that what if they didn't like what I did or didn't like how I did it and complained. That would probably be the worst thing.” In general, Julie said that “dealing with parents” is her least favorite part of the job:

For all of my career I’ve hated parent conferences. I've gotten better with age but it's still not my favorite thing. I still will talk to them for five minutes and I’m done. I have nothing to say once I've spit it out. So many of them want to ask me about GT [gifted and talented] and I think geez Louise, they’re five. I know that kids are GT at five. I get that. I had one in kindergarten that was reading on a sixth grade level, but his social skills, he had none.
Julie added that we need to “let them be kids.” At the kindergarten level “we also need to think about how they can deal with other people; the social skills.”

**Summary.** Most of Julie’s days are filled with more positive than negative emotional experiences. She expressed that her emotions are definitively linked to those of her students. For Julie, feelings of guilt are a result of her inability to effectively deal with ESL students as well as what she describes as sometimes “fussing” at the students. Her least favorite and most emotionally charged part of teaching is dealing with parents. Finally, Julie’s mother and colleagues provide emotional support for her in difficult times.

**Thriving with Social Purpose.** Julie’s own words in describing her goals, personal agency beliefs, and emotions suggest that she is Thriving with Social Purpose.

**Active approach to goals.** Julie said that she always remains focused on her goals. “First and foremost I want to make sure that the kids learn. I’m not willing to abandon that goal.” Julie added that may require flexibility in working with her students:

I’m always watching students to make sure they’re getting it. We do Daily Five and literacy centers and if for instance a child is not getting letter recognition, I change the activities. So that means that one kid or a small group of kids might be doing something different. I have students who can say the letters when you’re pointing to them in order. They learn the routine. But, they can’t do it without the routine. I have to make sure they get it and I’m not willing to bend from that.

Julie reiterated that one of her primary concerns for her students is to “prepare them for first grade.” She offered, “If they don’t get it here, they’ll always struggle.
**Personal optimism.** Julie said that she’s “very optimistic” about her ability to achieve her goals and added:

I wouldn’t be teaching if I wasn’t. I push to get them where they need to be.

Sometimes there are things that stand in the way. Sometimes its behavior and sometimes it’s academic. It’s hard. You get frustrated, but you have to persevere.

You have to stay hopeful and you have to project that to them.

Julie described one child in her class this year who writes everything backwards. She said, “No matter what we try and not matter how many times we model it for her, she turns around and writes the word backwards.” Julie’s concern is that the child is dyslexic and is frustrated that the school will not do anything. She elaborated by saying, “I asked our reading specialist what I should do. She asked Dr. Athens [division reading specialist] and she said to just keep an eye on her.” Julie added, “But, I think I can help her. I know I’m not going to stop trying.”

**Mindful tenacity.** Julie said that it is her nature to continually monitor her teaching. She explained, “You have to watch the data and use that to guide what you’re doing. It’s something that I’m always thinking about.” Julie confessed that she is better at doing this with reading than she is with math:

I’m constantly rearranging reading groups and thinking about what I can do differently to help a particular child. It’s not usual for me to have a kid or a group of kids doing something different than the rest of them. I try something and if doesn’t work, I try something else. It’s constant rearranging and trying new stuff.
I actually do better with things that have to do with reading. You could probably say that I’m better at reading than I am at math.

Julie added that while her personal preference is for verbal content areas, she does have to be “mindful of all of the subjects because we have to meet our Smart Goals.”

*Emotional wisdom.* Julie describes herself as an empathetic person, especially when it comes to her students.

I worry about my kids all the time. The girl I mentioned who writes everything backwards…it was her birthday and we weren’t in school that day because of something. I don’t remember what it was - conference day or something. Anyway, I worried because I thought, how is she going to feel about not bringing in cupcakes on her birthday? Every kid this year has brought in cupcakes on their actual birthday. It may sound silly, but I worry about things like that.

Julie went on to say that it’s not just the child that she sympathizes with, but that she always takes the whole family into consideration.

That girl’s parents are probably not in a position to help her with her writing. They aren’t going to be able to pay for private testing or anything. How does that make them feel? The poor child can’t control it and not everyone understands that. It may not be something that will fix itself in time. Just because you can’t see it like a kid who is crippled or something, doesn’t mean it’s not there.

Julie added that she is concerned because, “What if she moves on to the next grade and the next, and no one tries to fix it?”
Social purpose. When asked about her purpose for teaching, Julie said, “I feel a social responsibility to help every child that walks into my room to succeed. Every kid has a right to learn. Like the little girl I’ve been talking about. I hate to hear let’s just watch her.” Julie offered, “I really feel for her and her parents. I can really relate to them on this, probably because of my experiences with my own son.” She added, “Watching does not make an equitable education. In my mind each year that you wait and watch, is a year that is lost.”

Life meaning. Julie said that teaching “definitely” gives meaning to her life. For her, this comes from “giving them a start in life:”

Just to know that I’m here for kids. Even though we joke about, hey, one day they're going to run the world, you better make sure you take care of them. So, just to know that I was a part of their life and started their, hopefully, their love of learning.

Julie added that is something she does not get at home because her own children “hate school.” She said that may be because she is “always pushing them.” She added:

But, here I can play around, have fun, and I like to play around with the kids. I like to be silly with them because it gets them excited about something, whether it's learning, you're being silly with them. It’s like you’re a five year old and they feel comfortable with you. I feel like I'm the goofiest one on the team. I'm not so serious. I mean, I don't like confrontation, but they're five. Why would you push them? You push them into hating learning and I don’t want to do that.
Julie concluded by saying, “It makes you feel so good when you help kids that can’t do something to do it; to see the light bulb go off. That’s what it’s all about.”
Chapter Five

The purpose of this study was to understand the role that resilience plays in a teacher’s decision to remain in the profession. The current backdrop for teaching is filled with education reforms calling for increased accountability, which has resulted in an increased emotional workload for teachers. In addition, the composition of the teaching workforce has changed over the past several decades due to attrition and retirement, leaving teachers in the middle phase of their careers filling more classrooms than those at either the beginning or ends of their career. Despite these changes, research has so far shed little light on why some mid-career teachers are able to sustain the resilience needed for perseverance and success, regardless of the challenges. As a result, this study sought to answer the following question:

What role, if any, does resilience play in a mid-career teacher’s decision to remain in the teaching profession?

In this chapter, I first review each participant’s responses based on the conceptual framework for this study, Motivational Systems Theory (MST; Ford, 1992) and its recent theoretical elaboration, the Thriving with Social Purpose (TSP) theory of motivation and optimal functioning, as well as the TSP Theory of Life Meaning (Ford & Smith, 2007). This includes an examination of the participant’s goals, personal agency beliefs, and emotions in relation to the challenges each has faced and her responses to those
adversities. TSP theory is based on the premise that when each of the motivational processes are amplified, motivation can facilitate optimal functioning, including resilience. The participants’ responses are also examined in relationship to the themes of resilience that emerged including personal strength, social competence, a structured style, and social resources. Graphic organizers are also presented for each of these sets of findings. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the findings of this study in relationship to the study’s research question as well as the current literature on teacher motivation and resilience presented in chapter two. Finally, the conclusions and implications for the teaching profession and future research are discussed.

**Synopsis of Findings**

The following section provides an overview of the findings for the study participants: Marie, Rachel, and Julie. These synopses are derived from the data reported in chapter four.

**Marie.** Marie said her goals have been the keystone on which she has depended throughout her teaching career. Her ability to stay focused on her core goals, while at the same time being flexible in her short term goals, has enabled her to persevere. She has managed obstacles and setbacks by proactively anticipating difficulties or even burnout, and then responding in a manner that has bolstered her resilience. For example, when Marie worked at Pattee Elementary she was overwhelmed by her class of thirty fifth grade students who had wide-ranging cognitive, emotional, and social abilities including learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, and gifted and talented children. At that point, Marie recognized that she was beginning to experience signs of burnout such as
excessive and prolonged stress. In order to combat these feelings, Marie took a two year break from teaching and reported that when she returned to the profession, she felt renewed. In fact, Marie has often used change – change of school or grade level – as a means to reignite her passion for teaching. Her additional coping strategies involve identifying, labeling, and finding solutions to dealing with the challenges she faces. The salient themes that emerged for Marie are discussed next.

**Motherhood.** For Marie, her goals and career trajectory have somewhat been influenced by being a mother. For instance, when she had the option to continue teaching fifth grade which she enjoyed, it meant moving to a different school, but Marie chose to remain at Hyattsburg Elementary because that was the school that her own school-aged children attended. She also acknowledged that teaching complements motherhood because of the compatible schedules.

**Lack of autonomy.** Marie describes the lack of autonomy and support she receives from her administrators in recent years as being the greatest threat to her goal achievement. She cites the recent initiative of her school district that requires teachers to use a specific lesson plan template, and the time-consuming process of writing these plans, as a source of stress. In addition, she does not believe this is going to make her a better teacher. Another example is the basal reading program that the school district has adopted. In Marie’s opinion, this is touted as being in the best interest of the students, but for her, these scripted lessons have not done anything to improve student achievement and furthermore, are counter to what she believes is the best way to teach students to read. Interestingly, Marie believes there is a connection between the lack of autonomy
and support from administration and student behavior because the school’s initiatives have reduced the amount of time for relationship-building. For Marie, there is a direct connection between the relationships she builds with her students and their academic success.

**Protective factors.** Marie is confident in her ability as a teacher, yet recognizes the importance of lifelong learning and collaboration with colleagues. She is always willing to learn and change to meet the needs of the diverse population of students whom she teaches. The pervasive personal agentic theme for Marie is a deep sense of her own competence and worth, as well as the presence of collegial, familial, and institutional safety nets. While Marie attributes much of the stress she has experienced throughout her career to a lack of autonomy, a supportive administration in her most recent teaching assignment has served as a protective factor and helped to strengthen her professional commitment.

**Emotions.** During her career, Marie has had both positive and negative emotional teaching experiences. Her positive experiences, such as helping the student whose parent was jailed to appreciate the value of learning, the student who credits Marie with her career choice of becoming a teacher, or the students this year who have discovered the joy of reading, have served to strengthen her self-confidence, confirmed her altruistic reasons for becoming a teacher, and helped to sustain her when she has faced adversity. It is the negative emotional experiences however, such as the frustration she experienced when attempting to make a case for the needs of students to the school board and received no response, or recognizing that an emotionally disturbed child is not receiving
the psychological help that he needs, that have spawned resilience in her. For Marie, these situations actually serve as a motivator. She is able to maintain stability when faced with challenges, and as a result, has experienced an increased sense of commitment and agency. Moreover, this suggests that resilience is a key factor in Marie’s willingness to continue in the teaching profession.

**Challenges.** The adversities that Marie has faced have included challenging parents who questioned her feelings of equity toward students, personal doubt in her ability to reach her goals, and a lack of alignment between personal beliefs and contextual expectations. The greatest challenge that she has faced, however, and closely related to contextual expectations, has been a lack of support from administrators. Marie expressed repeatedly throughout the interviews that what administration is asking teachers to do is in direct conflict with what she believes is in the best interest of students, and furthermore, that it impedes student success. But, she describes herself as someone who sees challenges as opportunities and as a person who needs a change about every five years. It is likely this positive attitude and active approach to dealing with challenges that has helped her to build resilience over the course of her career.

**Marie’s motivation.** Marie has experienced motivational challenges throughout her career including personal doubt, a lack of autonomy, challenging parents, and contextual expectations that are not aligned with her personal beliefs (see Figure 1). Despite these obstacles, an unwavering commitment to her goals, her positive agentic beliefs, and emotional experiences have served to sustain her motivation to continue teaching.
**Goals**
- Flexible short term goals
- Unwavering core goal

**Emotions**
- Student bonds
- Support system
- Emotional control
- Championing a cause

**Personal Agency Beliefs**
- Student relationships
- Student success
- Personal belief system

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**Figure 1: Substance of Motivation for Marie**
**Marie’s resilience.** People who are resilient are able to respond in a positive manner to adverse situations, and this may account for Marie’s ability to remain committed to the teaching profession (see Figure 2). Relationships with both students and colleagues are important to her. She appears to derive personal strength from those relationships as well as from positive self-efficacy, resolute goals, and an optimistic attitude about her future as a teacher. Marie also recognizes that changing grade levels or schools, as well as being an advocate for students, has helped her to circumvent negative feelings that may have caused her to leave teaching. Finally, Marie reported that she has surrounded herself with a support network including family, colleagues, and a therapist.
Rachel. Rachel measures her effectiveness on a day-by-day basis as she strives to feel good about her teaching. She indicated that she measures a successful day by the degree to which she accomplishes what she has planned, while at the same time managing student behavior. She said she feels empowered to pursue this goal because she believes her administrator perceives her as a person who will get the job done, but the real source of her empowerment comes from supportive colleagues. In addition to giving the positive feedback that is important to her, but which she describes as lacking in the
school’s administration, Rachel stated she sees her colleagues as mentors and role models whom she can emulate. While she does not believe she will ever reach her core goal of being the best possible teacher, she is confident that she will get to a point where she is satisfied with her teaching. Rachel confessed that she is sometimes bothered by peers who question why she does not pursue a master’s degree. While she appears firm in her commitment to persevere in the pursuit of excellence, she does not believe that an advanced degree will necessarily help her to achieve that. The themes that emerged from the interviews with Rachel are discussed next.

**Stress.** Rachel described the stress that is inherent in the teaching profession, the abundance of work such as lesson planning and grading papers that needs to be done at home, and the lack of a supportive administration, as being the greatest threats to her goal achievement. Rachel offered that a great deal of the stress is also a result of the inequity she feels when the students who are behavior problems distract from the learning of other children. She also acknowledged that a lack of general support, or support in terms of help with student behavioral issues from the school administration, challenges her goal pursuit.

**Confidence.** Rachel reported being confident in her teaching ability and she linked her positive agentic beliefs to her love of children, her students’ successes, her role as a mentor to new teachers, and the relationships she has formed with colleagues. She described having students who had previously failed, pass standardized tests with her continued efforts, as an example of the root of her positive feelings because not only does she care deeply about her students succeeding, but it also reflects positively on her.
Rachel said she has also found fulfillment in working as a mentor with new teachers because she enjoys being a role model. Her goal in that capacity is to form a trusting relationship where she shares both good and bad teaching experiences because she believes there are lessons to be learned from each type of experience.

**Lack of administration support.** Rachel’s negative feelings about her abilities as a teacher and the context in which she works are, again, rooted in the lack of support and feedback she receives from the administrators. Rachel described the supportive relationship she had with the assistant principal in Blue Ridge County as a stark contrast to that in her current teaching context. In Blue Ridge County she said she regularly received positive feedback from colleagues and administrators and was often chosen to represent the school at district functions. At Hyattsburg Elementary, she reported her only knowledge of how the administrators perceive her teaching ability, other than from formal, yearly evaluations, has come from second-hand discussion.

**Crying.** Rachel said she has used crying as an emotional release throughout her career, in addition to seeking solace from colleagues and her husband. The stressful incidents that prompt this are generally related to her students’ lack of success when they do not do well on tests for which they worked hard to prepare for, or when the learning environment is disrupted by inappropriate student behavior that in turn prevents others from learning. She described a time when she was working in Blue Ridge when she became so frustrated with the situation that she started to cry in front of her students. Rachel is equally as likely to use crying as an emotional release when she is extremely
happy, such as when she presented a citizenship award to a particularly deserving student who had surmounted many obstacles throughout the school year.

**Rachel’s motivation.** In her current teaching position, the challenges that Rachel faces are a result of a lack of support from administrators and the stress that comes from the extra hours that are required outside of the work day. Especially challenging for her though, are the negative student behaviors that threaten an equitable opportunity for all students in her classroom to learn (see Figure 3). Despite these adversities, she is able to thrive because of her firm commitment to her goals, her altruistic reasons for teaching, her role as a mentor, the bonds she forms with students, a solid familial and collegial support system, and being able to release her emotions through crying.
Substance of Motivation: Rachel

Goals
- Day-to-day short term goals
- Unwavering core goal

Emotions
- Student bonds
- Support system
- Crying - positive and negative

Personal Agency Beliefs
- Love of children
- Student success
- New teacher mentor

Motivation

Student behavior

Lack of administrator support

Contextual stress

Figure 3: Substance of Motivation for Rachel
Rachel’s resilience. Rachel has demonstrated resilience and remained committed to the teaching profession (see Figure 4). The relationships that she forms with students and colleagues are important to her resolve, and she derives strength from serving as a mentor to new teachers. She is firmly committed to being the best possible teacher she can be and is optimistic about her future. Rachel is satisfied with her formal education despite the encouragement from friends and colleagues to pursue a Master’s degree, and she measures her goal attainment on a day-to-day basis. Finally, Rachel surrounds herself with a support network that includes her husband and colleagues.
Like Marie and Rachel, Julie reported that her love of children and seeing them succeed, as well as the bonds she develops with them, form the essence of her approach to teaching. Julie’s primary function is to get her students to the point where they can be successful in the next grade level, both academically and socially. Equally important to her is to establish connections with her students that develop into lasting relationships. Julie described the importance of having students who stop by for a hug...
when they are still attending school in the same building, and even more so, those relationships that are intact long after the child has graduated from high school. The emergent themes for Julie are discussed next.

**Changing expectations.** Julie said she believes that academic expectations for students have changed dramatically over the past ten years, to the point where students are now required to master material that just recently was one to two levels above their current grade. She reported that this has created stress for her because while she loves teaching kindergarten, she dislikes that she has to ask her students to work at a level they are not ready for, and then promoting them regardless of their readiness. This is a double-edged sword because much like Marie and Rachel, Julie’s perception of her teaching ability is directly linked to her student’s success.

**Confidence.** Julie stated that she is confident in her ability as a teacher because of the positive feedback she receives from colleagues, parents, and students. She does, however, acknowledge that this confidence is often challenged by contextual barriers such as a lack of administrator feedback or support for collegial relationships that has resulted in a negative school climate. She described an atmosphere where teachers are never given positive feedback, there is a lack of trust on the part of administrators, and talking with colleagues is discouraged. The net result is a barrier of fear. While Julie has found ways of circumventing these obstacles such as working with children in small groups, meeting with colleagues after hours, and holding on to complimentary notes from students and parents, she said she is continually worrying about negative feedback from her administrators. As an example, she explained that while experience has taught her
that children have an easier time learning colors when working with crayons, this is frowned on in her school and teachers are expected to follow mandated plans. Most troubling for Julie is the absence of time or permission to work with her students on social skills such as how to talk to friends, that in her opinion, many of them do not learn at home.

**Stress and frustration.** Julie is the only participant in this study whose self-description indicates that she may be susceptible to burnout at some point in her career. She acknowledged that she has thought about retirement, but as a single mother, cannot afford to do so at this stage in her life. She described a vicious cycle where she is asked to do things that she does not believe the children are ready for, she becomes frustrated and “fusses” at the students, and this leaves her feeling discouraged. Moreover, this causes her to worry that a parent might complain about her. Finally, Julie reported that she has a tendency to let the things that are bothering her at school stay at school. She said she is not inclined to allow the stress or frustrations she experiences in her profession affect her home life. When she does feel a need to vent, she said she regularly turns to her mother and colleagues.

**Julie’s motivation.** Julie is motivated by her love of children and preparing them to be successful in the future, both socially and academically (see Figure 5). The bonds that she forms with students are very important to her, and her confidence is bolstered by the positive feedback she receives from students, their parents, and her grade level colleagues. Her motivation is threatened by a lack of positive feedback from administrators and a context that promotes students regardless of readiness. This causes
her to be frustrated occasionally and she worries that she sometimes “fusses” at her students. She also admitted to sometimes thinking about retirement as a result.
Goals
- Day-to-day short term goals
- Unwavering core goal

Personal Agency Beliefs
- Love of children
- Student success - academic and social

Emotions
- Student bonds
- Support system
- Frustration

Substance of Motivation: Julie

Response to students
Thoughts of retirement

Lack of autonomy

Contextual expectations vs
Student readiness

Figure 5: Substance of Motivation for Julie
**Julie’s resilience.** Julie has demonstrated resilience in a number of ways (see Figure 6). The lasting bonds that she forms with students are important to Julie. She derives personal strength from those relationships as well as from those with her colleagues, the support she receives from her mother, and the positive feedback she receives from parents. She has a positive perception of her teaching ability and perseveres in her goal to prepare students both academically and socially for the next grade level. She focuses on being successful one day at a time and has the ability to let go of her frustrations at the end of each day.
Discussion

As presented in the previous section, Marie, Rachel, and Julie have each faced challenges throughout her career. The most significant of these are a lack of administrative support and feedback, and a lack of alignment between personal instructional beliefs and district expectations, yet with support mechanisms such as collegial encouragement and a commitment to continued learning, each has demonstrated
resilience and maintained a sense of agency and dedication to the profession. This substantiates the findings of Day and Gu (2007), who found that teachers are able to overcome the emotional tensions in their work environments and maintain a sense of commitment to the profession by building on favorable influences and positive opportunities.

This study, like Day and Gu (2014), found that there are three distinct characteristics of teacher resilience including: (a) it is context specific; (b) it is closely correlated to vocational commitment and a person’s altruistic reasons for choosing to teach; and (c) that resilient teachers have the capacity to maintain stability and a sense of agency in their work lives. In regard to the teaching context, the Day and Gu study found the support system within that context to be especially important. This study indicated that Marie, Rachel, and Julie each noted the support of colleagues as an important factor in maintaining resilience; however, they were more inclined to rely on a support network that extended beyond the school setting including family, and in Marie’s case, a therapist as well.

The conceptual framework for this study, Motivational Systems Theory (MST) and its elaborations, including Thriving with Social Purpose (TSP) and the TSP Theory of Life Meaning, provided a specific lens through which to analyze teacher motivation. According to Ford (1992), “motivation provides the psychological foundation for the development of human competence in everyday life” (p. 244). For this effective functioning to occur a person must be motivated, skillful, and have the biological and behavioral capacities to support interactions within an environment that does not impede
progress toward a goal (Ford, 1992). Based on these criteria, MST defines motivation as an organized pattern of a person’s goals, capability beliefs, and emotions. When each of these components is amplified, the result is optimal functioning, thus facilitating resilience. The constructs of these theories provided an interpretive lens through which to examine each participant’s motivation to remain in the teaching profession. In addition, each construct is important to understanding how a person will respond when presented with challenges.

The energy and drive often associated with motivation are not sufficient to deal with pressure and stress (Martin, 2002). According to Martin, some level of resilience is needed. Resilience assumes the presence of a threat to existing circumstances (Gu, 2014) and the presence of protective factors that enable a person to respond in a positive manner to stress (Kaplan, Turner, Norman, & Stillson, 1996). It is therefore important to consider resilience within a specific context. Each of the participants in this study worked at the same elementary school at one point in her career, and it is that school that formed the context for her comments. Furthermore, Masten (2014) posits that a greater sense of effectiveness, agency, control, and self-confidence promotes the ability to persist in the face of adversity. Moreover, according to Fadardi, Azad, and Nemati (2010), an adaptive motivational structure includes a sense of control and commitment, high expectations of success, and emotional involvement in goal pursuit.

In this study, Marie, Rachel, and Julie each demonstrated a tenacious motivational pattern including goal perseverance, context and capability beliefs, and emotional control. The data support the idea that resilience is facilitated by an active approach goal
orientation, personal optimism, mindful tenacity, and emotional wisdom. In addition, each of the participants exhibited strong social purpose goals including resource provision, social responsibility, and in the case of Rachel, a strong sense of equity. Because of this motivational strength, each of these teachers exhibited resilience when facing adversity.

The findings of the phenomenon of teacher motivation and resilience of the mid-career teachers in this study revealed a number of commonalities in the adversities and responses of the participants. These challenges and coping mechanisms are discussed next.

**Increased accountability for test-score outcomes.** The current system of accountability in the United States has school leaders fixated on a teacher’s ability to raise student scores on standardized tests. As noted in chapter two, the problem with this approach is that it is impossible to standardize the students or the teachers. Therefore, the idea of standardization is in direct conflict with what motivates individuals to teach in the first place and fails to take into account teacher job satisfaction. According to Darling-Hammond (1997), effective teachers are not routine, and students are not passive, and therefore their interactions and relationships cannot be packaged.

Each of the study participants spoke negatively about the amount of testing they are currently required to do as opposed to just a few years ago, but for Marie and Julie these changes were particularly significant. This difference among the participants may be related to the number of years Marie and Julie have been teaching because they can remember what instructional practices were like before high-stakes testing mandated how
educators teach and how student learning is assessed. For Marie and Julie, standardized testing has resulted in standardized teaching practices where they are sometimes asked to use scripted lesson plans that they believe are depriving them of using instructional practices that would better facilitate student learning, as well as enable them to differentiate and meet individual student needs. On the other hand, as high-stakes testing has always been a reality for Rachel, it is possible that her opinion is more closely linked to what she sees as the negative effect it has on the students when they are not successful on these tests. For each of these teachers though, the increased accountability that is a result of high-stakes testing has challenged their motivation and prompted the need for protective factors that support resilience.

Lack of administrator support. Extant research suggests that in addition to the regular stress that some teachers feel in meeting the needs of their students, pressure from administrators and policy makers connected to high-stakes testing and increased accountability may affect some teachers’ long-term commitment to the teaching profession (Rubin, 2011). While some educators cite these additional responsibilities as reason enough to consider leaving the profession (Valli & Buese, 2007), Haberman (2005) claims that this, along with a lack of support from administrators, as contributing factors to job-related stress and weakened teacher morale.

Research on school effectiveness has underscored the importance of teachers who are committed to the profession (Rosenholtz, 1989). Anderman, Belzer, & Smith (1991), asserted that teacher satisfaction and commitment to work are critical factors for effective schools, while Ashburn (1989) posited that the school context is the single largest
predictor of commitment for teachers. Firestone and Rosenblum (1989) identified important organizational factors that influence teacher commitment, including administrative support. According to Anderman et al., this stems from the subjective relationship between the teacher and principal and reflects on the way a school leader is viewed by teachers and the perceived degree of support, management, or control provided. In this way, the research on principal leadership points to a central role to be played in overall teacher satisfaction and commitment (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1989; Nidich & Nidich, 1986).

A number of studies have linked administrative leadership and support to teacher job satisfaction and retention (Betancourt-Smith, Inman, & Marlow, 1994; Billingsley, 1993; Chittom & Sistrunk, 1990). In recent years, according to Faber (2010), the focus on accountability has resulted in administrators taking desperate measures to insure adequate progress in the eyes of their stakeholders and policy makers. While the reason for administrative action was not the focus, this study did confirm that a lack of support from administrators indeed presented the greatest challenge to each participant’s motivation. For Marie, Rachel, and Julie, the contradictory demands of being asked to develop critical thinkers while at the same time covering an extraordinary amount of material in order to have their students prepared for standardized tests, coupled with a lack of support, has left them frustrated at times. Furthermore, this study found that a lack of feedback and support for collegial engagement were additional, significant adversarial factors.
Both Rachel and Julie said they believe that their administrators hold them in high regard, but that this belief was formed from secondhand comments, rather than direct feedback from the administrators. While Marie had a similar experience working at Hyattsville Elementary, she has found a very supportive administrative team at the school where she currently works within the same school district, and reports that as a result she is much happier in that environment. This suggests that there is room within the current system of education, even with the pressure of high-stakes testing and accountability, to support teachers and make them feel valued. This may include supporting the flexibility to change work assignments within the school division such as Marie did.

Supporting teachers is important because as Farber (2010) asserted, increased expectancies from administrators have come at the expense of a teacher’s time, health, and commitment to the teaching profession. According to a MetLife Survey of the American Teacher (2013), the result is a lower level of teacher satisfaction that may contribute to attrition in schools. Findings from the survey indicated a 15% decrease in teacher job satisfaction since 2009 and a 12% increase in teachers who say they are likely to leave the profession in the near future. Only 39% of the survey respondents indicated that they are very satisfied with their jobs, a decrease of 23% from 2008 (MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 2013). This is problematic because according to this same study, effective teachers account for 33% of student achievement gains. Moreover, in a report on teacher turnover in high-poverty schools that included data from a teacher follow up survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, Ingersoll
(2004) asserted that nearly 40% of the teachers surveyed left the profession because of job dissatisfaction.

Despite the lack of administrator support, each of this study’s participants has been able to thrive, find satisfaction in her job, and remain resilient. Marie views these challenges as an opportunity for her to improve her teaching skills and says this has enabled her to be “optimistic about teaching” and her future as an educator. “Knowing I have made a difference in some students' lives is what keeps me going.”

Rachel manages by putting her “best foot forward” and reminding herself that “I'm doing the best I can, and that's all I can do.” She loves working with children and associates her role as a teacher as being part of her “identity.” Rachel is unwilling to let adversity threaten her career because she said, “teaching gives me a sense of purpose in life.”

For Julie, it is all about seeing “that light bulb go off. It makes you feel so good when you help kids that can’t do something to do it.” For that reason alone, Julie refuses to give up.

**Student behavior.** According to Müller, Alliata, and Benninghoff (2009), teachers are more satisfied when student behavior is positive. Marie, Rachel, and Julie each stated that she has seen an escalation in negative student behavior in recent years. The disruptive or off-task classroom behaviors, and the adverse effect on the learning environment are their greatest classroom concerns. This supports the findings of Beltman, Mansfield, and Price (2011) in their review of 50 recent empirical studies focusing on teacher resilience, who found that disruptive students presented a significant challenge
for teachers. Moreover, according to Sugai, Sprague, Horner, and Walker (2000), students engaging in disruptive behavior consume an excessive amount of instructional time and this accounts for the majority of referrals requiring administrative attention. Furthermore, Walker, Ramsey, and Gresham (2004) posited that this type of behavior also impacts their classmates’ ability to learn, the teacher’s stress level, and the teacher’s ability to teach effectively. Marie, Rachel, and Julie each indicated that she was not likely to go to administration with behavior concerns, because they felt that would be frowned upon.

Negative student behavior has had the greatest emotional impact on Rachel. She indicated that dealing with disruptive behavior often leaves her feeling emotionally drained, especially because of the impact that it has on the students who want to learn. While she has not directly asked for help, she believes that she has been open enough with her administrators about the problems she is having with several students this year that help should be offered. Rachel offered that this serves as further evidence of a lack of administrator support.

**Colleagues.** While collegial interaction is not necessarily supported at Hyattsburg Elementary, Marie, Rachel, and Julie each expressed the affirmative role that colleagues have played in helping them to remain optimistic about their future as teachers. Teachers’ interactions within a professional community are important and research has found that the opportunity to engage in dialogue with colleagues has positive benefits, including higher levels of commitment and student achievement (Qian, Youngs, & Frank, 2013). According to Qian et al., teachers can develop pedagogical understanding, examine their
own beliefs and assumptions, and learn new instructional practices through these conversations.

While each of the study’s participants expressed the importance of the role that colleagues play in their continued motivation and resilience, there were differences among the three in how that support is manifested. Marie said she not only shares professional concerns with several colleagues, but they also exercise together several times a week in an effort to alleviate job-related stress. Rachel, on the other hand, views her close colleagues as mentors and role models. She said she feels comfortable venting her frustrations to them, but because she respects them professionally, she is also willing to emulate their teaching practices. Julie offered that her colleagues have served a dual purpose. First, she said, she has a reciprocal, sounding-board relationship with a number of her teammates. But secondly, she said she also recognizes that she can learn from peers, especially about new technologies from her younger colleagues. This supports the findings of Zhao and Frank (2003) who asserted that teachers are more likely to use educational technology if their colleagues are using it and are also available as resources.

**Altruistic roots.** Research has shown that people enter the teaching profession for a variety of reasons, the most common of which are personal fulfillment, enjoyment of the subject, and a desire to work with young people (Curtis, 2012; Manuel & Hughes, 2006). The participants in this study each indicated that she chose teaching because of her love of children, but did so at different stages in their lives. Both Rachel and Julie explained that they wanted to be a teacher from a very young age and never wavered in that desire. Julie had simply never considered another career path because she loved baby
sitting and working with young children. Rachel said the influence of her third grade teacher was a key factor in her career choice. But for Marie, education as a profession was not her first choice, and was only considered at the encouragement of her sister. She explained that while she had always loved children, she was not a very good student and as a result did not have positive experiences on which to anchor her feelings about education.

Contrary to the findings of Manual and Hughes (2006), this study found that teaching is a good career choice for people who have families. While it may not have been part of their initial reasons for choosing the profession, both Marie and Julie stated that teaching is an excellent career in which to raise a family. In fact, one the reasons that Marie said she returned to teaching after a brief hiatus was because it was conducive to raising a family. Similarly, Rachel indicated that while she has not yet started her family, she likes that she will be on the same schedule as her children when they are school-age.

**Conclusions**

This study sought to fill a void in the literature by seeking to understand the role that resilience plays in three mid-career teacher’s abilities to adjust to adverse situations, and what motivates them to persevere in the face of that adversity. The relationship of these findings within the conceptual framework for this study, Motivational Systems Theory, and its recent theoretical elaboration, Thriving with Social Purpose (TSP; Ford & Smith, 2007) theory of motivation and optimal functioning, as well as the TSP Theory of Life Meaning, is discussed next.
**Goals.** According to Ford (1992), goals are important because they define the content and direction of motivational patterns, and as a result, behavior is guided by goals. Marie, Rachel, and Julie each reported having broad, yet well-defined short term and core, long term goals. They each have goals that pertain to their growth as a teacher and this is linked to the effort they put into their teaching as well as their ability to adapt and respond to the challenges each faces within the teaching context. They also have goals that are linked to their student’s success.

Marie’s short term goal is to understand the developmental level, both cognitively and emotionally of the students she is working with. Rachel’s short term goal is to feel good about her teaching on a daily basis, and Julie wants to make sure that her students have the academic and social skills to move onto the next grade level. In the long term, Marie wants to reach the children who represent the under-achieving student she once was; Rachel stated that she wants “to be better at what I'm doing” and to “continue learning;” and Julie’s core goal is to make a lasting connection with her students.

Marie, Rachel, and Julie each are keenly aware of her core goal and not surprisingly, this goal for each of them is linked to her students’ successes and achievement. According to Urdan (2014), teachers feel a tremendous sense of responsibility because they are seen as holding the key to the success of the students they teach. This idea of teacher responsibility and accountability has informed policy such as No Child Left Behind and value-added models for teacher evaluation discussed in chapter two. For Marie, Rachel, and Julie, the responsibility of student outcomes appears to be a stable trait where they willingly embrace this challenge for the same altruistic reasons for
which they chose to pursue a career in education. However, this responsibility is often challenged by the contextual issues such lack of autonomy, student behavior, disgruntled parents, and unrealistic student expectations. When these things occur, the participants in this study demonstrate resilience and are able to persevere.

The explanation for Marie, Rachel, and Julie’s perseverance can be found in three recurring themes from the psychological literature on motivation. According to Ford (1992), these themes include (a) “Motivational processes are qualities of the person rather than properties of the context;” (b) “Motivational processes are future-oriented rather than being focused on the past or present;” and (c) “Motivational processes are evaluative rather than instrumental in character” (pp. 72-73). The three components of Motivational Systems Theory meet these criteria. Furthermore, the data presented in chapter four suggests that these teachers are able to persevere because of their goal-life alignment, amplified motivation, and the existential and cultural contributors and feelings of life meaning.

**Personal agency beliefs.** According to Ford (1992), personal agency beliefs play a critical role in attaining goals, especially in challenging situations. Personal agency beliefs are evaluative expectancies that include capability beliefs about whether a person believes he or she has the capability to attain his or her goals, and context beliefs about whether or not the context supports goal-attainment efforts (Ford, 1992).

Marie expressed confidence in her ability to reach her goals and has the added security of a safety net comprised of family, colleagues, and a therapist to sustain her when her goals are challenged. This optimism is linked to her students and she explained,
“It's not about me being successful. I'm successful when they're successful, and seeing them feel good about what they’ve done or can do, makes me optimistic about the future.”

Rachel’s confidence in her teaching ability is linked to her love of children. Because her desire to work with children is so deeply rooted, she believes that she can persevere regardless of any adversity she may face. Rachel believes she can achieve her goals because “other people tell me that I can” and because “I’m doing it for myself and for the kids.”

Julie stated her confidence is bolstered by the positive feedback she receives from students, their parents, and colleagues. She said, “I keep the notes they write me. They make me feel good. They’re the things I always remember.” This and seeing “the ‘ah ha’ moments” are what help to make Julie feel successful.

This “power of positive thought” described above can be particularly potent in helping people to navigate certain pathways (Ford, 1992). According to Ford, goals are not enough for people to reach their objectives, but rather, they must believe that they have the ability and the opportunity to achieve the goal. Ford further asserts that personal agency beliefs play a particularly crucial role in challenging situations. Marie stated that there were many times at Hyattsburg Elementary where she just did “not feel supported by her administrator.” Similarly, Rachel noted that “there’s no type of [administrative] feedback and Julie stated that it would be nice to hear something positive, “Even just a sticky note on your door with a smiley face.”
**Emotions.** There is little doubt among anyone who has been a teacher, that it is an emotionally charged endeavor (Urdan, 2014). Children can be irritating and misbehaved one moment and angelic the next. When these emotional responses are exacerbated by the magnitude of a teacher’s job, including dealing with stakeholders such as parents and an administration that may not be supportive, the emotional investment can be enormous. For these reasons, regulating one’s emotions is critical for longevity in the field of education (Hargreaves, 1998).

Marie, Rachel, and Julie expressed that their emotions are linked to their goals and their students’ successes. Each reported that when their students demonstrate learning, they experience positive emotions, and feel confident and successful. Marie noted that, the real reward in teaching is seeing the students “get the connection,” and she said, “Knowing I have made a difference in some students' lives is what keeps me going.” Rachel said, “I hope that I make a difference every day, with every child.” She described the most enjoyable aspect of teaching as seeing “the kids get it,” and added that she finds fulfillment in the pride that they have when that happens. Julie finds success in just being “a part of their [her students] life” and hopefully igniting “their love of learning.”

By contrast, when their goals are thwarted, Marie, Rachel, and Julie experience negative emotions. Marie shared that she believes she is capable of influencing the well-being and future of her students. Yet, there are times when a student with whom she tries very hard to make a connection and influence in a positive way is failing and the weight of this burden can be overwhelming for her. She said, “It [breaks] my heart. It stays with
you always.” With one particular student she added, “I went home and cried and went to bed early because I was depressed because I couldn’t help him.”

Similarly, Rachel described the long hours she spends planning lessons, but when a student’s misbehavior disrupts what she has intended to be an engaging lesson, her feelings of competence are jeopardized. She said, “It makes me question myself. It’s discouraging.”

Of the three study participants, Julie was the one who seemed best equipped to regulate her emotions. She said that she feels lucky that she has the ability to just “let it go.”

In addition to leaning on colleagues, each participant also had a preferred way of dealing with negative emotions: Marie sees a therapist and exercises regularly with friends and colleagues; Rachel finds her release through crying and a good night’s sleep; and Julie confides in her mother.

**Resilience.** Resilience assumes the presence of a challenge or adverse situations or conditions in which a person is able to respond in a positive manner (Gu, 2014), and extant research provides some evidence that protective factors are key components in teacher resilience (Brunetti, 2006; Gu & Day, 2007; Luthar & Brown, 2007). Howard and Johnson (2004) found that a deep sense of agency, where the teachers believed they had the ability to control what happened to them, a strong support group, and a belief in one’s own competence and worth to be significant protective factors. Arguably, teachers can benefit from support that will help them to deal with job-related stress. Burnout and
plateauing, as discussed in chapter two, are major concerns that may result in teachers leaving the profession or interfering with their effectiveness.

This study confirms extant research on adults that suggests resilience is not associated with generalized personal attributes (Luthar & Brown, 2007), but rather is a dimension influenced by multiple factors that are specific to a given content (Ungar, 2004). The participants in this study identified several contextual conditions that they view as challenges. The first is a lack of positive feedback from administrators. Rachel said, “Administration gives you no feedback about how you're doing. There's no positive reinforcement like you're doing a great job. Never once since I have been here have I ever been applauded for what I do.”

Another challenge is the lack of autonomy. Julie stated, “I love what I do, but I hate what I have to do.” She wants her students to experience success, but because of division initiatives, “they are set up to fail;”

An additional challenge is that contextual expectations are not aligned with personal pedagogic beliefs. Marie stated that, “The least rewarding and the least enjoyable part of my job is knowing what would be right for me to do as a teacher and knowing that I'm expected to do things that I don't necessarily agree are beneficial for my students;”

Poor student behavior was also cited as a challenging contextual issue. Rachel said, “There are a lot of behavior problems and this causes a lot of stress.” She explained that it is particularly bothersome because it distracts from the students who want to learn.
Finally, negative and difficult interactions with parents have led to adversity. Marie shared a story of one parent who had caused her so much grief that another teacher offered to give her money for a lawyer. She declined and said, “I haven’t done anything wrong. I don’t need a lawyer. I was going to stand by my convictions and not waver in my goals.”

An important factor in resilience is the presence of protective factors that enable individuals to resist stress (Kaplan, Turner, Norman, & Stillson, 1996), and that people’s coping strategies may also facilitate resilience in successfully dealing with a stressful situation (Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008). In addition, according to Ford and Smith (2007), resilience involves amplifying upward spiral mechanisms. For Marie, Rachel, and Julie, this included goal alignment, a personal identity that is inextricably tied to teaching, and feelings of life meaning that are amplified by manifestations of thriving and social purpose. The protective factors for Marie, Rachel, and Julie, can be found in the optimal functioning associated with Thriving with Social Purpose (Ford & Smith, 2007). These factors are protective because they enable Marie, Rachel, and Julie to maintain teaching as an effective source of feelings of life meaning and personal strength, even in the face of challenges. These factors are discussed next.

**Thriving with social purpose.** Resilience is a manifestation of people at their best and is a form of optimal functioning (Ford & Smith, n.d.). When people are functioning at this level, according to Ford and Smith they are Thriving with Social Purpose. These thriving motivational patterns include an ability to stay focused on personal goals, a willingness to explore alternatives and take risks when necessary to
maintain progress toward those goals, personal optimism that minimizes the possibility of becoming mired in evaluative thoughts, and mindful tenacity that emphasizes the importance of continually monitoring context beliefs (Ford & Smith, n.d.).

The concept of amplification in motivation is rooted in the mutually reinforcing patterns of goals, personal agency beliefs, and emotions in which people are motivated to accept new challenges as opportunities rather than to become stagnant or even defensive (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). As a result, there are powerful consequences that include accelerated learning, competence development, a sense of personal empowerment, and enhanced well-being (Ford & Smith, 2007). According to Ford and Smith, these “upward spirals” lead to a thriving pattern of functioning that facilitates productive engagement with relevant contexts and the continuation of striving toward personal goals. When those goals include integrative social relationship goals, the consequence is a social purpose that facilitates a more comprehensive and meaningful pattern of optimal functioning. The result is enhanced well-being of the individual, as well as the social systems of which the individuals are a part. This study has shown that in the face of adversity, Marie, Rachel, and Julie were able to maintain an effective pursuit of their core personal goals because of their amplified motivational functioning.

Moreover, according to Ford and Smith (n.d.), resilience is fueled by the pursuit and attainment of core personal goals, and this provides a source of human growth and self-discovery that ultimately leads to feelings of life meaning. The mutually reinforcing, essential qualities of optimal functioning includes engagement and meaning. Engagement is the key dynamic in promoting learning, competence development, and improved
performance (Neufeld et al., 2006). Meaning, on the other hand, promotes a sense of fulfillment, well-being, and personal integrity. According to Ford and Smith (2007) meaning results from the attainment of personal goals that links past, present, and future, and helps individuals to view themselves and their achievements as part of something larger than themselves.

For the purpose of this study, the integrative social relationship goals that connect people to each other and the broader social context of which they are a part are of particular importance. These socials relationship goals include belongingness, social responsibility, equity, and resource provision. The data presented in chapter four demonstrates that resilience is facilitated by thriving motivational patterns as well the presence of these strong social purpose goals. In the presence of adverse situations, motivation would have to be amplified for Marie, Rachel, and Julie to remain engaged in the pursuit of her goals and to derive meaning from it.

**Active approach to goals.** The self-descriptions of Marie, Rachel, and Julie presented in chapter four suggest that each of these teachers is engaged in the pursuit of her goals. According to Ford and Smith (2007), this active approach includes a clear understanding of core personal goals, the ability to remain focused on those goals, a willingness to explore alternatives and take risks, and the ability not to become hindered by evaluative thoughts or influenced by circumstances out of a person’s control.

Marie said, “I think I take an active approach to my goals. I will not give up on my goals.” But, she is also flexible and recognizes the need to find an alternative way of
reaching her non-readers. In trying a new approach she said, “It was a risk, but I think it’s going to pay off.”

Rachel noted, “I’m determined to fulfill goals I set for myself. She added that when she is not one hundred percent successful, she feels “defeated and guilty inside.” She added, “I know that I’m not perfect and I do the best that I can. I tell myself, tomorrow is a new day, and push myself that much harder the next day.”

Julie is equally committed to her goals and said, “First and foremost I want to make sure that the kids learn. I’m not willing to abandon that goal.” She also acknowledged that may require her to be flexible. “I’m always watching students to make sure they’re getting it.” If they are not, Julie said, “I change the activities.” While she is willing to make adaptations in her methods, she added, “I have to make sure they get it and I’m not willing to bend from that.”

**Personal optimism.** According to Ford and Smith (2007), personal optimism is an important component in developing self-trust in one’s ability to work toward personal goals with an appropriate amount of effort. Marie, Rachel, and Julie each expressed optimism in her teaching ability as well as in her future.

Marie said, “I’m optimistic about teaching and my future as an educator.” She is also committed to making a lasting contribution to her students and school community. “I want to build relationships with the community, with students and their parents. This is as important to me as the teaching component.”

Rachel also expressed optimism by saying, “I do believe that I am optimistic about teaching and my future as an educator because this is what I’ve always wanted to
be and I don't want to give up on my students.” She added, “For me, teaching provides a sense of belongingness and acceptance in the community.”

Julie is also “very optimistic” about her ability to achieve her goals and added, “I wouldn’t be teaching if I wasn’t.” She said, “I feel a social responsibility to help every child that walks into my room to succeed. Every kid has a right to learn.”

**Mindful tenacity.** Mindful tenacity is the continual monitoring of the context, supports, and feedback needed to progress toward a goal. This is important because persistence in less than optimal conditions includes being able to find alternative pathways in which to work toward personal goals (Ford & Smith, 2007). Marie said that she is constantly “thinking about my teaching.” Rachel described herself as a reflective practitioner saying, “I would say every day lends itself to self-reflection and learning what works and what doesn't. If I notice most students aren't getting it, I try to figure out a way that I can better present the information.” Julie uses data as a means of monitoring progress. “You have to watch the data and use that to guide what you’re doing. It’s something that I’m always thinking about.”

**Emotional wisdom.** Emotional wisdom includes reflective understanding, empathy, emotional regulation, and is dependent upon an individual’s functioning and context (Takahashi & Overton, 2002). These components, and empathy in particular, are important for promoting effective functioning that involves an individual’s identity and how he or she relates to others (Ford & Smith, 2007).

Marie noted, “I get way too emotionally attached to some students. When I know they lack self-confidence, have a challenging home life, or struggle with learning, I feel
for them.” One of the most difficult parts of teaching for Marie is letting her students go at the end of the year. She said, “What if no other teacher loves them as much as I do?”

Rachel used the word empathic as a self-description and said, “I care so much about others and try to put myself in their shoes regardless of the situation.” Like Rachel, Julie describes herself as an empathetic person and stated, “I worry about my kids all the time.” And like Marie, she worries about letting go at the end of the year, especially when it comes to a struggling student. “What if [they] move on to the next grade and the next, and no one tries to fix it?”

**Life meaning.** According to Ford and Smith (n.d.), life meaning is a special feeling that a person gets when he or she believes that their life makes sense, has a purpose, and is worthwhile. Life meaning is both a product of optimal functioning and a motivational force that encourages optimal functioning (Ford & Smith, n.d.). In this study, life meaning provides an explanatory factor for why each participant is able to thrive when faced with adversity, while at the same time providing protection against future challenges. Despite the challenges that Marie, Rachel, and Julie have faced, they are able to move forward and are motivated to seek life meaning.

According to Ford and Smith (n.d.), feelings of life meaning increase our awareness of the personal goals that mean the most to us, help us to maintain a sense of comfort and stability in difficult times, and provide a source of energy and wisdom in the face of dilemmas. Marie, Rachel, and Julie each experience this distinctive feeling as a result of their professional lives, and this is a key factor in their ability to remain resilient.
when faced with challenges. Each participant expressed her need to maintain a sense of coherence and alignment between her daily teaching activities and core personal goals.

According to Ford and Smith (n.d.), feelings of life meaning are a reliable result of pursing our core personal goals with an active approach to goals, personal optimism, mindful tenacity, and emotional wisdom. For Marie, goals are her anchor, and because of her commitment to them, she is energized to persevere during difficult times. She said, “I pride myself on being a hard worker and accomplishing my goals. I stay [because] I love teaching and I feel like I’m a good teacher.”

Rachel has internalized her life experiences as an educator and the identity that she has created as a teacher is her mooring. She is also always mindful of the social responsibilities that are inherent in the profession. As a result, this identity permeates all aspects of her life, and in that she finds meaning. “I feel like being a teacher is almost like next to my name. I'm always very conscientious about it.”

For many people, caring for others who are dependent on you and helping them to fulfill their hopes, dreams, and to reach for their goals can be a particularly potent source of life meaning (Ford & Smith, n.d.). Julie’s life meaning is anchored “giving them [her student] a start in life.” “It makes you feel so good when you help kids that can’t do something to do it; to see the light bulb go off. That’s what it’s all about.” According to Julie, these occasions give her life meaning and help her to persist, even in the face of contextual challenges.

Additionally, each of this study’s participants identified their relationships with other people as being an integral aspect of their ability to remain resilient. These sources
of support were either family, colleagues, or in Marie’s case, a therapist who offers her an objective perspective on the challenges she faces.

**Summary.** The conceptual framework for this study, Motivational Systems Theory, as well as the Thriving with Social Purpose theory and the Theory of Life Meaning, provide an explanation for how Marie, Rachel, and Julie are able to remain motivated, resilient, and committed to teaching in the face of challenging situations. Through their stories we know that each of the participants has a set of clearly defined goals that they are unwilling to compromise, positive personal and professional agentic beliefs, positive emotions that support their altruistic reasons for choosing the teaching profession, and negative emotions which serve to bolster their resolve. Marie, Rachel, and Julie are each personally optimistic and expressed a commitment to continually monitoring their goal progress, as well as a willingness to take risks in order to achieve those goals. Each of these teachers is deeply empathetic and has demonstrated an ability to regulate her emotions. Furthermore, Marie, Rachel, and Julie acknowledged that teaching has given meaning to her life. Life meaning is connected to individual motivation and it is possible to experience greater life meaning by taking control of motivational mechanisms such goal-life alignment, and the ideals that bring coherence and comfort to life (Ford & Smith, n.d.). For this study’s participants, this meant having clearly defined goals, being engaged in their pedagogy and the context in which they teach, focusing on the contributions she has made to her students, and taking time to enjoy the moments of affirmation and support from colleagues. These factors, in turn,
have enabled Marie, Rachel, and Julie be resilient and maintain their motivation for teaching.

**Implications for Practice**

While the majority of studies on teacher resilience have focused on preservice or early career teachers (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011), this study sought to understand the phenomenon through the perspective of mid-career teachers. Given the current state of teacher accountability in the United States, this study provides an important perspective on the challenges that mid-career teachers face and the factors that support their resilience and motivation to remain in the teaching profession. This is important because of the high rate of teacher attrition (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015), and because mid-career teachers are often at the pinnacle of their careers. Not only are they able to provide quality instruction for their students, but they can serve as role models for future generations of teachers. The findings herein suggest that mid-career teachers face complex contextual challenges such as a disconnection between their pedagogic beliefs and the contextual expectations of their workplaces, a lack of administrative support, and poor student behavior that has resulted in stress. Furthermore, these challenges have threatened each participant’s motivation, yet each has remained resilient and found effective strategies to regulate her emotions and motivation.

Resilience is a multi-faceted process that includes interacting with events, and with protective factors in place, facilitates the ability to overcome challenges. The intrapersonal protective factors of Marie, Rachel, and Julie include competencies such as well-defined goals, positive agentic beliefs, and a means of dealing with both positive
and negative emotions. The findings of this study could help to inform district policy makers, administrators, and schools of education. Implications as well as suggestions for future research are discussed next.

**District policy.** The reform agenda currently in place in the United States was designed to increase teacher accountability, the quality of our schools, and how students perform on standardized achievement tests (Sachs, 2000; Valli & Buese, 2007). Empirical research, however, suggests that school and policy contexts may conflict with the reasons educators choose the teaching profession and the career goals that they establish (Richardson, Karabenick, & Watt, 2014). The participants in this study cited the lack of alignment between their goals and contextual expectations to be a source of adversity.

Research has also revealed the strong effects that a quality teacher has on student achievement (Hattie, 2009). According to Hattie (2003), “excellence in teaching is the single most powerful influence on [student] achievement.” In looking at the major sources of variance in student achievement, Hattie (2003), found that teacher’s account for about 30%. Hattie further asserted, “It is what teachers know, do, and care about which is very powerful in this learning equation” (p.3). The only effect that was greater was the student, who accounts for about 50% of the variance of achievement (Hattie, 2003). Marie, Rachel, and Julie are each firmly committed to their student’s academic and emotional success, and as a result, they tend to form close bonds with their students. They are also interested in their own personal growth and continued learning as professionals. This combination and the protective factors identified earlier in this chapter
have helped each of them to persevere despite challenges that are a result of district policy.

Research has also shown there is a relationship between a teachers’ commitment to the teaching profession and effectiveness (Day & Gu, 2009). It is therefore a logical conjecture that school districts should examine what supports, builds on, and adversely affects mid-career teacher commitment. This information may help to stem the tide of plateauing, stagnation, and high attrition rates. It is imperative that policy leaders recognize teachers as long term investments and consider teacher job satisfaction. Taking motivation into account and addressing the affective needs of teachers may help to sustain and retain quality teachers, and subsequently provide a mechanism for delivering improved student outcomes.

Administrators. Extant research suggests that motivation is affected when a teacher feels competent, efficacious (Kunter & Holzberger, 2014), and when they feel autonomous (Deci & Ryan, 2000). According to Niemiec and Ryan (2009), a teacher’s experience with autonomy, and therefore his or her level of motivation, is dependent upon the condition of their immediate school context. For example, Lam, Cheng, and Choy (2010) found a positive relationship between perceived school support, including the support of autonomy, competence, and colleagues, and a teacher’s level of autonomous motivation. Moreover, in a study that sought to determine the relationship between the system principals use to solicit teacher compliance and the degree of social support teachers’ felt, Abbey and Esposito (1985) found that teachers perceived significantly less support when they felt coerced. On the other hand, teachers felt
supported by their principals when they perceived the reason for compliance was because they were respected and knowledgeable.

In this study, the participants did not feel supported by their administrator and the lack of autonomy presented a challenge to their feelings of competence and motivation. Yet, existing research shows that school administrators, particularly principals, form an important dimension of the school context and his or her behavior affects a teacher’s level of autonomy and motivation (Day & Gu, 2009; Roth, Assor, Kanat, Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007). According to Pelletier, Séguin-Lévesque, and Legault (2002), teachers feel less autonomous and motivated in their jobs when they feel pressured by administrators. Conversely, Eyal, and Roth (2011) found that a teacher’s motivation was directly and positively influenced by the principal’s autonomy-supportive behavior. Marie, Rachel, and Julie each expressed a desire for a greater degree of autonomy and feedback from the school administrators. Providing this may serve to bolster the motivation of more teachers.

According to Hattie (2003), principals have a direct influence on school climate. He further asserted that those “who create a school with high student responsiveness rather than bureaucratic control” can have a positive influence through a trickledown effect (p. 2). The results of this study may therefore provide the impetus for school leaders to offer mentoring programs and training directed toward attending to the well-being of staff, and an understanding of the necessity of building resilience alongside the expectations for accountability and student achievement. Of the three study participants, Marie was the only one who expressed a desire to champion this cause. She has spoken at
school board meetings and met with the superintendent to express her concern over the lack of autonomy that teachers in the division experience. Marie said that many of her colleagues are “too afraid to say something,” but as she has gained experience, she feels “braver.”

As a result of the findings presented in this study, it would be beneficial for administrators to find ways to nurture a relationship with their teachers. Small things such as leaving a note in a teacher’s mailbox or a kind word in passing could go a long way to helping teachers to feel valued. It may also include fostering an environment where teachers feel comfortable sharing frustrations and concerns without fear of repercussions. This could begin with something as simple as a school climate survey or having a conversation with individual teachers about what their personal concerns are or what they think is working well. It may include team building activities where all stakeholders work to create an atmosphere that is based on mutual trust. Finally, it most certainly should include a forum for celebrating individual and collective successes. As Fullan (1998) asserted, we need to pay more attention to capacity-building by investing in development, incentives and support that increases the ability and motivation of teachers. According to Fullan (2001) this starts with building relationships. Kouzes and Posner (1998) stated that there are seven essentials to developing relationships including (1) setting clear standards, (2) expecting the best, (3) paying attention, (4) personalizing recognition, (5) telling the story, (6) celebrating together, and (7) setting the example (p.18). The stories of Marie, Rachel, and Julie clearly indicate that recognition and celebration are not part of their school culture, but that these are things each of them values and desires.
**Teacher education.** According to Richardson and Watt (2014) people have different reasons for choosing to teach as a career, different expectations about what it will require, and how long they believe they will persist in the profession. With a clear understanding of the importance of resilience, preservice programs may find ways to develop programs that teach and support the protective factors that are needed when teachers first enter the field, as well as those that might help to sustain them throughout each career phase. Kaplan (2014) asserted that teachers’ motivation may be promoted by enhancing their awareness of their individual motivational processes. This concept is underscored by those who advocate the agency of reflective practitioners (Schön, 1983). Extant research suggests that the goal of reflection is to examine existing beliefs in order to improve practice (Tillema, 2000), and to develop a professional teaching identity (Conway & Clark, 2003). Moreover, Arrastia, Rawls, Brinkerhoff, & Roehrig (2014) suggest that future teaching behaviors of preservice teachers may be influenced by reflecting on the classroom practices of the teachers they observe during field experience, and considering how they might implement the practices themselves in the future. Future-oriented discourse may be valuable for preservice teachers because it implies expectancies and therefore may elicit motivation (Husman & Lens, 1999) and encourage the pursuit of goals (Bembenutty & Zimmerman, 2003).

Acknowledging the complexity of teaching is just the beginning. Richardson, Karabenick, and Watt (2014) posited that for too long teaching has been considered to be an easy job, and as a result, little attention has been given to what attracts people to it or what sustains them throughout their careers. Understanding that teaching, according to
Lightfoot and Carew (1979), is “a complex mixture of intellectual capacities, pedagogical skills, personality characteristics, and organizational talents (p. 1) may help schools of education to effectively predict future outcomes, such as perseverance, confidence, and emotional well-being that can support resilience. In the meantime, schools of education should help preservice teachers to develop an understanding that, along with the rewards such as positively influencing young children and adults, there are challenges.

According to Richardson, Karabenick, and Watt (2014), when faced with challenges a teacher’s goals may be destabilized, their confidence undermined, negative emotions may emerge, enthusiasm may wane, and personal well-being may be affected. This study has shown that school contexts conflict with the goals and motivational factors that first enticed these participants to choose teaching as a career. Therefore, it is important for those in charge of teacher preparation to be mindful that in addition to asking future teachers to deliver on student success, we must also prepare them with the tools to maintain their enthusiasm and motivation for teaching, given that feedback was both valued by the participants in this study, and nonexistent in practice. It may be incumbent on teacher educators to find ways to start building resilience at the preservice level so they can learn the habits of resilience that will allow them to remain focused on their goals. In order for this to occur, additional research is needed.

Implications for Future Research

While the study of teacher motivation and resilience is still an emerging field of inquiry, the work thus far has revealed the complexity of a teacher’s professional journey and identity. Given the value of keeping quality teachers in the classroom, it is important
to explore the connection between teacher motivation and resilience. Furthermore, understanding the professional needs of teachers at different career stages has the potential to prevent the plateauing and stagnation that render some educators ineffective. Finally, it is important to explore interventions that could either facilitate or hinder motivation. Interventions worth studying include providing mentors for early career teachers, targeted professional development to meet the needs of struggling teachers, and collegial support programs at all stages of teaching.

The findings of this study highlight the critical importance of context and the pressures of teaching in an era of high-stakes testing, yet research on teacher motivation and resilience is in a nascent stage (Urdan, 2014). Previous research that examined a teacher’s work within a professional context has generally focused on the reasons individuals choose to leave teaching (Gu & Day, 2007). This study suggests the need to consider more than why a teacher decides to leave or remain in the teaching profession. Longitudinal studies that explore the malleability of motivational dimensions throughout a career and how that might contribute to teacher quality are needed. Questions that need to be answered include: Do those dimensions change from early through later career stages as personal identities and interactions within teaching contexts change over the course of a career? What impact does motivation have on how a teacher’s identity and how might that change throughout his or her career? Are there particular interactions that hinder or support motivation and resilience? Is having a collegial support system more important than having a supportive administration, or are they equal in value? For those teachers who maintain motivation, these experiences strongly contribute to their
resilience and according to Day and Gu (2007), this is a necessary condition for their continued effectiveness.

Previous research has revealed that resilience is not innate. It is developmental and dynamic suggesting that individuals can learn how to respond in the face of challenging circumstances (Luthar et al., 2000). According to Cefai (2004) and Neenan (2009), resilience is a construct that can be learned, nurtured, and enhanced. In addition, three broad sets of protective factors that may impede the impact of adverse experiences have been identified, including characteristics of the individual, the family environment, and the social context (Schoon, 2006). Because resilience and motivation share the similar characteristics of self-determination, self-efficacy, being open and willing to experience new things, and social supports (Resnick, 2011), it may be possible to also identify similar protective motivational factors. This information may not only help to develop a clearer understanding of teacher motivation, but it would also be important to determining if motivational patterns can be changed. Future research should explore what interventions would be effective in changing motivation patterns. Without a doubt, a negatively motivated teacher can have a deleterious effect on students. However, research that can identify processes for mediating that negativity may help to reduce teacher attrition and suggest supports for those teachers who remain in the profession despite caustic attitudes.

According to Mansfield, Beltman, Broadley, and Weatherby-Fell (2016), building resilience is a complex process. Therefore, future research is needed to explore whether or not there are specific protective factors that positively influence resilience that are
specific to the teaching profession. Can these factors be taught and learned? Furthermore, research should consider how these factors develop and if they vary depending on career stage. Finally, research should explore the malleability of resilience as well as learning activities that may be designed to help both preservice and inservice teachers to build resilience. Ultimately, the end result should be to develop motivated, resilient, quality teachers who have the mechanisms in place to sustain them throughout a long career.

There are programs that are intended to facilitate resilience, but most of these have been targeted at helping children. Windle and Salisbury (2010) conducted an extensive evaluation of resilience programs and found that very few had been subjected to evaluation or controlled trials, most had focused on identifying protective factors, and few had tested interventions. Masten, Herbers, Cutuli, & Lafavor (2008) suggest three major strategies that resiliency programs can employ including: (a) risk-based approaches intended to reduce adversity; (b) asset-focused strategies that attempt to improve assets in the lives in children; and (c) process-oriented designs which attempt to mobilize children’s adaptive capacities such as improving attachment relationships with parents or providing social skills training. Would these same strategies work for adults and specifically, how effective would they be in developing resilience in teachers?

Limitations

This study has two limitations. First, it is impossible to totally eliminate reflexivity, or the influence of the researcher on the study participants. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), in an interview study the researcher is always part of the world he or she is studying and is an inescapable influence on what the participant
says. The goal of the researcher is therefore to understand and to use this productively (Maxwell, 2013, p. 125). The degree of reflexivity may have been elevated in this study because at one time I worked in the same school with the study participants. However, because the school is made up of one main and three auxiliary buildings, I never worked in the same building with them. Following Maxwell’s (2013) advice, I used this prior acquaintanceship to establish an environment of trust throughout the interview process and while conducting member checks. Before beginning the interviews, I discussed the steps I was taking to ensure confidentiality with each of study participants. This information was repeated each time we interacted for the purpose of this study and each participant was assured that she could rescind her commitment to participant at any point in which she was concerned about confidentially or if she felt she could not answer the questions truthfully. I also wrote memos after each interview as a way of reflecting and to address any incidents that may have indicated reflexivity. Finally, I also encouraged the study participants to reflect after each of our meetings. This was intended to serve two purposes. First, I asked each participant to think about how she responded to each of my questions and to note any additions or changes she would like to make to her answers. Second, I encouraged each participant to reflect on whether or not they felt any hesitance about answering the questions I asked. While none of the participants said that this was an issue, if any of them had indicated a level of discomfort, I would have suggested terminating her participation in this study.

A second limitation is that there is no way to determine whether the interviewees are truly representative of the phenomenon being studied, or whether the data merely
characterizes three females, who all worked for the same principal in the same school, in a single school district, in a specific region of the United States. Would I have gotten different results if I used different teachers? Would the perspectives of male teachers be different from their female counterparts? Would the perspectives be different if the teachers worked for a different principal? Finally, would these results be representative of teachers in other school districts and in different geographic locations? This study did reveal that each of the participants felt challenged by her particular teaching context. What may be a challenge for a teacher in one context may be completely different in another setting and over time. In order to address these limitations, this study should be expanded in future research to include a larger sample size in different locations, as well as longitudinal data to examine how resilience may or may not change over time.

**Importance of Study**

The area of teacher motivation, and in particular resilience, is an emerging area of inquiry (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011). Yet, with the issue of teacher burnout and attrition at the forefront of a great deal of education news, anyone involved in education should be concerned with enhancing the quality of educators in our classrooms, especially those at the mid-career point. This is a professional life phase that is characterized by a fear of stagnation, yet these are the teachers that can serve as role models for those just entering the field. In order to support this, a better understanding of what influences teacher resilience throughout his or her career, and how to sustain and nurture this within personal and professional contexts, is necessary. An understanding of the relationship between risk and protective factors may help to shed light on this issue.
Resilience in teaching is important because it is not realistic to expect students to exhibit resilience if their teachers are not modeling its characteristics. Furthermore, a shift from the focus on teacher stress and burnout to resilience is an important first step in understanding the ways teachers manage and maintain their motivation and commitment, even in challenging times (Gu & Day, 2007). It also has the potential to turn the conversation from the negativity associated with teacher burnout, to a dialogue that is positive and hopefully promotes proactivity.

This study demonstrated that there are a great number of variables that influence teacher motivation, but when teachers exhibit the characteristic of resiliency, or the ability of remain motivated in the face of adverse situations, they are able to persevere and adapt. The risk factors in this study included a lack of administration support, a lack of alignment between professional goals and contextual expectations, poor student behavior, and challenging parents. Protective factors including clearly defined goals, positive agentic beliefs, and emotional control allowed these teachers to remain engaged and committed despite the challenges. Because Marie, Rachel, and Julie are each committed to remaining in the teaching profession, this suggests that resilient teachers may be less inclined to leave to the profession. However, more research is needed that targets the specific factors that support or hinder resilience in teachers. Given the importance of the role of the administrator as a barrier to motivation identified in this study, future research should seek to explore the relationship between administrator motivation and teacher resilience, as well as studies intended to identify contextual interventions that may facilitate teacher resiliency.
Appendix A

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance
Research Hall, 4400 University Drive, MS 3E5, Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Phone: 703-993-5445, Fax: 703-993-9599

DATE: August 19, 2015
TO: Gary Galluzzo
FROM: George Mason University IRB
Project Title: [702042-1] Teachers for Life: A Phenomenological Investigation of the Role of Resilience in Three Veteran Teacher’s Decision to Remain in the Profession
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project
ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: August 19, 2015
EXPIRATION DATE: August 18, 2016
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited review category #7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The George Mason University IRB has APPROVED your submission. This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that all research must be conducted as described in the submitted materials.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by the IRB prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to the Office of Research Integrity & Assurance (ORIA). Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed (if applicable).

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the ORIA.

The anniversary date of this study is August 18, 2016. This project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. You may not collect data beyond this date without prior IRB approval. A continuing review form must be completed and submitted to the ORIA at least 30 days prior to the
anniversary date or upon completion of this project. Prior to the anniversary date, the ORIA will send you a reminder regarding continuing review procedures.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of five years, or as described in your submission, after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Karen Motsinger at 703-993-4208 or kmotsing@gmu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within George Mason University IRBs' records.
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Personal Goals:

1. Can you think back to when the idea of becoming a teacher first emerged for you? Would you please tell me the process you went through and the reasons you had for becoming a teacher?

2. Please tell me about your teaching experience – years taught, grades, schools, and districts?

3. How would you describe your current teaching position to someone interviewing for a similar position?

4. What aspects of your teaching position are the most enjoyable and rewarding to you? What aspects of your teaching position are the least enjoyable and rewarding?

5. How would you describe yourself as a teacher?

6. What aspects of this self-description represent the things that are most near and dear to your concept of who you are – or who you would ideally like to be - as a teacher?

7. Tell me about a particular incident or event that confirmed your decision to become a teacher.

8. How important is it to you that your personal goals are aligned with those of the school where you currently work?
a. When your personal goals are challenged by a lack of alignment with organizational goals, what helps you persevere?

9. Have you ever considered abandoning your goals?
   a. Please explain why or why not you may have considered this?

10. Is there anything about your personal or professional goals that I have not asked you that you would like to add?

**Personal Agency Beliefs:**

11. Tell me about your short and long term goals as a teacher.
   a. What are your immediate goals?
   b. Can you describe the ideal scenario in which you hope to find yourself professionally in the future?

12. Thinking about your current teaching situation, can you describe a time when you felt empowered as a teacher?
   a. Do you feel empowered to establish professional goals?
   b. If so, why?
   c. If not, why not?

13. Tell me about how confident or how unsure you are about your ability to reach those goals.
   a. What possible barriers do you think you may encounter?
   b. What kinds of supports do you think will enable you to achieve them?
   c. What do you think the consequences and results of pursuing those goals will be?
d. Tell me about your willingness to explore alternatives or to take risks in pursuit of those goals.

14. When you think about your future as a teacher, are you optimistic?
   a. If so, why?
   b. Can you describe a particular situation that supports that optimism?

15. Tell me about a teaching situation such as an interaction with a student, in working collaboratively with a colleague, or during direct instruction in which you felt most successful.

16. Tell me about a situation that challenged your belief in yourself as a teacher.
   a. What helped you to persevere?

17. Tell me about a time when you faced a challenge in the teaching context and you became discouraged and considered quitting your job.
   a. Was there something or someone who sustained you during that time?

18. Tell me about a time when you received particularly positive feedback about your teaching.
   a. Who did that feedback come from?
   b. How did that make you feel?
   c. Did that feedback have a lasting impact or was it just a temporary pick-me-up?

19. What do you believe are the necessary ingredients for your students to achieve academic success?
   a. How confident are you that you can help them be successful?
20. Tell me about a time when you believe you made a meaningful difference in a student’s life.

21. Tell me about a time when you believe you made a lasting contribution to your school.

22. If you were asked to be a guest speaker in a class for college students hoping to become teachers, what would you tell them about the teaching profession?

23. Is there anything you would like to add about your beliefs regarding your teaching or the contexts in which you teach?

**Emotions:**

24. Imagine you just had the best day of your teaching career. What would have happened during that day?

25. Tell me about your most positive emotional experience as a teacher.

26. Tell me about your worst emotional experience as a teacher.

27. Are your teaching days filled more with good emotional experiences or bad ones?

28. Tell me about a time when you experienced a great deal of satisfaction as a teacher.
   a. How did you respond in that situation?

29. Tell me about a time when you felt discouraged as a teacher.
   a. How did you respond in that situation?
   b. What factors influenced you during that time? Please explain.
   c. Were there individuals that influenced you during that time? Please explain.
30. Tell me about a time when something you did at school or while teaching made you feel guilty.
   a. How did you respond in that situation?

31. Imagine you just experienced one of the most difficult days in the classroom you could possibly imagine.
   a. Can you describe a scenario that might result in your feeling that way?
   b. How would you respond?

32. Whom or what do you turn to when you need support during difficult professional times?

33. Is there anything about your experiences as a teacher that I have not asked you, that you would like to share?
Appendix C

Validity Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do I need to know?</th>
<th>Why do I need to know this?</th>
<th>What kind of data will answer the questions?</th>
<th>Analysis Plans</th>
<th>Validity Threats</th>
<th>Possible strategies for dealing with validity threats</th>
<th>Rationale for strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Question: What role, if any, does resilience play in a mid-career teacher’s decision to remain in the teaching profession?</td>
<td>We know little about why some teachers remain in the profession even in the face of difficult times and adverse contexts. There may be a connection between a teacher’s resilience and his or her ability to stem the tide of stagnation through the various phases of his or her career. Teachers who are resilient may be more effective and remain in the profession.</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews. Field notes, memos</td>
<td>Audio recording: Transcribing, coding, creating a coding matrix, identify similarities and differences between participants, memos/field notes</td>
<td>Reactivity: Participants may not answer truthfully because they are being recorded or they provide the answer they believe is expected. Researcher bias/subj ectivity while coding</td>
<td>Member checks Memo writing; peer review throughout the study.</td>
<td>Respondent validation is important for insuring that you have accurately captured the participants meaning (Maxwell, 2013; Silverman, 2003). Writing memos is a way of working through problems and facilitate reflection and analytic insight (Maxwell, 2013).</td>
</tr>
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</table>
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Biography

Susan V. Groundwater received her Bachelor of Arts in Broadcast Journalism from the Pennsylvania State University. She received her Master of Science degree in Public Relations from the American University. After 15 years as a Virginia public school teacher and finishing her Doctor of Philosophy in Education at George Mason University in 2016, she aspires to teach both pre- and in-service teachers at the undergraduate and graduate levels.