INFLUENCES CONTRIBUTING TO THE LONGEVITY OF EXPERIENCED TEACHERS IN THE ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE, AND HIGH SCHOOL SETTINGS

by

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Influences Contributing to the Longevity of Experienced Teachers in the Elementary, Middle, and High School Settings

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to:
my mother, father, and
Devin
Acknowledgements

I can do all things through the Creator who strengthens me. The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the guidance of many people. I am grateful for the varying levels of support and guidance from each of them. I would like to thank Dr. David Brazer, my dissertation chair, for his never-ending amount of patience, support, and encouragement of me, not only as a student, but also as a professional and an educator. Thank you also to my dissertation committee members, Dr. Penelope Earley and Dr. Earle Reybold, for their scholarly insights and expertise.

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List of Abbreviations

Brown Elementary School.................................................................................. BES
Conway Middle School...................................................................................... CMS
Abbey High School............................................................................................ AHS
Abstract

INFLUENCES CONTRIBUTING TO THE LONGEVITY OF EXPERIENCED TEACHERS IN THE ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE, AND HIGH SCHOOL SETTINGS

Theresa A. Beasley, Ph.D.
George Mason University, 2013
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The purpose of this study was to identify factors that contribute to teachers’ career longevity. The study gives voice to nine experienced teachers to help understand the challenges these teachers faced, the satisfaction they obtained, and the opportunities that allowed them to remain at one school for ten years or more. I use the lenses of social cognitive theory and theory of loyalty to guide this study that explores why some experienced teachers choose to remain in teaching for extended periods of time. Taken together, these theories offer explanations of the internal and external influences contributing to teacher longevity. This study relied primarily on in-depth interview data from experienced teachers. A survey provided demographic data and findings relating to the perceived collective efficacy of the faculty at each of the three inner-ring suburban schools. This collective case study yielded cross-case themes common to the nine cases, which include: personal values, collegial relationships with peers, interactions with students, voice in decision-making, and positive working environment. Knowledge
gained from this study provides an understanding of the complexities that experienced teachers face and the factors that lead them to their decisions to remain in their schools. The findings of this study may provide guidance for educational decision-makers when implementing measures to improve retention rates of highly qualified experienced teachers.
1. Introduction

Teachers are the cornerstone of our schools. Accomplished or effective teachers in schools tend to be among the most experienced (Nieto, 2003). According to Warren (2009), “For the longest time, the attainment of ten years in teaching was the benchmark for achieving accomplished [experienced teacher] status” (p.28). Darling-Hammond (2003) states, “Effective teachers constitute a valuable human resource for schools--one that needs to be treasured and supported” (p.9). When examining current teacher workforces, it appears that teachers are leaving schools prior to the establishment of adequate expertise (Alt & Henke, 2007; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Ingersoll, 2003; Shockley, Guglielmino, & Watlington, 2006). Thus, America’s educational system is facing substantial challenges retaining the public school teaching force.

At first glance, the problem appears simple and straightforward—increase incentives designed to attract new teachers into the profession. However, an intense closer look suggests the problem is more complex than this solution implies. Not only as a nation are we faced with teacher shortages, we are also unable to retain teachers in schools long enough for them to become highly qualified (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Wiegand, 2003). To be deemed highly qualified, Akiba and LeTendre (2009) maintain that teachers should possess specific characteristics, which include skills, training, and pedagogical knowledge. Retaining highly qualified experienced teachers increases the
likelihood of delivering a quality education to students (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Laine, Behrstock-Sherratt, & Lasagna, 2011).

Historically policy makers have focused on understanding teacher attrition, rather than understanding why experienced teachers are making the decision to remain in the workplace for an extended amount of time (Chinn, 2007; Robbins-LaVicka, 2007). According to Cohen (2009), “It is rare for a teacher to remain in one urban school for more than 10 years, and even more unusual for that teacher to be highly educated and deeply invested” (p.472). This study explores teacher longevity from the perspective of effective teachers in an inner-ring suburb who have remained in one school for ten years or more by examining personal beliefs, individual behaviors, and environmental influences.

**Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this study is to identify and understand the influences on experienced teacher longevity. This study represents experienced teachers’ voices and explains why they have decided to continue to teach in the same school. Understanding the specific personal attributes that the experienced teachers possess and the factors that influenced them to enter the field of education provides insight into their working lives. To understand why some teachers decide to teach in their school for ten years or more requires understanding the major characteristics of and influences on their careers. Additionally, knowing why experienced teachers entered the profession initially, the roles they play at their school, and their personal and professional reasons for remaining in one
school over a long period of time will provide administrators with the keys to build and retain a core of effective, experienced teachers.

**Significance**

This study has two distinct types of significance: (a) research significance, which derives from the lack of empirical studies of teacher longevity; and (b) practical significance, which aids in understanding teachers’ motivation to remain in one school. This study may contribute to empirical research as little is known about the experienced teachers’ reasons for remaining in the teaching profession. Practical significance can ultimately inform district and school officials about the nature of teacher longevity in an inner-ring suburban school setting.

**Research Significance**

Before addressing significance directly, I present published research on national trends related to teacher attrition. Knowing why teachers leave is the converse of understanding why they might remain. Understanding root causes of teacher attrition likely points to ways of motivating teachers to remain in their schools.

of teachers left the profession compared to an average departure rate of 11.9% of personnel for all other fields. Although many school districts must routinely overcome obstacles of identifying, attracting, developing, and retaining a high-quality teaching force, finding qualified teachers for some schools, especially schools in urban districts, and in some subject areas, such as mathematics, can be especially challenging (Lui, Rosenstein, Swan, & Khalil, 2008).

The departure of teachers from the workplace is similar to a “revolving door” (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 499). Merrow states, “The pool keeps losing water because no one is paying attention to the leak” (Merrow as quoted in Wilson, Bell, Galosy, & Shouse, 2004, p.162). In totality, when examining public schools over a period of five years, approximately forty-six percent of new teachers leave the profession. When further examining teacher attrition, by the end of any given year, one million teachers, or one-third of this large workforce move in to, out of, or between schools (Ingersoll, 2004). Based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics (Keigher, 2010), of the 3.4 million public school teachers who were teaching during the 2007-2008 school year, 7.6% or approximately 258,000 of those teachers moved to a different school and 8% or approximately 272,000 left the teaching profession. Twelve percent or approximately 32,600 of all teachers with 3 or fewer years of experience left the teaching profession compared with 5 percent or 13,600 teachers with 10 to 19 years of experience.

According to Margolis (2008), the expectation of today’s generation of teachers is for them to have multiple careers beyond that of teaching. This trend is in contrast to previous generations of teachers who generally remained in teaching until retirement.
Teaching force data corroborate this claim, thus indicating that teachers are increasingly moving between schools or leaving the teaching profession altogether (Ingersoll, 2003). The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers (Johnson, Kardos, Kauffman, Lui, & Donaldson, 2004) describes today’s teachers as those who are entering the teaching profession with no long-term career commitment in mind.

Earley and Ross (2006) state, “The impact of teacher turnover goes beyond the dollar cost of recruiting and hiring a new employee” (p.8). There exists a high cost to teacher turnover in terms of time and other resources, school and community cohesion, teaching effectiveness, and student achievement. Ferguson (1991) and Tamir (2010) state that the first few years of a teacher’s career are critical because the effectiveness of a teacher increases the longer one stays in the teaching profession. An inexperienced teaching force, due to teacher turnover, reduces the quality of the educational experiences students have.

Research shows there is a link between teacher retention and the quality of teaching and learning. According to Miller (2003), studies indicate effective teachers have a tremendous impact upon student achievement. According to Marzano (2003), students in classrooms with “most effective” teachers posted gains of 53 percentage points over a period of one academic year. In contrast, the average achievement of students who were taught by “least effective teachers” averaged 14 percentage points during the same period. Wong, Britton, and Ganser (2005) posit, “An effective teacher was perhaps the most important factor in producing consistently high levels of student
achievement (p.379). Nieto (2003) maintains that academic achievement increases when schools have a strong core of effective experienced teachers.

Hattie (2007) provides an extensive list of factors that influence student achievement. The data were compiled from the findings of over 50,000 studies relating to the classroom teacher and quality teaching. From these findings, Dinham (2008) concluded, “The teacher and the quality of his or her teaching are major influences on student achievement, along with the individual student and his or her prior achievement” (p.12). According to Haar (2007), retaining effective, experienced teachers should be the center of the administrators’ efforts to improve student achievement. Administrators must provide an environment that is supportive of the experienced teachers’ work where they are allowed the opportunity to flourish and grow. Yost (2006) suggests that a positive and supportive school environment will aid in maintaining and retaining successful and confident teachers.

Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2004) maintain that public schools continue to lose teachers at an increasing rate. This research along with others reveal little attention is given to the experienced teachers’ ability to remain in the same school despite their own various personal beliefs, behaviors, and environmental challenges. As stated previously, most of the teacher retention research has focused on attrition and migration. There are, however, a few studies that have explored teacher longevity.

In a single case study that documents the lives of two veteran teachers in one urban school, Cohen (2009) reported that there is surprisingly limited research relating to the lives of experienced teachers in urban school settings. This is due mainly to the
limited number of experienced teachers who remain in the teaching profession. Based upon the description of the single school in Cohen’s study, the yearly attrition rate at the research site is over 20% with fewer than 10% of the teachers remaining more than 10 years. The national attrition rate of teachers employed in districts classified as “urban inner city” can exceed 30% (Wirt, Choy, & Gerald, 2001).

Williams (2003) conducted research on reasons why twelve experienced teachers stayed in teaching in urban and rural settings. The research gives insight into why some teachers are able to endure and what their inner strengths are. Findings from the study revealed that the twelve experienced teachers agreed intellectual stimulation was a necessity. The experienced teachers were willing to meet the needs of their students and they “describe teaching as a nonstop quest for novelty, variety and new approaches” (p.72). These teachers were willing to take risks, were not opposed to change, and were willing to discover how to work with confidence and determination. Additionally, Williams (2003) examined the types of workplace conditions that contribute to the teachers’ success in the classroom. Participants in her sample group represented all grade levels. Their principals and central office personnel describe these teachers as being “beyond good-the best that exist” (p.71). Williams’ findings reveal that many of the teachers interviewed were faced with the same influences that contributed to their peers leaving the workplace, but they made the decision to remain in the teaching profession.

Nieto’s (2003) study investigated reasons for teacher retention and she maintains that increasing teacher longevity of quality teachers is highly contingent on regular and consistent support of peers and administrators. To retain qualified experienced teachers
and encourage teacher longevity, “Administrators must extend their roles beyond performance evaluation to include instructional support and not just helping with classroom management” (Wayne, Youngs, & Fleischman, 2005, p.76). Nieto (2003) suggests a prescription for administrators who are interested in retaining high quality experienced teachers. Among her recommendations, Nieto suggests that we must (a) reevaluate teacher education and staff development, (b) prepare teachers for public service, (c) support teachers who use creative methods to teach when working under difficult situations and (d) support teachers who value their students’ families and find positive ways to interact with them.

My study will add to the overall limited research concerning the retention of experienced teachers. The results of the study will additionally add to the literature on inner-ring suburban teacher longevity in that it presents experienced teacher’s own voices in expressing why they and their colleagues remain. Specifically, my study identifies personal beliefs, individual behaviors, and environmental influences that encourage experienced teachers to stay in the workplace. This contribution is different from other research efforts, which focused on why teachers leave.

**Practical Significance**

With increased attention given to students’ test scores and teacher accountability, retaining highly qualified teachers has turned into a nationwide concern. To some extent, increasing student performance is associated with teacher quality. According to Goe (2007), defining teacher quality varies depending upon the specific purpose and situation. A consensus among various researchers in the United States, however, is that teacher
quality acts as a driving force for improving student achievement and may be
demonstrated through teachers who possess specific characteristics, including
qualifications and teaching experience appropriate to grade level and subject matter
(Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Rice, 2003; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy,
2001).

My study focuses on those teachers who remain within the same school for over
ten years. A goal of this research is to provide a foundation to assist school administrators
and central office personnel in understanding experienced teachers’ perspectives relating
to their longevity in the workplace. Administrators can then use the findings from this
study to increase the prevalence of longevity among all personnel.

This research is aimed at providing district and school officials with a better
understanding of why experienced teachers choose longevity. By giving experienced
teachers an opportunity to express what personal beliefs, individual behaviors, and
environmental influences are behind their decisions to stay in their particular school may
prove helpful in guiding retention policy. In addition, knowledge obtained from teachers
in this study is intended to create a stable and consistent teacher corps. Furthermore, the
results of this study can benefit administrators as they consider school staffing by
changing and instituting policy and procedures, which enhance teacher longevity. Other
school districts may employ the findings from this study if similar longevity patterns are
evident there.
Research Questions

This study focuses on investigating why experienced teachers in an inner-ring suburban school district remained ten or more years in a particular school. The overarching research question is: What influences contribute to the longevity of experienced teachers in elementary, middle, and high school settings? The sub-questions are:

1. What are the specific beliefs of teachers who remain in the same school for ten or more years?
2. What specific behaviors are evident among teachers who remain in the same school for ten or more years?
3. What environmental influences are present with teachers who remain in the same school for ten or more years?

Definition of Terms

As noted above, this study addresses research questions relating to effective experienced teachers remaining in a specific school for an extended period of time. Within these questions and in data analysis, a number of terms are employed. For the purpose of this study, the following conceptual definitions are used:

Effective Experienced Teachers: Teachers who remain at their post for ten or more years in the same school and receive a principal recommendation of effective based on criteria including attendance at staff development, principals’ perceptions of success with student achievement, and demonstrated lifelong learning.
Social Cognitive Theory: Explains individuals’ and groups’ abilities to exercise a level of control over their futures (Goddard & Skrla, 2006).

Self-Efficacy: Effective experienced teachers’ beliefs in their abilities to establish and perform the courses of action required to produce a given result (Bandura, 1997).

Collective Efficacy: The ability of teachers working together to reach common goals, which will have a positive effect on students (Goddard & Skrla, 2006).

Theory of Loyalty: Provides one explanation of individual behavior, such as effective experienced teachers postponing their departure (exit) from the school site when faced with unpleasant situations (Hirschman, 1970).

Professional Loyalty: Reflects teachers’ commitment to work because of attachment to their occupation.

Mastery Experience: Influential source of self-efficacy, which aids in determining how effective experienced teachers interpret their past experiences (Ruble, Usher, & McGrew, 2011).

Personal Beliefs: Internal factors such as personal history, love of teaching, and hope and possibility that could impact effective experienced teacher’s career decision (Nieto, 2003).

Teacher Resiliency: The capability to recover strength or spirit quickly and efficiently in the face of adversity (Yost, 2006).

Teacher Empowerment: Ability of effective experienced teachers to act upon their ideas and to influence the ways these teachers perform in their profession (Melenyzer, 1990).
Autonomy: The ability of teachers to have a level of control relating to their working world (Bogler & Somech, 2004).

Teacher Mentor: An effective experienced teacher who provides on-going professional support to other teachers (Jorissen, 2002).

School Climate: Environmental influences that consist of multiple factors, including social, academic, professional, and physical aspects of the school (Loukas, 2007).

In this chapter, I presented my rationale for investigating the influences contributing to the longevity of experienced teachers. The significance of the problem manifests itself with the critical need for more research in the area of experienced teacher retention. In addition, the importance of the results can assist administrators and school systems with retaining qualified teachers. In the following chapter, I provide an explanation of the conceptual framework of this study, supported by theoretical and empirical literature.
2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Teacher longevity is a key factor in school quality, yet we know little about why some teachers remain in their posts for long periods of time while large numbers leave after a few years. Longevity is likely related to both internal personal factors and external environmental influences. Teachers’ personal beliefs, behaviors, and environmental influences explain why some teachers remain in their schools ten years or more.

I explore teachers’ decisions to establish longevity by first utilizing two theories—social cognitive theory and theory of loyalty that guide data collection and analysis. There are four working hypotheses embedded in my conceptual framework, which I believe directly relate to teachers’ decisions to remain in a particular school for ten or more years.

1. Over time, experienced teachers rely on their personal beliefs to sustain them as they remain at their schools (Leitch, 2010; Brunetti, 2006).

2. Giving experienced teachers a voice in the organization’s decision-making process increases their level of self-efficacy and sense of loyalty, thus providing opportunities for the experienced teachers to renew their commitment to the school community (Smith & Rowley, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007).
3. When the faculty within a school works collectively to reach a common goal, experienced teachers are more likely to remain at their workplaces (Johnson & The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2004; Tamir, 2010).

4. Experienced teachers are part of a professional and social community, which includes peers, administrators and other stakeholders, all of whom directly contribute to teacher retention (Rodriquez, 2009; Wong, 2004).

In the next section, I describe the theories that comprise my conceptual framework. In addition, I explain how the four working hypotheses of my study connect to the theories used in my conceptual framework. Finally, I relate each of these working hypotheses to the factors that influence teachers’ decisions to stay at their schools for ten or more years.

**Social Cognitive Theory**

Bandura’s social cognitive theory contains the main components of my conceptual framework. Social cognitive theory is based on the premise that human behavior is a triadic reciprocal interaction of personal beliefs, behavior, and environmental influences (Bandura, 1997). Thus, an individual’s behavior could be determined by the interaction of these three factors. A conceptual framework that includes social cognitive theory is an effective means to study teachers staying in their schools because this theory “addresses how humans as individuals and as members of groups, exercise some level of control over their futures” (Goddard & Skrla, 2006, p. 218). Additionally, my study is based on social cognitive theory’s premise that human behavior, such as teachers remaining in the classroom, results from multiple influences.
Efficacy beliefs, personal beliefs, behaviors, and environmental influences fall under the umbrella of social cognitive theory, and they help to explain teacher longevity.

Wegmann, Adams, and Higgins (2005) define efficacy beliefs as the ability to produce a specific result. These beliefs within social cognitive theory include self-efficacy and collective efficacy. The former involves a foundation for human motivation, well-being, and personal accomplishments while the latter includes a groups’ ability to reach goals and accomplish desired tasks. An assumption of social cognitive theory is that the strength of efficacy beliefs strongly influences individuals or groups.

Social cognitive theory is grounded in the claim that individuals are proactively engaged in their own development and these individuals have the belief that they can make events occur through their actions. This theory helps to explain how specific characteristics influence the experienced teacher’s perceptions and how these perceptions can affect the experienced teacher and/or group behaviors (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Components of social cognitive theory such as personal beliefs, behaviors, and environmental influences, also referred to as triadic reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1997), effect the decisions of teachers to remain in, migrate to, or leave a specific workplace. According to McArthur (2008), personal beliefs, behaviors, and environmental influences make a difference in long-term teacher retention, which is why I use them to help explain the data from my study.

Reciprocity is reflected by the fluidity of personal beliefs, behavior, and environmental influences in human behavior. One does not necessarily occur before the other. Gibson (2004) states, “[T]he relative influence exerted by the interacting factors
will vary based on the particular situation or individual” (p.197). Therefore, the detailing of the occurrence and description of these influences follow no set or implied order. Figure 1 illustrates this fluidity.

![Figure 1. Triadic Reciprocal Determinism](image)

Personal beliefs, behavior, and environmental influences interact bi-directionally as indicated by the arrows in Figure 1.

Reciprocal influences occur between personal beliefs and behavior. What people think, feel, and believe affect how they react or behave (Bandura, 1986). Personal beliefs and expectations connect to the environment in which the experienced teacher develops and acquires life experiences. People tend to take cues from their environment by forming social norms, policies, and reasoning based on the parameter of social cognitive theory (Goddard & Skrla, 2006). Our environment is dependent on our behavior while at the same time our environment affects our behavior (Bandura, 2001). Social cognitive theory views behavior as an outcome of interactions between our environment and personal beliefs. Personal beliefs, behaviors, and environmental influences interact
reciprocally. In other words, our environment and personal beliefs can influence our behavior but ultimately how we act or behave is directly dependent on individual choices.

**Personal Beliefs**

The first working hypothesis of my study is that over time, experienced teachers rely on their personal beliefs to sustain them as they remain at their schools (Brunetti, 2006; Leitch, 2010; Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2004). The personal influences that reside within these teachers could impact their career choices. These influences may include: their personal histories, their love of teaching, their belief that all students are capable of learning, and their sense of satisfaction through relationships with colleagues.

Nieto (2003) identifies characteristics such as love, hope and possibility, anger and desperation along with belief in the ability to shape the future as internal factors and how they influenced the teacher’s decision to remain in the workplace. There are other studies that support Nieto’s findings for educators to remain in the teaching profession, and for them to also remain in their current school setting (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; Waddell, 2007). Job satisfaction is derived from teachers’ sense of competence and self-efficacy. Thus, psychological features such as efficacy beliefs contribute to teacher longevity (Ball, 2010).

When experienced teachers believe they are capable of reaching specific goals, these individuals and the groups of teachers to which they belong are more likely to approach their goals with creativity, effort, and persistence (Goddard & Skrla, 2006). Organizing and executing courses of action are essential components of self-efficacy.
These components directly relate to behaviors pertinent for competent performance in a given area (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002).

Mastery experience is the most influential source of self-efficacy in that any given success raises efficacy appraisals. Ruble, Usher, and McGrew (2011) refer to mastery experience as “the interpretations individuals make of their past performances” (p.2). Self-efficacy beliefs increase when teachers interpret their efforts in assisting students as being successful. In contrast, teachers have a lower sense of self-efficacy when they are unsuccessful in the classroom. Self-efficacy is not only related to task choices but affects a teacher’s career choice (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002).

McArthur’s (2008) findings support the notion that efficacy beliefs affect teacher retention. She surveyed 160 certified teachers in 27 private schools to determine the relationship between teachers and job satisfaction. The findings revealed that self-efficacy beliefs of the teachers and collective efficacy beliefs of the faculty positively related to job satisfaction, which was a significant predictor of teachers’ intentions to remain at their schools. Additionally, schools with low average levels of efficacy beliefs were more likely to experience problems with teacher retention than schools with high average levels of efficacy beliefs.

Teachers’ abilities to act and their beliefs about their competence are also influences on self-efficacy. Researchers found that although there are social and structural influences on career choices, self-efficacy is an important mediator of these external influences and has a direct bearing on teacher retention (Betz & Hackett, 1981). According to Bandura (1994), “people with a high sense of efficacy have the staying
power to endure the obstacles and setbacks that [may] characterize difficult undertakings” (p.77). Thus, teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to remain at a given school for an extended period.

It appears that teachers who display resiliency and persistence become actively engaged in promoting social change within their schools. Teachers who demonstrate these qualities empower themselves to become more effective educators (Gu & Day, 2007; Hoy & McCarthy, 1994). Although teachers who leave the teaching profession are faced with similar challenges and obstacles, the absence of resiliency and persistence factor into their decisions to leave teaching (Yost, 2006).

**Teacher resiliency.** Teacher longevity has been directly tied to resiliency and Bobek (2002) maintains that resilience will increase teacher retention. Being resilient allows a person to have the capacity to continue to bounce back, to recover strength or spirit quickly and efficiently in the face of adversity (Yost, 2006). Resiliency is enhanced when the teacher recognizes adverse situations and chooses to develop appropriate coping skills in order to resolve the situation. Researchers suggest a person must learn how to become resilient, and without it teachers are more likely not to remain at the worksite (Bernshausen & Cunningham, 2001). To develop teacher resiliency, Bobek (2002) suggests the importance for building collegial relationships, experiencing success in the workplace, being competent in one’s subject level, being recognized for success, and maintaining a sense of humor.

Patterson, Collins, and Abbott (2004) use a descriptive research project to examine strategies used by classroom teachers and teacher leaders in building resilience
in large urban environments. Criteria for selecting participants for the study were based on recommendations by the participants’ peers and supervisors. The researchers asked participants to identify characteristics that caused them to remain in their urban schools. Results from the study revealed that these teachers believe the strategies they used to maintain their resilience contributed to their career longevity in urban schools. Patterson, Collins, and Abbott maintain that resilient teachers: a) have a set of personal values that guide their decision-making; b) place a high premium on professional development and find ways to get it; c) provide mentoring to others; d) take charge and solve problems; e) stay focused on the children and their learning; f) do whatever it takes to help children be successful; and g) have friends and colleagues who support their work emotionally and intellectually.

**Teacher empowerment.** Research on teacher empowerment began appearing in the literature during the late 1980’s (Edwards, Green, & Lyons, 2002). “Teacher empowerment is the opportunity and confidence to act upon one’s ideas and to influence the way one performs in one’s profession” (Melenyzer, 1990, p. 4). Researchers used the School Participant Empowerment Scale (SPES), the Brayfield-Rothe Index of Job Satisfaction, and the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) to examine the relationship among teachers’ perceptions of empowerment, job satisfaction, and commitment (Wu & Short, 1996). One subscale of the study was self-efficacy, the data from which reveal significantly predicted job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. Therefore, the findings from the study demonstrate that empowerment can
affect a teacher’s commitment to the workplace and overall sense of job satisfaction. Slye (2000) found that an increase in teacher empowerment increased teacher satisfaction.

Empowering teachers contributes to ownership, increased commitment, and increased motivation to work. When teachers feel like pawns rather than players who can control their own behavior, they are likely to respond with reduced commitment, mechanical behavior, indifference, and even dissatisfaction and alienation (Sergiovanni, 2005, p.129).

If teachers believe they work in an environment that is supportive, nurturing, and stimulates growth, then they will feel empowered and motivated to remain in the workplace.

**Behavioral Influences on Longevity**

Personal beliefs lead to behavior. Behavioral influences consist of those behaviors, which are performed by an individual. Jerald (2007) states that there are research findings connecting some teacher behaviors to a teacher’s sense of efficacy. Teachers with a stronger sense of efficacy:

- Tend to exhibit greater levels of planning and organization;
- Are more open to new ideas and are more willing to experiment with new methods to better meet the needs of their students;
- Are more persistent and resilient when things do not go smoothly;
- Are less critical of students when they make errors; and
- Are less inclined to refer difficult students to special education (p.33).
Teachers who exhibit these behaviors, according to Jerald, are going to positively impact student learning. When teachers have high-achieving goals for themselves, those goals are transferred to their students.

**Theory of Loyalty**

What I have initially observed as an educator has led me to my second working hypothesis: giving experienced teachers a voice in the organization’s decision-making process increases their level of self-efficacy and sense of loyalty, thus providing opportunities for experienced teachers to renew their commitment to the school community (Smith & Rowley, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Hirschman (1970) developed the theory of loyalty to explain individual behavior, which includes teachers postponing their departure from the school site. Voice is an integral component of the theory of loyalty. It provides opportunities for individuals to verbalize their inner feelings. Voice is a means by which a member of the organization attempts to change the practices, policies, and outputs of his or her organization (Hirschman, 1970). The successful exercise of the teacher’s voice in the workplace leads to professional loyalty.

There are many factors that could impact teacher longevity. One of the key influences of teacher retention is providing opportunities for teachers to have a voice in the decision making process in the workplace (O’Brien & Tye, 2002). Participating in the decision making process may contribute to the strengthening of experienced teacher’s loyalty, self efficacy, autonomy, and general sense of feeling empowerment (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004).
Bogler and Somech (2004) refer to autonomy as “the teachers’ feeling that they have control over various aspects of their working life” (p.279). Higher levels of autonomy were associated with greater retention and job satisfaction (Allen, 2005; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006). With high demands for administrators to enforce federal, state, and local policy changes, Earley and Ross (2006) note, “…educators are frustrated over what they may perceive as lack of autonomy for what and how they will teach and evaluate their students (p.7). Olsen and Anderson (2007) found that teachers frequently mention “a general desire for increased autonomy” (p. 22). Hargreaves (2003) reveals that when teachers are unable to utilize their independence in teaching, dissatisfaction occurs: “Teachers with over-examined professional lives complain of eroded autonomy, lost creativity, restricted flexibility, and constrained capacity to exercise their professional judgment” (p. 92). Therefore, an increase in classroom autonomy could promote an increase in teacher retention.

**Environmental Influences**

Environmental influences for this study consist of the school climate, which includes the professional atmosphere and the physical working conditions in a school site. These influences encompass specific components that could impact experienced teachers’ decision to remain in their school ten or more years. Components that may impact teacher longevity can include administrators, policymakers, and other personnel who directly affect the organization.
School Climate

School climate has been researched for years and the components that comprise a school’s climate are extensive and complex. According to Mitchell, Bradshaw, and Leaf (2010), “school climate is defined as the shared beliefs, values, and attitudes that shape interactions between the students, teachers, and administrators” (p. 272). Loukas (2007) describes school climate as having multiple variables that include the physical, social, and academic dimensions of schools. The climate sets the tone for the way school personnel interact in order to resolve problems, build trust and mutual respect, and generate new ideas. A good school climate involves establishing and maintaining satisfying relationships among colleagues and with families and building feelings of accomplishment, such as making a difference in the lives of the students and families (Kuperminc, Leadbeater, & Blatt, 2001; Mitchell, Bradshaw, and Leaf 2010).

The National School Climate Center (2009) has established a five-standard framework that supports effective school climate improvement efforts:

- The school community has a shared vision and plan for promoting, enhancing, and sustaining a positive school climate;
- The school community sets policies to address barriers to learning and teaching;
- The school community prioritized, and supported to promote learning, enhance engagement in teaching and learning, address and remove barriers to the teaching of all students, and develop appropriate operational infrastructure for meeting the standards;
• The school community creates an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically safe;

• The school community develops meaningful and engaging practices, and norms for teachers that promote social and civic responsibilities.

Empirical research pertaining to school climate suggests that when school members feel safe, valued, engaged, and respected, learning increases and teacher satisfaction and retention are enhanced. Researchers identify factors that influence school climate and could impact the experienced teacher’s decision to remain at a school for an extended period. School climate is an important determinant that affects job satisfaction and teacher retention (Imazeki & Goe, 2009; Laine, 2011; Taylor & Tashakkori, 1995).

Bulach and Berry (2001) investigated the impact teachers’ gender, experience, number of years at a school, and degree status on the climate of a school. The Instructional Improvement Survey, which measures seven climate factors, was administrated to 1163 teacher participants from twenty schools. Findings from this study indicate that more experienced teachers and teachers with more years at a school were more positive about the school climate of their school. Teachers with 2-10 years’ experience were the least positive about their schools’ climate. The data demonstrate a need for administrators to develop ways to retain teachers who have 2-10 years of experience at a school, as these teachers seem most at risk of leaving the profession. Experienced teachers from this study, however, demonstrate a staying power that should not be ignored.
In a one-year study that examined the effect of participatory teacher research on teacher efficacy and empowerment, Henson (2001) found perceptions of school climate to be related to self-efficacy. The research site for the study was an alternative education school located in a large southwestern city in the United States. The school’s enrollment was approximately 600 students and teachers worked largely with self-contained classrooms. The participating sample consisted of eleven faculty members, who volunteered to participate in the study. Data were collected from multiple sources, which included surveys, interviews, and field notes. The purpose of Henson’s study was to investigate the potential impact of teacher empowerment, collaboration, and perceptions of school climate on teacher efficacy in the context of participatory teacher research. Findings suggest that school climate may impact self-efficacy and is positively related to teachers’ perceptions of their efficacy beliefs as well.

Increased levels of self-efficacy among individual teachers have been related to the health and organizational climate of a school, such as teacher empowerment and collaboration, more effective instruction, and high expectations of students (Henson, 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Research has shown that providing a positive and supportive school climate for teachers may increase self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and job satisfaction. These variables could have a positive influence on student achievement and teacher retention.

**Professional atmosphere.** The third working hypothesis of my study is if the faculty within a specific school works collectively to reach a common goal, experienced teachers are more likely to remain. Collective efficacy beliefs within the school setting
refer to the ability of the teachers, as a faculty, to work collaboratively to organize and execute the necessary actions that will have a positive impact on the organization (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004). According to the researchers, collective efficacy “reflects how capable members of a group believe themselves to be at attaining organizational goals” (p.404). High collective efficacy in schools results in higher student success (Bandura, 1993; Knoblauch & Woolfolk Hoy, 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007).

Collective efficacy can only be measured as a whole and should not be misunderstood as any part of the individual’s self-efficacy levels that make up the group (Bandura, 2001). Within the structure of a collaborative group, the individuals make up the group and bring about change. In other words, an individual teacher’s sense of self-efficacy influences the collaborative group in which the teacher works (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). However, the measurement of collective efficacy is not derived from the collaboration of the individual. Collective efficacy is the group’s ability to bring about change as a whole. The actions of teachers when working together to accomplish certain goals at a given school can encourage certain behaviors. Schools with a strong sense of collective efficacy may promote teacher retention.

The fourth working hypothesis of my study states that experienced teachers are part of a professional and social community, which includes peers, administrators, and other stakeholders, all of who directly contribute to teacher retention (Rodriquez, 2009; Wong, 2004). Macdonald (1999) reviewed international literature on teacher attrition. The findings revealed strategies that could improve the professional atmosphere in the schools. Allowing teachers a more proactive role for educational decisions is one key
visible factor administrators may use to encourage teacher retention. Another finding from Macdonald’s review of the literature shows that fostering collegial relationships with administrators and other members of the professional community encourages teachers to remain in the teaching profession.

In order to identify the best strategies for retaining teachers, Jorissen (2002) interviewed teachers with three or more years of teaching experience. The researcher found that one strategy is to assign qualified mentors to newly hired teachers. Implementing a mentoring program decreases the isolation of both new and experienced teachers. Additionally, a mentoring program could encourage experienced teachers to remain at their work sites by recognizing the value of their experiences (Jorissen, 2002). Mentoring programs cast experienced teachers in new roles, such as school-based teacher educators (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). “Mentoring is one important mechanism for advancing the teaching profession, increasing teacher retention, and raising student achievement” (Virginia Department of Education, 2004, p.1). This type of school involvement provides opportunities for the experienced teachers to renew and/or reinforce their commitment to the teaching profession and the school.

**Physical environment.** School facilities have a direct impact on teaching and learning and the condition of the school could be a determining factor as to whether or not teachers remain in the teaching profession (Schneider, 2003). According to Laine (2011), “Poor and unsafe school conditions such as polluted air and poor ventilation can lead to decreased student achievement due to health hazards” (p. 29). Buckley, Schneider, and Shang (2005) conducted a study of teachers in Washington, DC, in which the
participants rated the working conditions of their schools and how these conditions affected their decisions to remain in their schools. Findings from the study show that the quality of the school facilities has a significant impact on the retention of the experienced teachers. In a study of Chicago and Washington schools, Schneider (2003) found:

Among teachers who graded their facilities with a C or below, more than 40 percent said that poor conditions have led them to consider changing schools and 30 percent [were] thinking about leaving teaching. The numbers [were] even higher for teachers who had experienced health effects related to poor facilities: about 50 percent of Chicago teachers and 65 percent of Washington teachers considered changing schools, and about 40 percent of Chicago and Washington teachers [were] thinking about leaving the profession entirely (p.3).

Schneider concluded:

School facilities have a direct affect on teaching and learning. Poor school conditions make it more difficult for teachers to deliver an adequate education to their students, adversely affect teachers’ health, and increase the likelihood that teachers will leave their school and the teaching profession (p.4).

Highly qualified, effective teachers tend to leave schools that lack the capital to guarantee positive, clean, and safe environment for the faculty (Imazeki & Goe, 2009). The physical environment of the school can influence teachers’ abilities to instruct the students and affect a teacher’s desire to remain in a given school (Laine, 2011).

Sergiovanni (2005) noted the importance of providing teachers with a respectful place to
work along with decent working conditions. Positive working conditions were an important factor for teacher longevity.

Summary

Figure 2 below is a diagram representing my conceptual framework. It includes aspects of my theoretical perspective, which may affect the retention of experienced teachers in an inner-ring suburban school district. This diagram places the teacher in the school setting and presents the teacher as an important component of the organization. Personal and behavioral influences along with efficacy beliefs are represented as internal influences and are included within the circle. The environmental influences are external components, which in the pictorial representation are located outside of the teacher’s personal world.
In this chapter, I presented my conceptual framework, which includes social cognitive theory and theory of loyalty. Social cognitive theory is based on the premise that human behavior is a triadic reciprocal interaction of personal beliefs, behavior, and environmental influences. This grounds my study in attempting to identify the influences affecting teachers’ decisions to establish longevity in their workplace. I use the constructs from my conceptual framework to inform and guide my interpretation of data. In the next chapter, I present research design and methods used to execute my research project.
3. Methodology

This chapter explains the research procedures I used to explore influences contributing to the retention of experienced teachers who have served in the same school ten or more years of their careers. The chapter begins with reintroducing the research questions followed by the research design and a general description of the research participants. The next section describes Brown Elementary School, Conway Middle School, and Abbey High School as the research sites while the following section explains how participants were selected and, briefly, who they are. Two distinct data collection methods are presented, followed by a detailed chronological description of the study’s procedure. Data analysis strategies are addressed, followed by a discussion of validity and limitations.

The methodological strategies of this study were employed to assist with answering the following main question: What influences contribute to the longevity of experienced teachers in elementary, middle, and high school settings? The sub questions are:

1. What are the specific beliefs of teachers who remain in the same school for ten or more years?
2. What specific behaviors are evident among teachers who remain in the same school for ten or more years?
3. What environmental influences are present for teachers who remain in the same school for ten or more years?

**Research Design**

Miles and Huberman (1994) define a case as, “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context. The case is, in effect, your unit of analysis” (p.25). Stake (1995) describes the case as a bounded integrated system. The case must exist or function within a bounded system that focuses on the specifics and not generalities of that case and system. A bounded system can be a distinct thing, process, an institution, a program, or a person or persons around which boundaries exist (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 1993). In this study, the bounded system involved understanding reasons experienced teachers choose to remain in their particular school for ten years or more. Thus, the behavior, which takes place within that system, has patterns that surface consistently and regularly. These requirements are unique characteristics of the case and also make it possible to examine and understand it. Paramount to the type of case study undertaken is the purpose behind the case. Stake (1995) lists three purposes: a) intrinsic, which is motivated by personal desire to know more about the particular case chosen b) instrumental, which is chosen with the intent to generate theory or greater insight and the specific case becomes secondary, or c) collective, which is applying instrumental study to multiple cases within the same system in order to gain insight and generate or refine existing theory of the larger research topic.

A collective case study is one where “individual cases share a common characteristic or condition, and are categorically bound together” (Merriam, 2009, p. 49).
Thus, I employed a collective case study in an effort to achieve a thorough and in-depth understanding of the personal beliefs, individual behaviors, and environmental influences instrumental in experienced teacher longevity. Furthermore, I utilized collective case study design to give nine experienced teachers the opportunity to share aspects of their personal and professional worlds in order to understand the major characteristics of and influences on their careers. Thus, administrators and district personnel may use the findings from this study in order to assist them with making informed decisions for maintaining a corps of effective teachers. The motivation behind this collective case study was my interest in understanding why some teachers remain in their schools for ten or more years. I gained insight into one district’s experienced teacher longevity by examining the characteristics and dynamics of each of the cases and the similarities and differences among them. When examining the case, researchers can utilize multiple sources of data, which facilitate reaching a holistic understanding of the case being studied. To accomplish this, I employed a survey and in-depth interviews.

I employed the Collective Efficacy Scale developed by Goddard (2002) (see Appendix A) as a means of obtaining a general understanding of the schools in which my participants were working. “A survey is a system for collecting information from or about people to describe, compare, or explain their knowledge, attitudes, and behavior” (Fink, 2003, p.138). Knowing how people in each school think and act, to some degree, helps place my participants' views and experiences in context. Case study research is unique from other qualitative approaches because “within case study research, investigators can collect and integrate quantitative survey data, which facilitates reaching a holistic
understanding of the phenomenon being studied” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p.554). Thus, administering the survey to all members of the faculty at each school provided descriptive statistics to help me understand the background information on the entire school as well as noting the number of years taught at this school by each teacher responding. The survey provided a broader understanding of the climate and overall atmosphere of each of the research sites. In addition, demographic information was gathered for comparison with the participants of this study.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) state that qualitative research provides an avenue for researchers to explore the inner experience of participants and to determine how meanings are formed. This study uses interviews to gather in-depth information relating to the participants’ thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, and feelings concerning influences that contribute to their longevity. “Qualitative interviewing allows a researcher to enter into the inner world of another person and to gain an understanding of that person’s perspective” (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 202).

In-depth interviews were the primary source of data collection. The survey along with in-depth interviews assisted me in gaining insight into the beliefs and characteristics of teachers who have made the decision to remain at the research site for ten or more years of their teaching careers. By using both types of data collection processes, multiple sources of information came together to reveal and reinforce consistent and regular behavior patterns within and across each case.

**Setting**
As a teacher in the Devonshire School District when this research project began, I had easy access to the three schools due to the working relationships I had established with the principals at these sites. Additionally, I was aware of teachers at these sites who taught at their school for ten or more years. Stake (1995) suggests that research is generally conducted at a site that is familiar to the researcher. The three schools selected as research sites, Brown Elementary School (BES), Conway Middle School (CMS), and Abbey High School (AHS), are located in the Devonshire School District\(^1\). These schools are also in the same pyramid and are a part of an inner-ring suburban school district, which is located in the mid-Atlantic section of the United States. The attrition rate of the entire school district’s teaching workforce was 12% during the 2011-2012 school year (Human Resources, Devonshire School District, 2012).

Table 1 below shows the total student enrollment, ethnicity, and free/reduced price meal participants for each of the research sites (Devonshire School District, 2012).

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\(^1\) To protect participants’ confidentiality, I am withholding all demographic information related to Devonshire School District. All descriptive information is of public record and gathered from the official website of Devonshire Public Schools. All proper nouns are pseudonyms.
Table 1
*Student Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Brown Elem.</th>
<th>Conway Middle</th>
<th>Abbey High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrollment</td>
<td>626</td>
<td>1268</td>
<td>2247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander and Indian</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Price Meals</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the 2011-2012 school year, the faculty of BES consisted of 61 licensed teachers, with 56% of the faculty having post-graduate degrees. BES has three administrators and houses grades 1 through 5; the demographic breakdown of students mirrors that of Conway Middle and Abbey High. CMS houses 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. At the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year, the faculty at CMS had 139 licensed teachers with 58% of the staff having post-graduate degrees. AHS consists of 10th, 11th and 12th grades. During the 2012-2013 school year, the faculty at AHS consisted of 199 licensed teachers with 76% having post-graduate degrees.

**Participants**

This study was conducted using two sets of participants. The first group of participants were administered the Collective Efficacy Scale. All teachers, counselors,
social workers, and principals in the three worksites were afforded the opportunity to participate in the survey. Administering the survey to all faculty members provided a broader understanding of the climate and overall atmosphere of each of the research sites. In addition to these data, the survey also provided background information on the entire school.

Interviews of the second, much smaller group of nine experienced teachers provided specific information to answer my research questions. There were two criteria for the selection of the interview participants: 1) teachers with ten or more years of teaching in one school and 2) successful teaching as defined by the principal. I describe this process in detail in the Interviews section below.

**Data Collection**

I sought and was granted approval from the Devonshire School District’s Accountability Office to conduct all aspects of my research project. After gaining approval from the school district, I obtained permission from the Human Subject Review Board at George Mason University to conduct my research. I began data collection in the spring of 2012.

**Survey**

For the first step of the survey data collection, I met with the administrators at the middle school to inform them of my research project. I asked the administrators to forward an email, which briefly detailed the survey, to licensed staff. The forwarded email contained the website address for the online survey. Before beginning the online
survey, participants were guided to 1) an explanatory page that described the survey and its purpose and then 2) a consent form that allowed the participant to proceed with the survey or opt out from taking the online survey. My first attempt at collecting survey data was unsuccessful as the response rate was 18 percent. I again met with the middle school principal and received permission to conduct a hard copy survey. I am confident that the second attempt was not tainted as I informed the faculty of the option of completing the hard copy version of the survey and reinforced that the survey was both voluntary and confidential. Aware of the concerns of completing the middle school survey, my approach at the elementary school and high school differed. I contacted the principals at the elementary and high schools to determine an appropriate time and place to administer the hard copy version of the survey during regularly scheduled faculty meetings.

**Survey instrument.** The short form of The Collective Efficacy Scale, developed by Goddard (2002), consists of items that determine how faculty perceive collective efficacy in their workplaces. Since its development, researchers have utilized the Collective Efficacy Scale in studies relating to various school phenomena. Goddard and Skrla (2006), for example, conducted a study in an urban school district using data drawn from 1,981 teachers in forty-one K-8 schools. The teachers in the study responded to a survey containing the short form of the Collective Efficacy Scale that determines how school social composition is related to perceived collective efficacy.

According to Goddard, the 12-item short form is more theoretically pure than the earlier version of the 21-item Collective Efficacy Scale (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000). The survey uses a Likert scale, 1-strongly disagree through 6-strongly agree, that
provides some variability so that there are distinctions among the survey participants’ responses. In this study, data from the short form of the Collective Efficacy Scale gave insight as to whether the given research site had a strong sense of collective efficacy, which could promote teacher retention.

Additionally, the data from the survey provide background information that were useful when analyzing and interpreting the interview data for this study. Prior to responding to the items on the Collective Efficacy Scale, faculty members were asked to complete a series of preliminary items, such as providing their length of service at each school and stating if they have served as a mentor in the school district’s mentoring program. Having the participants provide personal information such as total years of teaching experience provides pertinent data necessary in supporting research sub question three. The background information, demographic items, and the Collective Efficacy Scale assist with determining the organizational climate at each of the schools.

**Interviews**

Merriam (2009) suggests that case studies use purposeful sampling, which allows the researcher to describe characteristics of specific population of interest after which the researcher attempts to locate the individuals to interview. The logic of using purposeful sampling is to support and illuminate the research questions (Patton, 2002). Additionally, purposeful sampling allowed me to gather rich information from the nine cases in understanding teacher longevity (Maxwell, 2005 & Patton, 2002).

To obtain a pool of prospective participants for face-to-face interviews, I contacted a representative from the school district’s Human Resource office to assist with
identifying the targeted sample group of experienced teachers. I requested a computer-generated list of experienced teachers who have worked at each of the research sites for at least ten years. The district representative supplied me with a list of school personnel who had worked in the Devonshire District for ten or more years. Utilizing this list, I met with the principals of the three schools in the study to refine the list by identifying the experienced teachers who had taught at the school for 10 or more years. Principals at the three sites recommended experienced teachers for the study based on criteria including attendance at staff development, principals’ perceptions of success with student achievement, and demonstration of lifelong learning. Once the principals identified experienced teachers, individual emails were sent to each of the twelve identified experienced teachers at Brown Elementary School, fifteen identified experienced teachers at Conway Middle School, and twenty-one experienced teachers at Abbey High School inviting them to participate in the study. A total of thirteen prospective experienced teachers responded to my email and participants were selected in the order in which they responded. The first nine respondents comprised a diverse pool of participants, three from each of the research sites. I stopped recruiting when I had commitments from the nine participants because I needed to limit the sample because of constraints on my time.

I responded to each of the prospective participants by email to establish a time that was convenient for them to meet. Once a time and location were agreed upon, I met with each participant to begin the face-to-face interview. Two interviews took place during the teacher workday, six interviews took place after school, and one interview took place during the participant’s planning period. Interviews took place in each of the
teachers’ classrooms. The participants were given an explanatory letter describing the research study and a consent form for each to sign. After reassuring each participant that the interview would be confidential, I began audio-recording the session. I guided the participants through the interview process by having each one respond to a pre-developed interview protocol (see Appendix B).

**Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol was designed in a semi-structured format with open-ended questions. To field test the questions, taped pilot interviews were conducted with three teachers who met the study’s criteria. The pilot study was administered to determine whether the developed questions would generate relevant data and to assess my interviewing and listening skills. Participants were asked to give suggestions regarding the questions and procedures. Appropriate changes were made to the interview protocol based upon the pilot interviews and analysis.

Patton (2002) suggests starting the interview protocol with questions that the interviewees can easily answer followed with questions that are more challenging or sensitive. The interview protocol for this study is organized into three stages based on the study’s research questions. The purpose of the first stage was to glean personal background information by asking questions relating to the length of time the participants have been in education and at a particular school. Additionally, the participants were asked to describe reasons they entered the field of public education. During the second stage of the interview protocol, questions such as “are teachers allowed to participate in the decision-making process?” shifted the focus to behavioral influences of the
interviewee at their research sites. Questions relating to the environmental influences that contribute to longevity, such as “How are you treated by your school district?” were included in the last stage of the interview protocol. The data from interviews assisted in helping me to understand how the experienced teachers think about, view, and interpret their behavior as they remain at a specific school site for ten or more years. In addition, I took notes during the interview. This allowed me to record reactions and/or note data for further elaboration. After each interview, the audiotapes were transcribed using verbatim transcription. As I began the data collection process, I documented insights that I gained from reflecting on the surveys and in-depth interviews. “Memos are reflective notes that the researchers write to themselves about what they are learning from their data” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p.501).

Writing memos is a tool that I used to assist with recording my ideas during the data analysis process. Memo writing allowed me to think about the data so that analysis of the data could occur. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), “[Memos] move the analysis forward and as such are just as important to the research process as data gathering” (p.118). Additionally, memo writing was ongoing and I was able to retrace the process by which I arrived at my findings.

**Data Analysis**

**Survey Data**

Data from the survey instrument were exported to Microsoft Excel and SPSS for statistical analysis. Survey responses were analyzed and are presented by school site in
chapter 4. Using the Collective Efficacy (Short Form) Scoring Guide (Goddard & Hoy, 2003), a collective efficacy score was determined for each of the three schools. Of the 12-items on the Collective Efficacy Scale, 6 items in this scale were revised. For example, the item, “Students here just aren’t motivated to learn,” is scored in reverse order. Thus, a strongly agree “6” was scored “1,” suggesting low efficacy. The following items were reverse scored: 3, 4, 8, 9, 11, and 12. Scores for all the items were then added to determine a score per column. To obtain a collective efficacy value for each school, I calculated the mean of each response and of the 12 items in determining the strength of collective efficacy beliefs in each research site. For each of the three schools in the study, I also computed a standardized score with the mean of 500 and a standard deviation of 100, which is referred to as the SdS score. To compute the SdS score, I used the following formula: SdS for collective efficacy (CE) = \(100(CE - 4.1201)/.6392 + 500\) (Goddard & Hoy, 2003). The following steps were performed:

1. Compute the difference between the school’s mean collective efficacy score and the mean of the normative sample (\(CE - 4.1201\));
2. Multiply the difference by one hundred [\(100(CE - 4.1201)\)];
3. Divide the product by the standard deviation of the normative sample (.6392);
4. Finally, add 500 to the result.

I computed the SdS for each of the three schools. Then, I compared the scores against the normative representative sample (Goddard & Hoy, 2003). The range of the normative scores is listed below.

If the score is 200, it is lower than 99% of the schools.
If the score is 300, it is lower than 97% of the schools.
If the score is 400, it is lower than 84% of the schools.
If the score is 500, it is average.
If the score is 600, it is higher than 84% of the schools.
If the score is 700, it is higher than 97% of the schools.
If the score is 800, it is higher than 99% of the schools.

According to Taylor (2000), “Descriptive statistics are used to describe quantitatively how a particular characteristic is distributed among a group of people” (p.105). Descriptive statistics assisted with reporting the results of the Collective Efficacy Scale survey. The method of reporting information helped me to organize and present the survey’s data in summary form.

Interview Data

According to Bogden and Biklen (2007), “the interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world” (p.103). The data from my study is descriptive in nature. The rich data (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002) allow me to understand the influences that contribute to the retention of experienced teachers in an inner-ring suburban school district.

Yin (2009) identifies several types of strategies that can be used to analyze case study data: a) theoretical propositions, b) rival explanations, and c) descriptive frameworks. The objective and design of my study are based upon my working hypotheses, research questions, and conceptual framework. Thus, I relied on the
theoretical propositions (working hypotheses) of my study as a general strategy to analyze the face-to-face interview data. The data from the interviews were examined for themes and patterns and were coded based on the properties and categories that emerged from the transcribed data. I periodically reviewed the coding process in order to check for accuracy of the placement of the data.

According to Yin, “all empirical research studies including case studies have a story to tell” (p. 130). I examined the details of each case individually and then used cross-case analysis as a guide to interpreting the interview data in my study. I first treated each individual case in and of itself, so that I was able to learn as much as possible from the data, which had a direct impact upon the case. After the data from each single case were analyzed, I began the cross-case analysis.

**Coding**

I used a coding system to assist with analyzing participants’ responses to the interview protocol. My research questions and conceptual framework helped to inform and aid in developing the etic codes for this study. Additionally, emic codes emerged as data were collected from the interview protocol. To assist with analyzing the data, I used matrices to organize the data and initially employed computer-assisted software to code, retrieve, and manipulate the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

After the taped interviews were transcribed, I began the initial coding of the interview data by entering the transcriptions into NVivo computer software: however, it was more personable and comfortable for me to identify and code themes manually. To aid with analyzing the data, I used schema analysis, which takes a methodological
perspective similar to that of grounded theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). According to Denzin and Lincoln, both schema analysis and grounded theory “begin with a careful reading of verbatim texts and seek to discover and link themes into theoretical models” (p. 280). Schema analysis assisted me with discovering how components of my conceptual framework tied together to answer the research questions in my study. Therefore, I utilized a coding system that is generally associated with grounded theory.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe two different types of coding that I used in this study to assist with analyzing the interview data: a) open coding, which is to discover, name, and categorize the phenomena according to their similarities and differences; to break down into minute units and b) axial coding, which is how categories relate to their subcategories in terms of their characteristics and dimensions along with regrouping of the data.

I conducted multiple readings of the transcriptions to develop an accurate perception of each participant’s response. During each reading or while listening to the audio recording, I made notes about emerging themes or how the responses might connect with my working hypotheses or research questions (Patton, 2002). As I identified the experienced teachers’ responses to each of the interview protocol questions, I began to notice comments relating to themes addressed in the literature. I created additional codes realizing these themes that might be important in the analysis. Examples of additional codes include personal decision-making and thoughts of leaving.

During open coding, I divided the data into small meaningful sections based on the participants’ own words. To compare similarities and differences, each of the
transcripts was analyzed line by line. I constantly compared each piece of data with previous data. I recorded my analysis of vocabulary, sentences, phrases, and paragraphs by writing and color-coding key components for each question and for each participant. I constantly compared the data and continued this process until all data were analyzed.

All analyzed data were used during axial coding. To view all the data, categories were listed separately and then together on separate sheets of paper to make relationships and comparisons. In many instances, I had to revisit my open-coding ideas and categorize again to find more meaningful properties. Color-coding again was used to match similar characteristics. This resulted in merging themes, such as salary and professional decision-making.

Table 2 below shows a list of codes derived from my conceptual framework. Once interview data were collected, I applied these codes only when they clearly fit a specific segment of the data. I developed new codes when data segments were found that did not fit any of my pre-existing codes.
An analysis of the participants’ responses allowed me to draw conclusions relating to the impact efficacy beliefs and personal beliefs have on the retention of
experienced teachers at the research sites. The analysis allowed me to learn participants’ perspectives on the environmental influences that are important in their decisions to stay. According to Patton (2002), by using interviews for collecting data, I was able to “capture how those interviewed view their world, to learn their terminology and judgments, and the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences” (p. 348). I used the information gleaned from the survey and interviews to identify phenomena contributing to the longevity of experienced teachers.

**Validity**

As a researcher, one aspect of data collection I was aware of was validity threats. Researcher bias and reactivity (Maxwell, 2005) are specific validity threats I addressed. Since I am a veteran teacher (37 years), it was necessary for me to mitigate possible bias or the tendency to impose my own beliefs upon the reader.

On a personal note, I worked in the same middle school for 23 years as a loyal and dedicated teacher. Doing so was a challenge because the air quality along with other factors caused several colleagues and me to adjust to our surroundings. Occasionally, we would wear dust masks to protect us from inhaling excessive allergens. Asbestos was discovered in the boiler room near the school cafeteria. A company that specializes with removal of asbestos worked to discard the hazardous material from the building. During this process, staff members complained about the safety hazards and air quality of our school. Despite the hardship of periodically adjusting to the work environment, our loyalty continued on the job. Experiences such as these have contributed to my interest in this research, which I realize can also create the potential for personal biases.
Reflexivity is a strategy I used to guard against researcher bias. Johnson and Christensen (2012) state, “the researcher actively engages in critical self-reflection about his or her potential biases and predispositions” (p. 265). Therefore, I maintained a research journal, which included my own point of view, responses, and thoughts about the process.

Additionally, by using member checking, participants in this study were able to verify the accuracy of their recorded data. Respondent validation (Maxwell, 2005) assisted with addressing validity threats. Once I collected and interpreted the data, I verified my conclusions with the participants. Obtaining clarification from participants when their responses to the interview questions seemed ambiguous served as a means of unraveling the words of the participants so that their stories were accurately documented. For additional member checking, I shared a copy of individual participant profiles obtained from the data with each interview participant to seek clarity in the interpretations and conclusions I drew from the data.

**Limitations to the Study**

A limitation of the study was the self-reported nature of the data. Data were based upon the participants’ realities and what they perceive as truth. Additionally, once participants were identified, not all grade levels or subject areas were represented. The participants represented teachers with longevity in their schools across the school district. Even though this study is of just one inner-ring suburban school district, data gleaned from the experienced teachers could be used as a starting point to discover what is going on in other school districts with similar demographics. Other school systems that want to
explore the phenomena of teacher longevity may utilize my findings to determine if similar longevity patterns are occurring in their districts. Miles and Huberman (2002) describe this as generalizing to a case rather than generalizing from it.

Summary

This chapter presented the approach I used to answer the overarching research question: What influences contribute to the longevity of experienced teachers in elementary, middle, and high school settings? Retaining both new and experienced teachers in the public school setting is a challenge for school administrators and policymakers. This study gave voice to experienced teachers and allowed them to tell their stories regarding their decisions to remain in their schools. This study addressed this unique population of teachers who have remained on the job and in the same school for over ten years or more. Educators, who choose to remain in the teaching profession for extended lengths of time, provide unique and valuable contributions to their work environment, professional community, and student achievement.
4. Data Analysis and Findings

The purpose of this study is to understand the influences on experienced teacher longevity. To provide a broader understanding of the findings of the study, I begin by presenting results from the demographic data and Collective Efficacy Scale from Brown Elementary School, Conway Middle School, and Abbey High School. Demographic and survey data were used to give insight into the perceived collective efficacy of the faculty within the three research sites. The survey and in-depth interviews, with in-depth interviews being the primary source of data collection, were utilized in determining teachers’ decisions to teach in their schools for ten years or more, which requires understanding the major characteristics of and influences on their careers.

Data gathered from in-depth interviews were used to answer the following overarching question and sub questions: What influences contribute to the longevity of experienced teachers in elementary, middle, and high school settings? (1) What are the specific beliefs of teachers who remain in the same school for ten or more years? (2) What specific behaviors are evident among teachers who remain in the same school for ten or more years? (3) What environmental influences are present for teachers who remain in the same school for ten or more years?
**Collective Efficacy Survey**

The Collective Efficacy Scale (Short Form) is based on Bandura’s social cognitive theory and was designed to assess the extent to which a faculty believes in its combined capability to positively influence student learning (Goddard, 2002). The twelve-item Collective Efficacy Scale was constructed for a study to reexamine the theoretical aspects of the 21-item Collective Efficacy Scale (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004). The Collective Efficacy Scale consists of items that help to determine how faculty members perceive collective efficacy in their workplaces. The survey uses a Likert scale that provided some variability to determine distinctions among the survey participants’ responses. Data from the Collective Efficacy Scale gave insight as to the strength of perceived collective efficacy, which could promote teacher retention.

A survey of faculty members at BES, CMS, and AHS was conducted to ascertain the feelings of "community efficacy" that prevail in each school. The results of the Collective Efficacy Scale indicate that the efficacy level of the faculty at BES was higher than the efficacy level at CMS or AHS. According to Brinson and Steiner (2007) strong sense of collective efficacy within schools insures positive outcomes: a) improves students’ performance, b) improves the negative effects of low socioeconomic status, and c) creates a work environment that builds teacher commitment to the school. Results from the Collective Efficacy Scale, demographic items, and background information were utilized to determine specific aspects of the organizational climate at each of the three schools.
Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics are utilized in reporting the results of the Collective Efficacy Scale and demographic data. There were a total of 352 survey responses. Table 3 shows the number of survey participants and the total number of faculty members at each of the research sites.

Table 3  
*Survey Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brown Elementary</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conway Middle</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbey High</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of the school’s scores was standardized against the normative data provided in a representative sample (Goddard & Hoy, 2003). Brown’s measured collective efficacy standardized score is higher than 84% of the schools in the normative sample, which demonstrates an above average range. Conway Middle’s standardized score is lower than 84% of the schools, which demonstrates a low average range. Abbey High’s standardized score demonstrates an average range when compared to the normative data. Table 4 reports the findings of the Collective Efficacy Scale using mean and standardized scores.
Table 4
Perceived Collective Efficacy of Faculty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SdS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brown Elementary</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conway Middle</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbey High</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>489</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographic information of faculty members was reported for each school. Data consisted of four items: age, gender, length of time working at the same school, and participation in mentoring. The demographic section of the survey served as background information from the research sites.

Participants at Brown Elementary were relatively evenly spread among four of the five age categories: 21-30 (31%), 31-40 (26%), 41-50 (16%), and 51-60 (24%). The smallest participant category was the 61 or above age category with only 2% of participants working at the elementary school who are at least 61 years of age. Brown has a relatively young faculty since the highest participant rate among the 21-30-age category is thirty-one percent.

Participants at Conway Middle were relatively evenly spread among three of the five age categories: 31-40 (23%), 41-50 (22%), and 51-60 (12%-age category. The highest participant rate among the 21-30-age-category is forty percent. The smallest
participant’s age category was 61 or above with 3% of the faculty being at least 61 years of age. Similar to Brown Elementary, Conway Middle has a relatively young faculty. Participants at Abbey High School were relatively evenly spread among three of the five age categories: 21-30 (16%), 41-50 (24%), and 51-60 (19%) - age categories. The smallest participant’s age category was 61 or above (7%), which corresponds with the smallest participant age category at Brown Elementary and Conway Middle. Unlike the elementary and middle schools, Abbey High’s highest participant rate was within 31-40 - age category, which was thirty-four percent.

When asked, “How long have you taught at your current school?” fifteen teachers, or 25% of the teachers responding to the survey, reported that they have taught ten or more years at Brown Elementary. Twenty-two teachers or 20% of teachers responding to the survey reported that they have taught ten or more years at Conway Middle. Fifty-two teachers or 30% of teachers responding to the survey reported that they have taught ten or more years at Abbey High.

When asked, “Have you participated as a mentor in this district’s mentoring program?” twenty-six or 43% of the survey participants at Brown Elementary reported that they have. One hundred-three or 92% of the survey participants at Conway Middle reported that they have participated as a mentor in this district’s mentoring program. Ninety-one or 51% of the survey participants at Abbey High reported that they participated as a mentor in this district’s mentoring program.

Exami...
for the nine experienced teachers in this study. The participant profiles that follow provide brief descriptions of the personal characteristics of the nine experienced teachers. To provide a broader understanding of the working environment of the nine participants, I present the school profiles. Following each school profile, I present the case analyses for the three experienced teachers who are employed in that specific school. Case analyses reveal aspects of the experienced teachers’ personal and professional worlds and briefly highlight influential factors contributing to their career longevity.

**Participant Profiles**

The experienced teachers interviewed for this study were inspired to become educators early in life or made the decision to become a teacher after switching careers. Each entered the field of education due to influential people in their lives, courses taken in college, or a personal obligation to make a difference in the community. All nine interviewed welcomed the invitation to participate in this study. Because I served as a classroom teacher at the middle school for many years with four of the nine participants (Vera, Shirley, Michael, and Mary, who currently teaches at BES), I believe the collegial rapport between us as colleagues facilitated open and honest conversation. Table 5 displays a summary of the participants’ characteristics.
Table 5
*Characteristics of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Subject/Grade</th>
<th>Length of time in Education</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Years at Present School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>BES</td>
<td>2nd Grade</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>BES</td>
<td>3rd Grade</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>BES</td>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vera</td>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>7th and 8th Grade Mathematics</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>8th Grade History</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirley</td>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith</td>
<td>AHS</td>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>AHS</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Juris Doctor</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>AHS</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All nine experienced teachers were professional and pleasant during the interviewing process. The experienced teachers made certain that they had a clear understanding of each question before giving a response. The participants interviewed in this study bring with them their unique backgrounds and experiences, which help establish their reasons for remaining in their schools for ten or more years.
Brown Elementary School Profile

Brown Elementary School was built in 1965 and is situated on 13 acres of woodlands. Renovations have been numerous to meet the needs of both the students and the community and include a new library, music room, wired classrooms, and a secured main entrance. In February 2010, Brown Elementary celebrated the grand opening of its new gymnasium, which features sun tunnels and LED lighting. In 2011, four new classrooms were also added and the school took on several “Green” projects including an eco-air fresh air system, a solar hot water energy system, and an environmental quality HVAC system throughout the entire building.

Brown Elementary has become one of the most state of the art schools in the area. All faculty members are provided a laptop for instructional use and Internet access is readily available to all students. Each classroom has at least three desktop computers and a classroom set of specific net books, and kindergarten classes have 12 personal computers dedicated to the “Breakthrough to Literacy” program. Five additional mobile network carts are used for technological integration throughout the classrooms. Teachers working with below grade level learners have access to laptops and two carts containing twenty-four laptop computers for student use.

Brown is one of thirteen elementary school sites serving the Devonshire School District. The student population draws from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Table 6 indicates the student demographics at Brown Elementary School.
Table 6
*Brown Elementary School Student Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Percent of Total Student Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Indian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Price Meals</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The faculty at BES consists of educators who report that they are appreciative for the daily collaboration that has been established for student success. This collaboration has been an essential component in enhancing collective efficacy. The support teachers receive from each other is one of the reasons they continue to work at the highest levels possible. One of the participants comments, “We have teachers who help each other and collaborate with each other very well and the principal is very understanding and supportive of her staff.” Faculty members working with each other are critical to developing relationships that enhance a strong sense of collective efficacy (Jahnke, 2010), thus laying a foundation for teacher longevity.
Case Analysis

Two out of three of the Brown Elementary participants were inspired to become educators early in life. One, however, did not enter the teaching profession early on but instead made his ultimate decision to teach based upon his earlier life experiences. Each experienced teacher welcomed the invitation to participate in this study. These teachers were professional and pleasant during the interviewing process and made certain that they had a clear understanding of each question before giving a response. They bring with them unique backgrounds and experiences, which help establish their reasons for remaining in their schools.

Betty

Betty is a second grade teacher at Brown Elementary and this is her twenty-third year of teaching. She has been a teacher at this school for the past twenty-one years. Betty teaches math, reading, social studies, science and writing, and the students in her class are also exposed to music, art and physical education. Betty is the only participant in this study who does not hold an advanced degree. Teaching and spending time with her three children prevented her from furthering her education and she regrets not pursuing an advanced degree earlier in her career. Obtaining a Master’s degree is one of her future goals.

Personal world. A glimpse into Betty’s personal history demonstrates how her parents and other family members influenced her life choices and contributed to her becoming an educator. Betty comes from a family environment where education has always been extremely important and there is a wide range of educators in her family.
Along with her mother and grandmother who were teachers, and her grandfather, who was a school principal, several other members were in the educational field. Education had a tremendous impact upon Betty’s life and her family’s experiences shaped her dream and motivated her to become an educator. She says, “As a little girl, I always knew that I wanted be a teacher.” Betty remembers stories her parents shared and what she learned as a child about the hardships her parents endured in order to become educated. Many of her family members had to overcome tremendous odds to reach their goals. Their dedication was a pivotal point in Betty’s decision to commit to her lifelong dream. Betty promised herself long ago that she would not only graduate from high school but graduate from college and pursue a degree in teaching. She also promised herself that when she succeeded in her college endeavor, she would work with children, especially children whose hardships resembled those of her family history. Since most of Betty’s students come from families who live below the poverty level, Betty’s promise to herself greets her everyday through the eyes of her students.

As a career educator, Betty believes that her role as a teacher is to prepare her students academically to the best of her abilities, and also to instill in them life skills beyond the approved district and state curriculum. Betty states that she is not just their teacher to her students. She relates:

I’m not just their teacher but I am not their friend either, but more of a guidance person for them to make sure they are making the correct choices, and just doing the right thing to be a good citizen.
Betty has been able to track many of her former students. When she hears about one of them making bad choices or decisions, Betty says, “So I just keep in touch with them [former students] and just help them set goals to fix whatever they think their weaknesses are.” By rebounding from the setbacks of the negative reports regarding her former students, Betty is able to strengthen her sense of efficacy, which results in a stronger sense of resilience and persistence to remain in the workplace (Gu & Day, 2007).

**Professional world.** Since being at Brown Elementary, Betty states that she has observed numerous changes to school policy. She has also seen a change in how the curriculum is disseminated to the students. Betty relates a specific change that personally affected her and her family.

When Betty began teaching at her current school, her two older children were given permission by the school district to attend Brown Elementary, even though Betty and her family live in an adjacent school district. This arrangement allowed her to spend quality time with her children and Betty did not have to provide before and after school care for them. With a new Superintendent, however, her school district’s policies were revised and faculty members’ children were no longer permitted to attend a school in Betty’s district if they lived outside of this local jurisdiction. Betty’s third child was unable to attend school at his mother’s workplace. This caused Betty to reconsider her teaching position at Brown Elementary because it was important for her child to be in the same school with her, since this was for Betty the most feasible and convenient arrangement. In her interview, Betty said, “So that was when I was really considering
going to another district but I was able to work some things out, even though it would have been nice if they had made it easier for administrative transfers.” Even though her first concern was to consider the best possible solution for her immediate family, Betty’s sense of loyalty and commitment to her students were key factors in her decision to remain at Brown Elementary.

With the new curriculum guides currently being used by the faculty at BES, Betty and her colleagues are expected to teach using a certain teaching style and also teach specific content. Betty gives her thoughts on how she views this latest change and how she is able to persevere:

As you know, I’ve been here for a long time, so I’ve seen things come and go and roll around and come around and around. So for someone who has been here for so long, I know that it’s just another phase that they’re trying. And I just, I take it with stride and I just do my best with what I can. But I do find myself getting a little burnt out and not feeling like I have the freedom to be as creative as I used to be with the new curriculum guide. But I feel that there is a little bit of, they give you a little leeway to teach it and be your own person, but they [administrators] do want you to stick to the guides to a certain extent, so it’s kinda hard to find your creativity and freedom.

Betty’s lack of freedom is superseded by her staying power and Betty’s resiliency has kept her planted in her school despite all of the changes.

Betty realizes that she has to make adjustments when presenting the new curriculum to her students. With these new changes, Betty acknowledges that there are
not a variety of resources available for her to implement the district’s revised curriculum. To compensate for this deficiency, Betty admits: “I have to come up with different things and make things, search for different things here and there and it’s not just right there for us, which takes a lot of time and energy to search for things.” Self-efficacy beliefs increase when teachers interpret their efforts in assisting students as being successful (Pintrich & Schunk, 2008). By increasing her efforts in making sure her students have the necessary instructional materials needed for the new curriculum, Betty demonstrates a high sense of self-efficacy.

Betty has been very active in the school’s reading programs and the parent resource center. Being involved in these programs has allowed her to connect with her students and their families in a more intimate and productive manner. Betty participates in the character education program in her school and also serves as co-facilitator of the school-wide program, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

Betty states, “The principal is very understanding of both students and staff.” She also reports that the faculty at BES is “very collegial and respectful towards everyone else.” She goes on to say, “We are here for each other and we help each other out whenever we can.” Increasing longevity of quality teachers is highly contingent on regular and consistent support of peers and administrators (Nieto, 2003).

Betty loves the physical aspects of her school. She says, “It is a beautiful building, an older one, but it is still very welcoming.” She expresses her love for her classroom as well. Betty reflects, “I take pride in my classroom. I like to make it a welcoming setting. I have a nice big space [classroom] and I enjoy coming to work every day.”
Summary. To gain insight into Betty’s personal and professional worlds, I briefly highlighted several influential factors contributing to reasons this experienced teacher made the decision to remain in BES for twenty-one years. Her family values, positive relationships with colleagues, salary, and inviting school environment have motivated Betty to stay. She describes her building as “a nice place to work.”

Bob

Bob has remained at Brown Elementary School for ten of the thirteen years of his teaching career. He earned a Master’s in teaching and teaches general education subjects including reading, writing, math, science, and social studies to third graders. Bob is no stranger to teaching. Prior to working in the Devonshire School District, he taught in a different geographical area and then served as an English teacher in a school outside of the United States. One of his professional goals is to again teach abroad. Bob says, “The only other thing that I do think about is teaching outside of the U.S., another country, maybe a developing country, and then contribute to establishing schools there.”

Personal world. The values that were instilled in Bob as a child have encouraged him to become an educator. In addition, Bob states that he entered public education for selfish reasons. He states, “It’s a field where you are human. You have to be human when you’re teaching. “ Bob further describes teaching by saying:

To me, it’s not a fake job. It’s something people need. It’s useful. It’s important. It’s necessary. So that attracted me to it. It connects you to what’s real in all human existence. For there’s always teaching and learning from the beginning to
the end of mankind. There’s going to be teaching and learning. So, for me, it’s real. It’s real and it’s needed and I want to be part of that.

Bob admits that he rarely socializes with his colleagues outside of school life, but he does have other interests. Since he has lived in numerous locations, Bob’s closest friends do not reside in this immediate area. Thus, he states that it is important for him to spend quality time with his extended family. Bob reflects:

I have nine brothers and sisters and aging parents, so I’ve got things to occupy my time. So I feel like I get enough time with people when I’m here [at work], and when I’m home I need to give time to those people.

Bob has found interests outside of school life, which motivate and inspire him to continue teaching. One of Bob’s outside interests is reading. According to Williams (2003), intellectual stimulation, such as reading, contributes to longevity in the workplace. Bob’s interest in reading continues to give him endless opportunities in discovering new approaches to learning. At the time of this interview, Bob was in the process of reading a book about the brain entitled “Incognito: The Secret Lives in the Brain,” by David Eagleman. Bob describes it as layperson’s book and very entertaining. Bob goes on to say:

When I read things in there about how the brain works I try to step back at times when I’m a little stressed with certain kids about why they’re not getting that, and think about how, try not to rush to judgment because there is so much we don’t know about how kids are learning. So, [I’m] trying to get more patience that way [by reading]. So, resources I do on my own tend to maybe not so much help me in
terms of instructional strategies as much as they help me in my relationships of being patient, being open, and appreciating their [students] differences more.

Teachers bring to the work place various personal influences that reside within each of them (Wise, 2002) and Bob seeks to empower himself by relying on his ability to select resources and references that give him the confidence he is seeking to best educate his students. By empowering himself, Bob increases his level of self-efficacy and staying power.

**Professional world.** Research indicates that salaries may be a determining factor in a teacher’s decision to pursue employment in another school district (Imazeki, 2005). Bob views his comparatively high salary as a tangible and personal reward for remaining at Brown Elementary. His salary has become a cost-effective means for him to support his personal obligations, such as provisions for his living expenses and providing financial support to his extended family.

Bob feels at certain times that he has the latitude to present his lessons in a way that would benefit all students. At other times, however, Bob feels that he and his colleagues are trying to fit “a square peg in a circle.” Bob states:

And the mix, the mismatch comes from what we as teachers in the classroom know is going to work for the kids or what they can handle and the pace they can handle it and the level they can handle it. It does not match the district’s plan for what the classroom will look like. So, I feel like in a sense, I feel a bit micromanaged, that decisions that I need to be making I can’t make. They’ve [school district personnel] got all of the theories and all of the structure and all of
the bells and whistles, but they don’t know how to work it. They don’t know what it’s going to look like when you turn it on. And so, that’s where we [teachers] step in and have freedom, because we have to make it real, we have to make it happen. We can’t just say what we wish it looked like.

As a career educator, Bob is willing to make adjustments to assure students receive the quality of education, which Bob believes is appropriate. When attempting to implement district decisions, Bob demonstrates a stronger sense of efficacy. He is persistent and resilient when things do not go smoothly (Protheoe, 2008).

Bob gets his motivation and inspiration for staying at Brown mainly from interacting with his students. He says, “I think the further I get away from that [interacting with students] the more I would maybe become what I don’t like about education. So I think I’ll continue to interact with the kids.” Bob admits that he wants to do well as a teacher and survive the day-to-day life as an educator. Bob goes on to say, “I appreciate the time with the kids. It’s needed. It’s also very engaging. I’m never bored, never bored. So, I mean that in itself is a gift.”

Bob states:

Well, I am the kind of person who does like change. I do like change, and if this place [Brown] didn’t change then I would leave. But I feel like so much change happens here that I am always challenged. I am always developing just staying right here [at Brown]. If it didn't have that [so much change] I would have left, because I don’t want to be stagnant, and I will not be bored.
School facilities have a direct impact on teaching and learning and could impact a teacher’s decision to remain in a particular school (Schneider, 2003). Brown was recently renovated and includes an updated water system. Bob describes Brown’s physical site as a “nice building.” He also believes that Brown Elementary is a very positive place to work. Bob says, “Everybody has stress, but we all enjoy being here. We know where the stress is coming from, so we’re not blaming each other.” He goes on to say:

I think most people are happy here. New people are well received and the people that leave do so after a lot of years or for good reason. Nobody is leaving because they didn’t like the place. They’re leaving because they got married, “I moved”, it’s those kinds of reasons. Nobody is running from the job.

Bob describes a school community that creates an environment where all members of the faculty are welcomed, supported, and are physically safe, which support teacher longevity (National School Climate Standards, 2009). Bob says of Brown Elementary, “I think it’s safe. I think it’s clean. It’s safe, it’s clean, and it’s welcoming.”

**Summary**

To gain insight into Bob’s personal and professional worlds, I briefly highlighted several influential factors contributing to reasons this experienced teacher made the decision to remain in BES for ten years. Positive student interaction, comparatively high salary, and inviting school environment have motivated Bob to stay. He enjoys working in a building he describes as being safe, clean, and welcoming.

**Mary**
Mary has earned undergraduate and graduate degrees in early childhood education. She is one of two interview participants who have earned National Board Certification. Mary has been in education twenty-three years and at Brown Elementary for twelve. She currently teaches fourth graders.

**Personal world.** Mary’s father played a major role in her decision to become an educator. According to Mary, her father was an editor at the local newspaper and he did a lot of editorializing about civil rights and equal rights. Mary remembers that schools in her hometown in Tennessee were segregated until she entered the third grade. Mary shares the story.

I remember especially this one girl that came to my class that year. Three Black girls came and one of them her name was Margaret. This still makes me cry. [Pause] She had a heart condition and her family did not have a lot of means and she was the fastest runner in the class. It really is a story and it really does grip me. But everybody wanted her on their team because she was the fastest runner. And they would make her do the anchorperson, who would catch up the team. If you were behind, you could always count on her. She couldn’t be in our Girl Scout Troop because they didn’t let Black girls in the Girl Scout Troop. And she bought cookies from me. She was never bitter. Then one day, I was sick and my sister came home and told me she [Margaret] had collapsed on the playground because of her heart condition and she had passed away. And that moment has always been in my heart. Just like this [Mary begins to cry]. My dad had written an editorial about her life, you know, when she passed. And it did really I think
influenced people to consider the meaning of their lives and what an impact her life had on the entire community. There were a lot of people against it, against integration. It was just a very human story. I look back and we are still working and it just pulls me in.

Family values, particularly those from her father, have had a profound impact on Mary’s career choice. Mary states that as an editor, her father had to make a choice on whether he would go against the segregation of the day and write the story of her Black classmate’s challenges or remain silent. His decision continues to empower Mary to “get in there” and teach to break down the cultural barriers that exist in the school system. Mary says, “I believe that we are still working on integration [in this country] and in so many ways, my past and my present just pull me in.”

Mary is motivated by the way her students have learned to survive despite their family histories. She thinks that her students’ personal stories “keep her hooked.” Currently, Mary teaches fourth grade and says, “I love children. I feel like I am a pretty creative person so [teaching] is a good use of my talents.”

Mary moved to this area after receiving her Master’s degree. She taught three years at a different elementary school in the Devonshire School District but decided that she wanted to teach in a different school district. She left her teaching job and taught school in another school district for one year. Mary states that the reason she sought employment in another school district was because she felt that it was extremely challenging to work in the Devonshire School District. Mary says:
I was tired and I thought, “Well, I bet the grass is greener over in [another district].” And when I got there, and just, the particular school I was in, I was just like, “This is not nearly as diverse. It’s not as vibrant.” And at the time, that was just my feeling about it and I thought, “You know, [Devonshire School District] was the place for me.”

Mary left teaching for approximately three years to become a “stay at home” mom. After deciding to return to teaching, Mary was able to secure a special education teaching position at Conway Middle and remained in that school for eight years before transferring to Brown Elementary. Mary states that she enjoys being able to help interpret the outside world for her students and give them different perspectives to enhance their worldview. A snapshot into Mary’s life story reinforces the work of Nieto (2003) who concludes that personal history is often at the root of experienced teacher longevity.

**Professional world.** Fostering collegial relationships with members of the professional community encourages teachers to remain in schools for extended periods (Macdonald, 1999). Mary states that the friendships she has maintained with colleagues over the years at the elementary school are very rewarding. Mary indicated that she has “genuine” relationships and has three very good friends that have taught along side of her. Mary has served as a mentor and states that she definitely enjoys assisting her colleagues. Mentoring programs encourage teachers to remain in their work sites by recognizing the value of their experiences (Jorissen, 2002) as demonstrated by Mary’s ability in aiding fellow colleagues. Other teachers at BES are also willing to assist their co-workers as twenty-six or 43% of the faculty participated in the teacher mentoring
program at some point during their teaching career. Mary says, “I think everyone shares
the mission of educating the kids fully. I think that there is a passion here [at BES] for
that.”

Mary states that she works in a new wing of the building and that her room is very
nice. She comments: “We have a lot of sunlight. We’ve got a nice courtyard with the
little pond. And it’s very nice when you’re walking through the building to walk by the
pond and just look at the bubbling brook.” Mary goes on to say, “It’s rigged [the bubbling
brook]. I know that, but still it’s just nice to see that water flowing.” The physical
environment of the school can influence teachers’ abilities to instruct the students and
affect a teacher’s desire to remain in a given school (Laine, 2011).

Mary has not thought about leaving BES and she foresees herself staying at her
school until she retires. She comments:

I live here, my kids are in school here, it’s a vibrant area, and this school has been
great. I’m very invested in this system and I feel like I will be rewarded at the end
and in more ways than one. The financial reward, the financial security [her
salary] at this point is definitely important.

**Summary.** To gain insight into Mary’s personal and professional worlds, I briefly
highlighted several influential factors contributing to reasons this experienced teacher
made the decision to remain in BES for twelve years. Family values, relationships with
colleagues, salary, and inviting school environment have motivated Mary to stay in her
building. Mary’s future plans include teaching at BES until she reaches retirement.
Conway Middle School Profile

Conway Middle School, built in 1956 and situated in the west end area of the city, has housed a variety of grade levels throughout the years. From 1956 through 1971, Conway housed high school students (grades 9-12) and was considered one of the finest schools in the state. From 1971 through 1979, Conway housed grades 9-10. In the fall of 1979, Conway became a junior high (grades 7-9) and in the fall of 1992, it was reorganized into a middle school consisting of grades 7 and 8. The latest evolution for Conway was its restructuring in the fall of 2009 as a middle school campus (grades 6-8). Conway 1, 2, and 3, as it is presently known, identifies itself as a middle school with an emphasis on the International Baccalaureate program. Along with the rigorous academic curriculum, Conway Middle School has initiated special academic programs in an accelerated math program, an alternative education program, an honors program, and an inclusion program. Before and after school programs include: intramural sports, job club, a power up program, student council, and a comprehensive tutorial program.

Conway Middle School has been a part of the district’s multi-year, multi-million dollar initiative to bring the latest technologies into the classroom. Computers, telephones, multimedia, Internet, and CD-Rom research capabilities exist within the school site. Student technology laboratories are also situated throughout the school building. The student population at Conway is socioeconomically diverse, as indicated in Table 7.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Percent of Total Student Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>571</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander and Indian</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Price Meals</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The faculty at Conway Middle School consists of educators who believe every child can learn. This common belief has been an essential component in enhancing collective efficacy. One experienced teacher comments, “I think there’s a core of teachers [at CMS] who believe that every child can learn and that it is the responsibility of the teacher to find out how to get to that kid.” Faculty members working toward a common belief is critical to developing and enhancing a strong sense of collective efficacy (McArthur 2008), thus laying a foundation for teacher longevity.
Case Analyses

Each of the three teachers at Conway Middle had different reasons for entering the field of education. One teacher was inspired to become an educator as a result of her positive relationship with a high school mentor. The second teacher, a military retiree, decided to go into education following a long-term substitute teaching assignment. The third experienced middle school teacher became an educator as a result of her negative high school experiences. Each experienced teacher welcomed the invitation to participate in this study. These teachers were professional and pleasant during the interviewing process and made certain that they had a clear understanding of each question before giving a response. They bring with them unique backgrounds and experiences, which help establish their reasons for remaining in their schools.

Vera

Vera is a mathematics teacher and has taught at Conway Middle School for twenty years. She holds a Master’s degree and is currently enrolled in a doctoral program. Her experiences as an educator are not limited to this school district, as she has taught in several other states and overseas.

Personal world. Vera’s desire to become an educator began during her early years in high school. She states that it was her high school physical education teacher who inspired her to choose teaching as a profession.

While in high school, I was mentored by my teacher and I always admired her. She talked to me about education a lot and I decided to pursue that field. I also
wanted a profession that would allow me employment opportunities anywhere. Teaching seemed to fit perfectly.

Although Vera is a schoolteacher with over thirty-two years of teaching experience, she has not always served the students in a classroom teacher role. For a brief period of time, Vera worked as a summer school principal and discovered that teaching was her vocation. “I thought at one point that I want to go to the administrative side of teaching and become a principal, but realized that I was better suited for the classroom.”

**Professional world.** One of the key influences of teacher longevity is to provide opportunities for teachers to have a voice in the decision making process in the workplace (O’Brien & Tye, 2002) and Vera’s voice has been a mainstay at the school. Vera serves on several committees where she is able to utilize her voice in an attempt to change the practices and politics of her school. She has served on the calendar committee charged with insuring that the district’s calendar matches the number of school days and hours set by the state. She has also served as chairperson on the school faculty council wherein her duties involved compiling questions and concerns by the faculty and presenting them to the administrative staff. Vera states that she continues to be a member of the School Education Plan. Having a voice in the school’s decision-making process increases Vera’s level of self-efficacy and sense of loyalty, thus providing opportunities for her to renew her commitment to the school community. (Smith & Rowley, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Vera loves teaching. She enjoys seeing the “light bulb” turned on and the “aha” moments of her students when they struggle to understand. She says, “I just enjoy it so much when my students are able to accomplish something that they had not been
able to accomplish before.” She believes deeply that all students can learn and their successes have resulted in her increased levels of self-efficacy and staying power (Ruble, Usher, & McGrew, 2011). Vera insists that the majority of the faculty at her school hold the belief that “it is all about the kids.” Vera comments:

We believe that everything that we do is for our students. It doesn’t matter if we are uncomfortable. What matters is meeting the needs of the students. When you walk into a classroom in my school, you will know that it is about the students. We are all here for them.

Vera reflects on the length of time she has remaining in education and says:

As I get towards the end of my career, it is nice to have a place that I have been at for a very long while. I have a lot of people and colleagues coming to me asking for my opinions and my guidance and that makes me feel good.

Vera, as a positive support person to others, demonstrates how she is able to remain invested and enthusiastic about her work. Her collegial and collaborative nature of interacting with colleagues contributes to job satisfaction and teacher longevity (Cockburn & Haydn, 2004).

From a different lens, Vera feels she is not important to the Devonshire School District and does not feel the school district is supportive of its employees. Vera says:

Personally, I feel like I am not important to the school district and I don’t know if that’s true or not. And I guess that says a lot about the school district. You don’t feel it’s personalized. You don’t feel like that if you’re doing an exceptionally good job that somebody will come by and say hey I like the way you’re doing
that. Or if you’re doing a terrible job somebody’s coming back and saying hey you know this might be a better way of doing it or something like that. So I don’t really feel there’s any type of personal connection between the classroom teacher and district office.

**Summary.** To gain insight into Vera’s personal and professional worlds, I briefly highlighted several influential factors contributing to reasons this experienced teacher made the decision to remain in CMS for twenty years. Having a voice in the decision making process, love of teaching, and relationships with colleagues have motivated Vera to stay in a building she describes as a place where when you walk into each classroom you know it’s all about the students.

**Michael**

Michael began his teaching career at Conway Middle School twelve years ago. Michael was born and raised in a rural area and graduated from a prestigious university where he majored in political science and minored in economics. He then received a Master’s degree in military education and furthered pursued a second Master’s in education.

**Personal world.** After retiring from the military, Michael became a career switcher and began substituting in the Devonshire School District. He currently teaches eighth grade civics at Conway. One of the reasons he decided to pursue teaching as a second career was due to his discovering the lack of Black males in the field of education. Michael states that what really convinced him to go into and stay in education was not only the lack of black male educators, but also the issues surrounding the
academic gap between Black, Latino, and White students. Michael says, “It was a problem and I wanted to be part of the solution.” Michael states that his personal goal for entering the field of education has not been realized because “the gap is not yet closed.”

Professional world. Despite the academic gap that exists in his school, Michael is very proud of all of his students. He reflects and says, “I get in trouble a lot [with the principal] because I tend to think that each and everyone of my students can make the best on every test that they take.” Michael provides opportunities for his students to do well, which increases their level of efficacy. For example, Michael allows each of his classes to set long and short range goals and requires that the entire class applaud each time a student is successful “especially if someone is struggling grade wise and then all of a sudden they pick up and they are getting it.” At the end of each grading session, Michael recognizes the top person in the class and he also acknowledges the person with the most academic growth. Michael says, “I try to motivate my students to be on top of their game. I want them to be competitive in life.”

The high expectations that Michael has for all of his students and the academic successes of his students helps to increase Michael’s sense of efficacy. Teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy are also more likely to approach the task of assisting struggling students as a challenge to be mastered rather than a threat to be avoided (Van Soest & Garcia, 2003). With this sense of efficacy, a person has the staying power to endure the obstacles and hindrances that represent challenging situations (Bandura, 1994). Thus, a teacher with a strong sense of self-efficacy is more likely to remain at a school for an extended period.
Having a strong sense of self-efficacy provides opportunities for Michael to be persistent and resilient (Protheroe, 2008) and also allows him to maintain a level of autonomy in the classroom. Michael admits, however, teaching has its challenges. He states:

It’s much more difficult than being in the military. I would advise seniors in college not to go into the teaching profession unless they are really going to be dedicated to the art because you are not going to like it if you’re not willing to dedicate yourself to something that’s going to require long hours and very low pay.

Michael lives in the community where he teaches and has come to know many of the parents of his current and former students. He states that parents of former students solicit his advice and help and that he has served as a mentor and friend to many of them. The positive relationship Michael has formed with his students also go beyond the classroom setting. He says:

I try to go to most of their football games. If they [his students] are on cheerleading squad, I am taking pictures. I am also taking photos at the track meets, the basketball games, at crew, baseball or lacrosse games. If we ask the kids to participate in these types of things, we at least need to attend the games.

Michael believes that “every child can learn” and that “all students can achieve.” Michael continually motivates his students and states that he “wants them to be on the top of their game.” He is proud of all of his students and their accomplishments and he ties in academic rewards throughout his curriculum.
Michael describes the school atmosphere as a “fun environment to work in” and loves discovering what he and his colleagues share in common outside of the school. He comments, “I think the school climate is better than it has been for a while. I think that it is pretty good. I think that most teachers feel like there is a lot of freedom here.” They [his colleagues] feel like no one is watching them every second to criticize them or their work. The school’s atmosphere is fair. Michael believes that the administrators at Conway are satisfied and “enthusiastic” with the current staff. With Michael’s belief relating to his current administration, his remaining at CMS could depend on his administrators providing an environment that is supportive of Michael’s work and where he is allowed the opportunity to flourish and grow.

Michael has mentored teachers at Conway for seven years and has always assisted his colleagues when they have sought his help. Mentoring casts experienced teachers in new roles, such as school-based teacher educators (Feiman-Nemser, 2003) and could encourage Michael to remain at his workplace by recognizing the value of his expertise. Michael appreciates the freedom that he believes he has earned and adjusts his curriculum as needed.

Michael finds that overall Conway is a pleasant place to work. He likes the physical layout. The building is easy to navigate and all of the resources are in close proximity to each other. The building has a new and an old wing and Michael’s classroom is located in the older section. The only drawback, according to Michael, is that his lunchtime is brief and there are restrictions on bringing in personal small
appliances. Michael insists that these small inconveniences are overshadowed by his love for his students and their families.

**Summary.** To gain insight into Michael’s personal and professional worlds, I briefly highlighted several influential factors contributing to reasons this experienced teacher made the decision to remain in CMS for twelve years. Having high expectations for all students, believing that all students can learn, serving as a mentor to colleagues, and living in the community where he teaches have motivated Michael to stay. Michael describes CMS as “a fun environment to work in.”

**Shirley**

Shirley is a twenty-five year middle school special education teacher. She is Nationally Board Certified and holds a Master’s degree in education. Her undergraduate degree is in psychology. Once in graduate school, Shirley realized that the courses in child psychology, which was her major, were closely connected to education. She began to include educational courses in her program of study and later earned a Master’s in education. “I have always worked with children, coming up, in day care centers and I have always had that foundation of working with children.” Shirley is very passionate about teaching. So much so, she made the decision to return to her community, where she was born, raised, and received her education from kindergarten through high school.

**Personal world.** Shirley actually attended Conway Middle School where she currently works and knows its history well. Shirley shares her story:

Actually, a lot of people don’t know this, because I don’t talk about it a lot. I attended K through 12 in Devonshire School District. I left to go to college, came
back to my area and pursued my Master’s degree. I then actually got a job in this school district because I wanted to kind of give back to the community. You see, a lot of things happened to me when I was in school and I wanted to make sure that those kinds of things didn’t ever happen again to children, never again, ever in life. I decided that if I could do anything to prevent such things from happening to another child I would.

Shirley recollects that when she was in the ninth grade, her guidance counselor said to her, “You’re not college material.” Shirley remembers the effect this statement had upon her. She says, “I just was really upset that this lady would take one look at me and make the assumption that I would just really literally amount to nothing.” As a special education teacher, Shirley has empathy for students, especially students who may not be accepted by their peers or may have a different way of learning and expressing themselves. Shirley goes on to say:

So I think I stayed [in teaching] because working in schools and dealing with different teachers I hear those kind of comments all of the time. They may not always be directed towards the student, but as teachers talk about students they make comments, like, “This kid is a loser” or “This kid will never make it.” I have made it my personal goal to make sure that all kids know that, if I can’t help them, I will find someone who can. So, if I cannot support the community in which I was raised, and right the wrongs done to me, then I am just “worthless.”

Experienced teachers who demonstrate staying power, “refuse to give in to the negative expectations that others may have of urban schools or the children who study
there” (Nieto, p.52). When Shirley attended school in the Devonshire School District, Conway Middle was a 9th and 10th grade center and Abbey High was an 11th and 12th grade campus. Shirley reflects: “So, I’ve been through the transformation of Devonshire School District as a student, as a teacher, and now I’m still teaching and I’m still seeing changes.” Shirley goes on to say, “And, unfortunately, I don’t know if you’re going to ask me this later, I don’t see it changing for the better. So, there you have it.”

**Professional world.** Since teaching at Conway Middle, Shirley has witnessed a high turnover rate of administrators and teachers, revisions to the curriculum, changes to school policies and a massive reconstruction of the physical building. Shirley admits that the main reason she has remained at CMS throughout her teaching career is because of the strong attachment and commitment she has towards her students. She says, “I am all about the students. I really know that I’m here to serve my students. I am here to make sure it is about them.” Shirley is determined to stay focused on her students and their learning and she is guided by her own set of personal values about education, which originated while she was in high school. Shirley’s personal values help her to maintain a sense of resiliency (Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2004), which contributes to career longevity. Sometimes her opinions regarding teaching has been a challenge for her as she feels that her colleagues may not always agree with her point of view. Shirley comments:

In many instances my colleagues are egocentric, and I just don’t have time for that because I’m here for the kids, and I have to often remind them [her colleagues], “It’s not about you. It’s about these students. It’s about these children,” because adults are so set in their ways and so inflexible in many cases.
Shirley struggles when describing some of her colleagues, but she says, “I often feel that some of them feel like they’re on a cruise ship. They’re not down in the dinghies or in the boats really doing the work.” Being able to persevere when situations at the work place are challenging for her provides opportunities for Shirley to increase her sense of self-efficacy (Hoy & McCarthy, 1994). Despite the comments regarding some of her colleagues, Shirley has served as a teacher mentor.

Since Shirley is the only faculty member in this study who was born, raised, and educated in the community where she teaches. The perception she has for the faculty members at CMS is somewhat different from the other participants in this study. Shirley, however, is passionate about teaching and she is profoundly dedicated with assisting her students in reaching their academic and personal goals. Irizarry (2007) suggests, “[T]eachers from the [local] community might be able to better relate to the students and, thus, promote academic achievement in ways that perhaps other teachers could not” (p. 91). He further notes that cultivating teachers from the local community could encourage them to remain in the district for the duration of their teaching career.

**Summary.** To gain insight into Shirley’s personal and professional worlds, I briefly highlighted several influential factors contributing to reasons this experienced teacher made the decision to remain in CMS for twenty-five years. Shirley has a sense of loyalty to her students and loyalty to the community, in which she was born and raised. Additionally, her personal values regarding self-worth have motivated Shirley to remain in her building until retirement.
Abbey High School Profile

Abbey High School is located near the geographic center of the city and approximately 2200 students are enrolled in the school. Abbey High opened the doors of its original building in 1965 and in 1971 it became the city’s only public high school serving 11th and 12th graders. Currently, Abbey High serves 10th through 12th grades and increasing enrollment prompted the school board to approve a plan to build an entirely new school building at the existing location. This new building opened its doors in September 2008 and the U.S. Green Building Council proclaimed it a certified Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold facility in 2009. With its 461,000 square feet of green space, media center, fiber optic network, automated library, and connections to the Internet, Abbey High is “taking its place as one of the best technologically equipped schools in the country” (Devonshire School District, 2012).

One of the primary goals of the facility’s design was the reduction of water use in a building that would ordinarily require a great deal of water to operate. The centrally located roof garden, providing aesthetic appeal and serving as an outdoor laboratory, both cleanses and reduces the amount of runoff from the building’s roof. Abbey High is also considered innovative in its role as a living educational tool. Presently, many of the strategies selected as part of the LEED process are being integrated into the school’s curriculum, which allow the high performance design elements of the building to be used as a teaching tool in a cross-curriculum manner.

The school is organized into academic houses, each with its own administration. Therefore, students have access to any assistance they may require. To accommodate the
student population as they build their careers early on, the new school features spaces
specially equipped for cosmetology, the culinary arts, auto and construction technology,
and health and medical sciences.

Abbey High School offers 188 courses and five years of French, German, Latin,
Spanish and Chinese. The school offers numerous Advanced Placement courses for its
students, and many faculty members serve as readers and consultants for the national
Advanced Placement program. The school has an Army Junior ROTC program, which
competes and has been recognized nationwide; it participated in the 2008 Presidential
Inaugural Parade. Abbey High School offers laptops to all of its students and provides
every student with their own personal computer as well as campus-wide wireless Internet
access. The student population at Abbey High School is socioeconomically diverse, as
indicated in Table 8.
Table 8  
*Abbey High School Student Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Percent of Total Student Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>876</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander and Indian</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Price Meals</td>
<td>1146</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The faculty at Abbey High consists of educators who reported that they believe teachers are committed to teaching students. This belief has been an essential component in enhancing collective efficacy. One experienced teacher comments, “I think there is a real commitment to the students and the school by almost all of the faculty here [at AHS].”

**Case Analyses**

One participant of Abbey High School made the decision to become an educator based upon family support and her love for sports. Two of the other participants were
career switchers. Both of these experienced teachers entered the field of education because they felt that they could make a positive contribution in the lives of students. These teachers bring with them unique backgrounds and experiences, which help establish their reasons for remaining in their schools.

**Edith**

Edith is currently teaching physical education and driver’s education at Abbey High School. She began her career in education thirty-five years ago and for the past eighteen years she has worked at Abbey High. In addition to teaching courses at the high school, Edith coaches volleyball and basketball.

**Personal world.** Edith was inspired to become an educator based on the values and support she received from her family as she pursued her interest in sports. Edith says, “I played a lot of sports, so I was geared towards physical education as a child.” She played on both her high school and college basketball teams. Before entering the field of education, Edith states, “I saw that there was a need for teachers to shape and help students. So, I went into physical education.” Edith recalls her educational goals, which she had set for herself while in college. “My goals were to graduate [from college] at age twenty-one, have a Master’s degree at age twenty-three and have a doctorate degree at age twenty-five. First two came true. I don’t know what happened to the last one.” She smiles at this point and then continues, “So, I just chalked it up and just went on and decided that a Master’s degree was the last one I am going to have.”

Prior to teaching on the high school level, Edith taught physical education at several historically Black universities. While working at these universities, Edith served
as head volleyball and basketball coaches. Her knowledge and skills about physical
education placed her in a position to become a basketball rated official and she served in
that position four years. She used her knowledge of the physical education world to serve
as “senior women administrator” and chief administrator of the National Youth Sports
Program. Edith applies her teaching skills outside of the classroom setting. Edith reflects,
“I actually teach as an aerobics volunteer, teach aerobic sessions to my sorority group, to
senior citizens and to different organizations. Those things that I’ve learned and I teach in
the classroom, I also apply it there.” Edith’s personal accomplishments have provided
opportunities for her to develop strong efficacy beliefs through her repeated successes
(Bandura, 1977) in teaching thus contributing to her remaining at AHS.

**Professional world.** Researchers suggest a person must learn how to become
resilient, and without it teachers are more likely not to remain at the worksite
(Bernshausen & Cunningham, 2001). Being competent in one’s subject level is a quality
that Bobek (2002) suggests helps in developing teacher resiliency. Edith’s previous
experiences as head basketball coach at different universities allow her to demonstrate to
her students that she loves teaching and that she is competent in her subject area.

When they [the males in her classes] see that you can play, because I played four
years in high school and four years in college, and so when they see that you can
play it’s like, “Look at this old person out here on the floor trying to play.” When
they see that you play, they try to match up or they try to duplicate, or they know
that there is something that I can teach them, even though they play on a team or
even though they’ve been playing basketball all their lives. They see that I can still teach them something that they did not know at this level, so that’s great.

At AHS, there are over 100 different languages spoken and as a physical education educator, Edith teaches a diverse group of students. She says:

    We have an ELL (English language learners) program and if you don’t have somebody in your class that can help translate then we have a problem. We can send someone down to a place where we can let somebody know that we need help with translation and they send someone down that can help us translate.

According to Bandura (1994), “people with a high sense of efficacy have the staying power to endure the obstacles and setbacks that may characterize difficult undertakings (p. 77). Edith admits that there are students who can make her school day rather challenging, but she says, “I just chalk that up to [their] upbringing.” Despite the sometimes minor distractions from a few of her students, Edith states that she feels good about the accomplishments of her students as she says that the students work well in her classes. She reflects, “A lot of them [her students] go off to play college ball after perfecting and gaining more skills within your class.” Edith goes on to say, “It’s very rewarding when you see that you’ve taught somebody and they’re using it and carrying through what you actually taught them. It’s great.” When a teacher is successful working with diverse students, the higher the confidence level of the teacher the higher the self-efficacy of the student (Yost, 2006).

    Over the last few years, AHS has implemented new policies, including extending the regular school day by an extra thirty minutes and requiring the faculty to attend
professional development workshops during the school day. Edith expresses her feelings regarding the additional workload. She comments:

I think we’re [teachers] a little overworked. I think all the teachers just felt a little overwhelmed last year. This year so far, it looks like it’s a little bit better and we’re not having as many meetings and we’re not pulled and tugged every which way and that we actually have a planning period. A planning period actually now is used as a planning period, whereas the years past we had this meeting to go to, that meeting to go to, had this to do, that to do and planning was nil to none.

School facilities have a direct impact on teaching and learning and the condition of the school could be a determining factor as to whether or not teachers remain in the teaching profession (Schneider, 2003). Edith states that she works in a beautiful edifice, but she says, “I guess the only problem is sometimes we may not have all the teaching stations that we want.”

**Summary.** To gain insight into Edith’s personal and professional worlds, I briefly highlighted several influential factors contributing to reasons this experienced teacher made the decision to remain in AHS for eighteen years. She enjoys interacting with her students. Her previous accomplishments, her love of teaching and her physical working environment have motivated Edith to remain in her building for over ten years.

**Kate**

Kate is a reading teacher at Abbey High and this is her fifteenth year at the school. She is a career switcher and came into the school after practicing law and working with juvenile offenders in an urban setting. Kate has a Juris Doctor; she is
credentialed to teach English, history, social studies; and she is licensed to teach intellectually disabled students. She is currently pursuing a Master’s degree in reading.

**Personal world.** Kate always wanted to become a high school teacher, but as a teen was persuaded to take another more lucrative route. Kate’s love for teaching, however, never left her and she taught several paralegal courses throughout her law career and mentored juveniles on life choices while serving as their public defender. As a practicing lawyer, Kate worked with youth who were making poor choices, which caused them to enter the juvenile facility or adult jail. Kate states, “What became increasingly apparent was not so much their educational deficits as their lack of perspective on what options were realistic for them and the consequences of the choices they were making.”

One youth, when informed of his possible prison sentencing, said to Kate, “Don’t worry about it. My dad’s down there [federal prison], my cousins are down there, my uncles are down there. They will all take care of me.” The youth also stated, “everybody goes to prison sometime.” These kinds of responses from young people made Kate consider entering the teaching profession so that she could work with at-risk students and give them alternative options.

Kate eventually left her field of law and became a substitute teacher in the Devonshire School District. She made this decision to change her career in order to teach and reach students before meeting them in a courtroom. Kate also shared that she has two sons of her own, who have become successful and would like to assist other males to realize their dreams.
**Professional world.** Kate has used her voice in several leadership roles at Abbey High and is an active member of the committee charged with implementing change in her school. Additionally, she has served as the chair of an “in house” committee that addresses staff morale issues. She recently joined the school’s transformation committee whose intent is to review and affect instructional management issues. Kate loves using her voice in contributing to the decision making process and has become a well respected member of the faculty. Kate insists that one major reason that she has remained at Abbey is because of the “bond” that she has developed with so many of the people at her worksite. She comments:

I’ve got some really good relationships at Abbey High, although my friends and I continually joke that there are fewer and fewer of us that have been here for any length of time. I think that relationships are important and that sense of trust that gets established, that sense of having someone you can go to when things get really frustrating.

To develop teacher resiliency, Bobek (2002) suggests the importance of building collegial relationships, which contributes to teacher longevity. Kate also enjoys her relationships with her students and feels that such relationships are underrated. She believes that a teacher can greatly impact a student’s desire for learning by just maintaining and fostering a positive attitude with them (Ruble, Usher, & McGrew, 2010). Self-efficacy beliefs increase when teachers interpret their efforts in assisting students as being successful. Kate reports that when she sees her students demonstrate routine
successes, such as good grades, she is very proud of them and pleased to think that she had any part in raising their skill or personal development.

Kate acknowledges that the state of her physical school site is an added plus to why she has stayed in her building for years. She remembers the old building, where ceiling tiles were missing and “projectors did not work.” She reports that the current building has reliable technology and is clean, safe, and dry. She says:

I love my room. My room is beautiful. I have been in some crappy little rooms in my day. There have been a lot of things built into this facility that maybe young teachers, who are just starting out, would not realize are so exceptional. Modern technology is still nonexistent at some schools within the state, and there is nothing, or very little that I can complain about.

Kate expresses her opinion concerning salary by stating that “the money cannot be denied.” She insists that Devonshire School District compensates all teachers very well in comparison to other local jurisdictions. While Kate enjoys her salary, she indicates that the real reason she would not leave Abbey High is the fear of “having to start all over again.” Her other fear involves leaving her colleagues and all of the good relationships that she has formed.

Summary. To gain insight into Kate’s personal and professional world, I briefly highlighted several influential factors contributing to reasons this experienced teacher made the decision to remain in Abbey High for fifteen years. Kate’s relationships with both her colleagues and her students, her ability and freedom to use her voice and the
beautiful new building in which she works give her no choice but to stay. Kate’s lucrative salary gives her an additional reason to remain at Abbey High.

**George**

George has been at Abbey High School for twelve years, which is the length of time he has been in education. He teaches mathematics, Algebra II, and Algebra II with Trigonometry. Holding several Bachelor’s degrees and Master’s degrees, George states that he is no longer interested in obtaining additional degrees.

**Personal world.** George is retired military and worked as an engineer with the Army Corps of Engineers. Deciding to switch careers and become a public school teacher after thirty years, George says, “I have always been deeply interested in education with the soldiers who work for me. I have always encouraged them to continue their education. And I thought I could do two things, continue to support my community, contribute to my community and to further my interest in education.”

George feels that his past experiences as an engineer have enabled him to motivate students through his knowledge and expertise of the subject. He chose Abbey High because he thought the demographics of the school were exactly the type of school where he wanted to make worthwhile contributions. The school has a very high ethnic and racial diversity. George says, “[Abbey High has] the same sorts of diversities I had when I was an officer in the army and I thought that I did have something to bring to the table.” George interprets his past professional experiences as successful as he applies his knowledge and skills from his former occupation to his present teaching position.

Mastery experience, which is how individuals interpret past experiences, is the most
influential source of self-efficacy (Ruble, Usher, & McGrew, 2011). Self-efficacy beliefs increase when teachers interpret efforts in assisting students as being successful. Self-efficacy is not only related to task choices, but affects teacher longevity (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002).

George lives in the community and he is fewer than 2 miles from work. He enjoys the short commute from home to his place of employment. His wife works in the community as well and logistically, “We are in a very good place.”

**Professional world.** George states that he feels an attachment to a large number of his colleagues at Abbey. George has established lasting relationships with a number of his peers. He has a great deal of respect for them and he is willing to extend a ‘helping hand’ to make his peers’ experiences at AHS more fulfilling. George says about his co-workers, “I couldn’t ask for better, I think, interactions. I have respect both ways with my colleagues.” He also has respect for the administrative team even though George says, “I disagree with some of the policies.” A few of the relationships George has established at AHS have developed into lasting friendships. George comments about his colleagues when he says, “There is a number, I’d say maybe almost a dozen that I feel very close to have become true friends that we, my wife and I see their families socially, and that has been very rewarding.”

Having leadership roles in the Army, one of which was Battalion Commander, provided opportunities for George to mentor numerous military personnel. Seeing officers excel under his leadership and guidance have been rewarding experiences for him. George’s personal accomplishments as a former mentor have led him to serve as a
mentor to new teachers at AHS. George says, “I’ve always taken an interest in new people and helping them develop, helping them further their careers.”

Abbey High is a newly built school and George states that he is grateful to work in such a state-of-the art building. He says, “It’s great. I mean we’re in a 100 million dollar school and you can’t beat it. Most people would give their eye teeth to teach in a place like this.”

**Summary.** To gain insight into George’s personal and professional worlds, I briefly highlighted several influential factors contributing to reasons this experienced teacher made the decision to remain in AHS for twelve years. Establishing positive relationships with colleagues, living in the community, mentoring new teachers have motivated George to stay in his school. The state-of-the art building where he works is an added benefit to George’s career decision.

**Cross-Case Findings**

This section details the cross-case analysis from the in-depth interview data of the nine experienced teachers in this study. I discuss my findings through the lens of my research questions. Also I discuss specific influences that encouraged teachers to stay. These common themes, which emerged across the nine cases, include: love of teaching, all students can learn, personal rewards, salary, collegial relationships, family values, ad school climate.
Personal Beliefs

To fully answer research sub-question one, “What are the specific beliefs of teachers who remain in the same school for ten or more years?” it is important to examine the cross-case themes that emerged from personal beliefs experienced teachers in this study have about their teaching profession. It is equally important to examine the cross-case themes that emerge from their lives in and outside of the classroom setting. The first working hypothesis of my study states that over time experienced teachers rely on their personal beliefs to sustain them as they remain at their schools (Leitch, 2010). In this study, personal beliefs of the experienced teachers are important qualities that have motivated them to remain in one school for an extended period of time.

Love of Teaching

One of the personal beliefs that allowed Mary, Edith, Betty, and Vera to remain at the same school is their love of teaching. These experienced teachers have varying reasons why they have such a passion for teaching. Mary, who teaches at CMS, expresses her personal belief about teaching when she says, “I love it. It was a calling to me. It suits my personality. I’m pretty resilient.” Edith shares Mary’s same sentiment for teaching. As a high school physical education teacher, Edith says, “I love teaching. I love teaching physical education. I love it, always have.” Edith also loves where she works. “I love Abbey High School. I feel this school has helped me to grow.”

Betty, who teaches at BES, comes from a family of educators and she always wanted to become a teacher. As evidence of her love of teaching, Betty says,
I love the challenge of teaching, especially the students that think they don’t know anything, the low self-esteem. I like to bring up their self-esteem and let them know that they can do things that they really put their minds to. I really like that challenge.

Substantial positive impact upon a student’s educational development can occur when an individual teacher believes that providing positive interactions with the student with low self-esteem will make a difference (Van Soest & Garcia, 2003). Students with low self-esteem may feel that the course curriculum is too rigorous and challenging. Experienced teachers with high efficacy beliefs may view this situation as a means to liberate the students because these teachers place their attention and effort to the demands of the situation. Teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to approach the task of assisting students with low self-esteem as a challenge to be mastered rather than a threat to be avoided. Vera’s love of teaching is:

...the joy of seeing the “light bulb” turn on or seeing that ‘aha’ moment where the students who were struggling and they finally began to see how math works. I just enjoy when students are able to accomplish something they hadn’t been able to accomplish before.

**All Students Can Learn**

An educational belief that the experienced teachers have is the belief that all students can learn. Michael, who teaches at CMS, has this belief and prefers spending time with his colleagues who share his same values. Michael says:
I think there’s a core of teachers that believe that every child can learn. And that is the responsibility of the teacher to find out how to get to that kid. Now I can’t say that that’s the total of all my colleagues, but the colleagues that I am with day-to-day, pretty much feel that way. So I tend to surround myself with people that think like I think.

Betty voices the same belief about students and learning. “I think we all believe that everybody can learn and everybody should be treated fairly and equally, and nobody should be saying, “Oh that person can’t learn” because of some reason. So, I can’t think of anybody in this school that doesn’t believe in every student in the classroom, and they don’t judge.” Betty goes on to say:

I really have a soft spot for all the students in my classroom. I mean I really want them to do well, and I think they can sense that I’m here for them. I’m not just their teacher, but I am not their friend either, but more of a guidance person for them to make sure that they are making the correct choices, and just doing the right thing to be a good citizen.

George believes that the commitment to teach all students is prevalent at Abbey High School. “There is a belief that the students here can learn.” George believes that there are members of the faculty where he works who are willing to make adjustments in the way they deliver their lessons so that all students will be able to grasp the concepts being taught.

I think there is a belief amongst most of the faculty that they are not beyond innovating and changing techniques and trying new things. Probably when I
compare this to my first career, much more flexible here than it would have been working in the Defense establishment.

**Personal Rewards**

The experienced teachers have expressed salary, relationships with colleagues, compliments from parents, or the personal satisfaction they receive from interacting with students as personal rewards for remaining in their schools for an extended period of time. Reporting salary as a personal reward were teachers from the elementary school and one teacher from the high school. In this study, the middle school teachers expressed intrinsic values for remaining as being more gratifying than teacher salary.

**Salary.** Salary is a tangible reward for Bob, Betty, Mary, and Kate. These teachers consider their comparatively high teachers’ salaries personal rewards, and they also have realistic views regarding salary as important for each of them remaining at their schools. Bob says, “They pay well. Well, I mean there is that real life side too. The pay is important. It is important that they pay well for me to be able to stay, so that is a factor.” Bob reveals another reason he considers his salary to be important to him. “The fact that I can’t sell my house right now because it’s an upside-down mortgage is a factor of staying, to be real.” From a very realistic viewpoint, Betty discusses her monetary decision to remain at Brown Elementary. “It would be very weird for me to leave after such a long time. Also, if I went to [another school district] they would probably only take 15 of my years, so that is another reason why I’m staying here, because I wouldn’t get the total pay that I would deserve. Kate expresses her opinion concerning salary. She says, “The money can’t be denied, because Devonshire School District compensates
teachers pretty well compared to a lot of jurisdictions. About her salary as a personal reward, Mary says, “I’m vested in this system, and I feel like I will be rewarded at the end and in more ways than one. And that financial reward, the financial security at this point is definitely important.”

**Colleague relationships.** Relationships that Mary, George, and Kate have established with their peers have been rewarding for each of them. Mary states that the friendships she has maintained with colleagues over the years at the elementary school are very rewarding. Mary says, “[I]t’s genuine, genuine relationships. I would say I’ve had two or three very, very good friends, people I consider my best friends that have taught here.” George has developed lasting friendships with colleagues at the high school, with whom he socializes outside of the working environment. “A pretty large number of my colleagues I do feel an attachment to. There is a number, I’d say maybe almost a dozen that I feel very close to that have become true friends that we, my wife and I see their families socially, and that has been very rewarding.”

One reason Kate says she is still at Abbey High is because of the bond she has developed with people at her worksite. Kate comments:

I’ve got some really good relationships [at Abbey High], although my friends and I are joking that there are fewer and fewer of us that have been here for any length of time. We were having a conversation the other day about how few of us have been around, even since the old building. But I think relationships are important and that sense of trust, that sense of someone you can go to when things get really frustrating.
**Students.** One of Bob’s personal rewards is when he receives compliments from the parents of his students. The positive comments he receives from the parents are most gratifying to Bob, as he has no children of his own. Mary thinks that the kids’ personal stories are very touching and “sort of keeps me hooked.” A personal reward for Edith is being able to teach a subject that she loves, driver’s education. She says:

It’s great to see the kids go out and get their learner’s permit and be able to drive, even though we just teach the classroom work and they have to go off to get behind the wheel training. But it started with us. And I just love physical education. I love teaching it, always have. I even taught it on the college level for 15 years.

Experienced teachers from each of the three schools express their personal gratification from seeing their students achieve. On various occasions, former students return to school to let their teachers know the positive impact that these experienced teachers had upon their students’ lives.

As a second grade elementary teacher, Betty is in a position to track her students’ progress from formative years through college. Betty comments on one of the personal gratifications she receives while working at her school:

Just seeing the children grow up. I get to see them go to the middle school and then go to the high school, and I have even run into them after they have graduated. I’ve taught so long that they are graduating from high school and going off to college. And it’s just gratifying to see. They come back and they always say
“hello” to me and tell me what they’re doing, and that just makes me really proud to know that I had an effect on that person’s life.

Shirley describes the personal satisfaction she feels when former students return to her classroom. She states:

That’s when I know that I’ve made a difference, because those kids will never forget the time that they spent with me, be it one year, two years, or three years. I try to make a difference, something that they will always remember or can use in life later on, and that’s where I get my biggest satisfaction. Those kids will always come back, because one thing about them they’re true in what they say and in how they act. So that’s where I get my glory, my kids. People ask me all the time. “You’ve been here so long. Why aren’t you a Principal? You’ve been here so long. Why aren’t you this or that?” I’m here with the students, because that’s why I came into education, and I feel that they get the best of me in a classroom. I don’t want to be a person who is a principal just to have a title. That means nothing to me. I don’t know that there is anything I can do different as a principal than I can as an educator, a person who is in here, in the trenches working with kids.

Vera states that since her spouse was in the military, she traveled a great deal and was not stationary long enough to see her students transform into young adults.

Before, I would teach students and then I never got an opportunity for them to come back and say “I’m an adult now. This is what I’ve done” or to come back and say “I now understand what you were saying” because as teachers we do a lot
of life lessons within our subject area. We’ll still talk to our students about surviving in the world and what they need to have in place to be successful.

Now that Vera has been at one school for over twenty years, she is able to experience seeing former students’ successes. ”You feel like you have put a lot into the community and you get to see some of it come back. It’s gratifying to have kids come back and say ‘Oh, I see.’ You get to see the results of your labor.”

George says that he likes to develop good relationships with his students even though it is a brief encounter lasting one school year. He goes on to say:

Although, I get a great deal of satisfaction when kids come back after they’ve been away for college for two years and they make a special effort to come by the classroom and say hello. I guess I like to think I don’t really have an enduring relationship with my students, but when they do come back and they do strike up that conversation, I’ve got to admit it’s a very, very rewarding feeling.

Michael’s personal reward is tied to the academic rewards he provides for his students during the course of a grading period. Michael says:

I try to motivate them [his students] to be on top of their game. I want them to be competitive in life. So, I establish the fact that each quarter I recognize the top person in the class, but I also recognize the person that have had the most growth during that quarter. So I am very proud of my students and what they accomplish, especially when they leave here and they do well at the high school level and they do well at the college level or they’re doing well in their job.
Kate unexpectedly mentored a high school student whom she no longer taught and she felt a personal reward for extending her assistance to this student. Kate says:

It was very gratifying to me, maybe in a selfish way, but it was very gratifying to me that of all the adults in the building that he could have come to get himself on track he came and asked for my help. And I have to assume that means that he trusts me in a way that he doesn’t necessarily trust the other people who are closer to him this year, so that’s kind of nice.

**Family Values**

Betty, Bob, Mary, Shirley, and Edith express the impact their families’ values had on their decisions to enter the educational profession. The values Betty’s family displayed concerning the importance of education and the fact that her family members were examples that Betty could emulate impressed her to become an educator.

My mother and my grandmother were both teachers, educators. Actually my family, my grandfather was a principal and my grandmother was also involved in schools. Both grandparents, actually, grandmothers were in schools. As a little girl, I always knew I wanted to be a teacher.

Bob, however, is hesitant to give specific examples of the family values that encouraged him to become an educator, but Bob does say, “I wouldn’t say that it was school that inspired me as much as just values I grew up with.”

Mary’s father was a newspaper editor and the topics, such as civil rights and equal rights, that he chose to editorialize about had a profound impact on Mary’ career choices. “As I look back I can see how my father influenced me a lot.” After telling the story
about her third grade class mate and how her father made the decision to write an editorial about her class mate’s life’s challenges, Mary says, “So, I’ve always looked back on that, and I think that is something that just says, ‘You know what, you’ve got to go in there [teaching].’ And we’re still working on integration in so many ways still. And it just pulls me in.”

There were ten siblings in Shirley’s family and her parents were not in a position to advocate for Shirley when it pertained to school related issues. When Shirley was confronted by her ninth grade guidance counselor and was told that she was not college material, Shirley reverted to the values that her parents instilled in her. “My parents always taught me that people don’t define who you are as a person; you make your way in life. You decide what it is you want to do. Shirley goes on to say:

So, I just think I stuck around [in teaching] to really try to make a difference, to really try to advocate for the kids who don’t have that voice. Unfortunately, I didn’t have a voice when that guidance counselor told me that [she was not college material]. My parents couldn’t come up to the school to really kind of talk to that guidance counselor about what happened. So, I think I take on the role of a personal advocate for a lot of these kids whose parents may not have the time, may not have the knowhow to just come up and talk and support their kids. So I think that is what I see my role as, just really advocating for all kids.

Edith was inspired by the values and support she received from her family as she pursued her interest in sports. “I played a lot of sports, so I was geared towards physical
education. I saw that there was a need for teachers to shape and help students, and so I went into physical education.”

Choosing to Live in Community Where They Teach

Choosing to live in the community where they teach is a personal reward for Mary, Michael, and George. Each of these experienced teachers have varying reasons for making the decision to live in the Devonshire School District. Mary is committed to her city and says, “I have two children that went through the school system. They actually attended an elementary school and then a middle school and all the way through Abbey High school. And they loved it. So, I feel like I know a lot of people in this school system. And this is my city, I live here, and I really feel attached. I feel like I make a contribution right where I live. Michael reflects on his current students and their siblings along with parents. “I’m teaching brothers and sisters of students that I’ve taught before. Makes it very easy. I know most of the parents. I also live in this community, so I get to see the parents and the kids when they’re not in school environment. So most of the kids that come in new each year have some idea of who I am before they come.”

Retired from his first career, George chooses to live in the community where he teaches. George says:

From the very practical, I still want to work. This is the school closest to my home. I’m only about one-and-a-half miles away. My wife is still working and she works one-and-a-half miles away from our home. So, logistically we’re in a very good place. I did choose Abbey High School because I thought the demographics of the school were exactly the sort of school that I wanted to make
a contribution in, a very, very high racial and ethnic diversity, and the same sorts of diversity that I had when I was an officer in the Army.

George goes on to say: “And I thought that I did have something to bring to the table.”

To answer sub-question two: “What specific behaviors are evident among teachers who remain in the same school for ten or more years?” requires examining the major characteristics of and influences on the experienced teachers’ careers. These influences contribute to why experienced teachers remain at their schools for ten years or more.

**Interactions and Relationships with Students**

Kate feels that relationships are underrated and relationships that a teacher can build with students, especially with the students who teachers see for two or three sequential years are actually very positive. Kate comments on a positive encounter with one of her students:

When I see a kid, like one girl, I obviously won’t name names, but one girl that just graduated last year. I started working with her in 10th grade. And she couldn’t have cared less about school, and last year she really, really pushed hard to fill in the gaps so that she could graduate with a standard diploma. And she [attends community college]. And when she was a 10th grader no one would have ever expected her to do anything more than go work at Papa Johns.

Kate states that when she sees her students demonstrate routine successes such as good grades she is very proud of them and “I’m very pleased to think that I had any part
in raising their skills.” Kate shares an example of a situation where she assists a former student.

I have a student now who is a senior who came back to see me. Now at this point I don’t have any official connection with this kid. I’m not his case manager, I’m not his classroom teacher at all, and he has those in place. But he came to me, because this year for the first time he’s thinking about what he’s going to do to position himself next year to have marketable skills. He wants to be a mechanic. This is the first year I’ve seen anything serious. And he comes to me, literally what is today, Tuesday? It must have been like Friday, I guess, was the first time he came to me. And he said, “I want you to help me, because I want to be able to be a mechanic, but I don’t want to just go get a minimum wage job.” And so I’m helping him get into the career center. I’m helping him to find out about college and the options and all of those things that he never took seriously before. So it’s kind of a, whatever the opposite of a perfect storm would be, because in a perfect storm we think negative. This is like a perfect storm of positive things. He has finally hit that point of maturity combined with two years of working with him and telling him, “You’ve got to get serious. You’ve got to use the things we’re teaching you to do.”

The positive relationships Michael has formed with his students go beyond the classroom setting. He says:

I try to go to most of their football games. If they’re on the cheerleading squad, I’m taking pictures. I’m taking pictures at the track meets, the basketball games,
at crew, the baseball, or lacrosse games. Because if I ask the kids to participate in those things, then you know at least I want to go to one of their games. Because of the relationships he has developed with parents of his former and current students, Michael is asked by parents to help them relate to their child. Michael says:

The other day, a parent called me about a kid that wanted to drop out of school, a previous kid of mine. And they asked me would I talk to him and convince him to go back to college. And I said, well I can’t promise you I will tell him that, but I will talk to him if you and his father will show up in my classroom. I’ll definitely spend the time. So, yes I keep those attachments [with students]. I’m pretty close with my kids. They tend to come to me when they get in trouble elsewhere.

**Mentoring and Motivating Colleagues**

“Mentoring is one important mechanism for advancing the teaching profession, increasing teacher retention, and raising student achievement” (Virginia Department of Education, 2004, p.1). This type of school involvement provides opportunities for the experienced teachers to renew and/or reinforce their commitment to the teaching profession and the school. When asked if they had mentored new teachers in their current schools, Mary, Shirley, Michael, and George responded that they had served as mentors to their colleagues. Mary is the only participant who is currently serving as a mentor and states that she definitely enjoys assisting her colleagues.

Since teaching at Conway Middle, Shirley has mentored five teachers. Other faculty members at CMS are willing to assist their peers as one hundred-three or 92% of
the faculty have participated as teacher mentors at some point during their teaching career. Mary discusses the teachers she mentored:

One teacher that is still in the same school with me, he started here with me. I was his mentor, and he actually stayed here and he’s still here and he’s been here now, I think, 11 years. Another person that I mentored actually stayed here for maybe seven years, and then went to [another school district]. I had two mentees that stayed two years and in their third year got pregnant and didn’t come back. So, I think those are teachers that really would have maybe stayed around, and then I had a couple [of teachers] who just moved out of the area. So I have mentored a lot.

Michael has mentored teachers at the middle school for seven years, but for the previous and current years, Michael has not officially mentor teachers. He would, however, assist teachers who seek out his help. Michael shares a story that occurred the same day of our interview.

[Mentoring] is really good. In fact, a few minutes ago I just got through working with a teacher that I mentored about five years ago. And that teacher’s still here in the building. I usually keep up the communication once that mentoring year’s done just to make sure everything is still going fine. I also pick up other teachers along the way. It’s not a formal mentoring, but it’s a mentoring.

Michael continues and begins to describe an incident that occurred earlier in the week that involved a colleague, who was recently employed to teach an elective class at the middle school where Michael works:
In fact, it was really funny. The other day, my kids from last year’s class were really giving some of the elective teachers a hard time. And especially this new elective teacher, I think he was the chorus director. So, I told him “well maybe you should come and see how I teach” because I had some of the same kids, “how I direct my class and how I use classroom management.” I think he misunderstood me because this year he went to tell his principal that he, because of scheduling conflicts, he doesn’t have any classes every other day, that he was going to spend that time with Mr. [Michael], learning how to have classroom management. And I had to say, “well, I don’t know if I can do all that. I don’t know if that’s possible.” But, I don’t know if I could do it for a whole year. I don’t know if this school is willing to let you do that for a whole year.

George enjoyed being a mentor at the high school as being a mentor was an extension of his experiences in his previous career. George says:

I put a lot of time and effort into it. I think I did it, I’ve done it three times now, and it can be extraordinarily time-consuming, but there is-- It’s what I did in the Army. As an officer, as a Company Commander, my lieutenants, I mentored my lieutenants. As a Battalion Commander I mentored my Company Commanders, my Captains and so on. And so that was just something that I’ve always done. I’ve always taken an interest in new people and helping them develop, helping them further their careers.
Other faculty members at AHS have an interest in helping new teachers further their careers as ninety-one or 51% of the faculty served as mentors at some point during their teaching career.

**Professional Decision-Making**

While teaching at their current schools, Mary, Betty, and George had been actively involved in their school’s decision-making process. Betty says, “I was in charge of the parent tutoring for several years. I helped to make decisions on how parents/volunteers would best be utilized at the school. I was also involved with the principal's leadership group.” Mary states that she has been a member of the superintendent's Dream Fund and says, “We judged teacher's proposals and awarded money for teacher's projects that have a direct impact on student learning.” George states that when he was a member of the Diversity Committee at the high school, policies were developed by the committee to increase the number of minorities in Honors and AP classes. According to George, the district’s school board eventually adopted these policies.

Vera and Kate have participated on various school related committees. They are the only two experienced teachers in this study who are currently active members of committees charged with implementing change in their schools.

Vera states that she served as a member of the Calendar Committee charged with ensuring that the district’s calendar matched the number of school days (hours) set by the state. She also was the chairperson of the school based faculty council, which the committee compiled questions, comments or concerns from the faculty and presented
them to the administrative staff. Vera states, “I was and continue to be a member of the School Improvement Plan now called the SEP, School Education Plan.”

Kate has been involved in several activities that have impacted her school’s practices. She has been a member of SAC (Staff Advisory Council) for several years. Kate describes this committee: “This is an in-house committee that addresses staff morale issues. The effectiveness of this body has varied from year to year, but it has been a good way to resolve minor issues and irritations.” Kate identifies and describes additional committees for which she has served:

I have been on the Professional Learning Council here at Abbey High for 3 years. We have been fairly influential in some of the curriculum and scheduling for professional learning, although much of it was entirely controlled by central office last year. I am on the Instructional Council, which is composed of department chairs, administrators, and some other decision-makers at the high school. We make many decisions about curriculum, school procedures and policies, and staff protocols and standards. For 3 years I have been part of the Reading/Literacy committee working on our School Education Plan. Our work is not so much about decision-making as about devising ways to support, promote, and mobilize action to serve the overarching objectives of the school and district regarding academic improvement and transformation of Abbey High School.

Kate recently joined the school’s new Transformation Committee. She states that the purpose and process of this committee are still developing. The intent is to review and
affect instructional and student/staff management issues that may advance or impede our school’s transformation.

**Individual Professional Decision-Making**

Bogler and Somech (2004) refer to autonomy as “the teachers’ feeling that they have control over various aspects of their working life” (p. 279) and several teachers report that they feel they have the power to personally manage their working space. George, Michael, and Edith reveal that they utilize autonomy regarding the program of study in each of their classes. George reflects on the administrative decisions that teachers are required to implement. George says:

> Regardless of some of the things that come down [administrative decisions] that might be somewhat distasteful to me, I think I have the freedom or at least the flexibility to close my door and try to keep those things that I don’t want to do out of my classroom.

George further states:

> I deliver my lessons the way I want to deliver my lessons. I think I know what to do. I have not only a-- I have the academic background, but I also have the practical experience background. So I do like to combine that. And I think I can do a more than adequate job in explaining concepts and then demonstrating how concepts are applicable in real life.

Michael shares his thoughts on the freedom he has in the classroom when teaching and communicating with his students. Michael says:
I think that freedom has to be earned. I think a trust has to be developed. There are times when my principal comes in [the classroom] and I may not be on the curriculum for that day because maybe that’s not where my students are. Or, maybe my students have something that they need to talk to me about that’s more important than curriculum that day. So, it has happened. I think the superintendent was in my class when I wasn’t where I was supposed to be teaching and they said “that’s okay.” And they are fine with it. But, I think that has to be earned.

Edith states that there is freedom in the classroom when delivering the lessons, but there are guidelines that must be covered. Edith says, “We have stipulations, boundaries that we can’t step out of, certain things that we must cover.” Edith goes on to say, “But you as a teacher, you’re actually controlling the class and teaching basically your style and what you want, as long as you’re answering all the curriculum questions that they are asking for.”

**Thoughts of leaving.** When asked if you ever thought about leaving your current school, Edith, Michael, and Mary say, “No.” Michael states that it would be difficult for him to leave because he says, “I promised so many siblings that I would teach their brothers and sisters and I promised some of the parents I will be here. So, that [leaving] keeps getting pushed back, each year gets pushed back a little more.” Mary has not thought about leaving since she began working at Brown and she foresees herself staying at her school until she retires. Mary comments:

> No, not since I’ve been here. I’ve pretty much thought, ‘I live here,’ like I said, my kids are in school here, it’s a vibrant area, living in [this metropolitan] area,
and this school has been great. And I’ve always thought that if it stays this great I would love to stay here and finish out my career here.

While working at Brown Elementary, Betty considered leaving her school, especially early in her teaching career. Betty says:

There have been times that I’ve thought about leaving. Maybe going to where I live because I have my own children. There was a time when I wanted to go work in my [city], because I live in [Morris] and it would have been easier schedule-wise and time-wise for me to go and work in [Morris]. But I was able to figure things out so I could stay here.

Bob, Vera, Kate, George, and Shirley reveal that they consider leaving their work sites. All the teachers except Bob say that they think about leaving numerous times during the day or during the school year. Vera says that she absolutely considers leaving. She says:

I think about it every year. (Laugh) I mean I think about it all the time. It was difficult for me in the beginning to stay because as I said we were used to leaving every three years and going into a totally new situation. And at the end of the third year here in [this state] I was constantly pestering my husband about “you know isn’t it time for us to move?” because we had never been in one place this long. Eventually, I start saying “okay.” As I get towards the end of my career, it’s nice to have a place that I’ve been at awhile. You have a lot of people coming to you for your opinions and your guidance because you’ve been here so long.
Kate, George, and Shirley admit that there are days they consider leaving their schools due to the frustration over school related issues. Kate says that she considers leaving her worksite “at least five times a year.” She goes on to say:

I mean seriously, I mean when something frustrating happens, or especially, frankly, during my, what I would call my floating time where I never knew year by year what they were going to ask me to do or when they were asking me to work with-- Like there was one year I was not only on a cart, but I was working with three different teachers in two different subjects, and it was just a lot to get my head around, and I didn’t feel I was being effective. I got really frustrated.

And sometimes it’s not even about the school. There have been a couple of times where I just kind of thought, “Jeez,” I wanted to get out of this hectic area, so I sort of checked out maybe going to [a different] area or something like that. But what kept me here was the fact that I would have to start over again. And you don’t know if you’ll ever get those really good connections, those good relationships going. And starting over again with new kids and leaving kids behind that expect me to be here. I mean I see kids every year when school starts that come and peek, “Oh are you still here?” And that kind of helps.

There have been a number of circumstances when George says that he considers leaving Abbey High. He, however, made the decision to continue teaching mathematics at the high school and shares his reasons for remaining. George comments:

There have been occasions when I did consider that [leaving]. I’m not sure how seriously I considered it, because I knew this was going to be a relatively short-
term career; it was not going to be a 20 or 30-year career by any stretch. So, I
didn’t have the same motivation maybe that some other teachers did. I know
we’ve lost a number of really good teachers out of Abbey High who were
frustrated at some of the issues that we’re dealing with. I guess because in my
position the situations didn’t bother me as much and I think I was just able to
work through them. So, in the great upheaval with principal after principal after
principal that we had here and changing directions, it was frustrating at times.
And I guess I would talk to my wife and say, “I wonder if I should look around
somewhere else.” But in the end the other benefits of staying here outweighed the
negative side.

Shirley expresses her reasons for considering leaving her school and yet making a
personal decision to remain in the same school for an extended period of time. Shirley
comments:

In days of frustration, in days of anger I think I quit maybe five, ten times a day,
but at the end of the day I know it’s all rhetoric, it’s all talk, because I would
never leave my students or I would never abandon them. I think a lot of it is
getting, what is it, people call it dumping the trash out of my brains, but I think
it’s just me getting to vent. And I vent because if I don’t vent then I’ll hold it in.
And I have a family at home I have to go home to, so I try to separate school life
from home life. So I’m frustrated with change, because it’s kind of like you have
a voice, but you’re the only one that is screaming and everybody else just can’t
hear you. They just cannot hear you. So, yeah I’ve definitely quit many times.
Being resilient allows a person to have the capacity to continue to bounce back, to recover strength or spirit quickly and efficiently in the face of adversity (Yost, 2006). Shirley states that she has to “vent” when she becomes frustrated by school related matters. Resiliency is enhanced when Shirley recognizes adverse situations and chooses to develop appropriate coping skills in order to resolve the situation. Teacher longevity has been directly tied to resiliency and Bobek (2002) maintains that resilience will increase teacher retention.

**Professional World**

“What environmental influences are present in teachers who remain in the same school for ten or more years?” To answer sub-question three requires examining the overall climate of the school, including aspects of the experienced teachers’ physical working conditions. The schools where the experienced teachers work have an impact on teacher longevity.

**School Climate**

School climate, according to Mitchell, Bradshaw, and Leaf (2010) encompasses shared beliefs, values, and attitudes that shape interactions between the students, teachers, and administrators. At the elementary school, Betty, Mary, and Bob state that school climate is very good. Betty states, “The Principal is very understanding and supportive of her staff. Mary comments: “I think everybody shares the mission of educating the kids [as] fully as people and students. I think that there is a passion here for that, definitely. I think it’s shared.” Bob says, “Caring for every kid, respecting every kid, respecting each
“other, and a very strong work ethic” are the educational beliefs that Bob feels the elementary school faculty have in common.

Kate and George reflect on what they perceive as the shared beliefs of the faculty at the high school. Kate says:

We have a really diverse faculty. I think the one thing that everyone would agree on here is that students should be encouraged to reach high standards of learning and performance. I truthfully don’t think all people believe that is possible for all kids, but I think they think that that should be our goal. I think all people, all instructional people here would probably agree that we have to adapt our expectations to the cultural realities of an urban school with a lot of kids who come from homes that don’t necessarily value education. So everyone sees that as an obstacle. How big an obstacle it is probably varies. For some people it’s just another bump in the road. For others it’s this giant wall that they don’t know how to climb over. But I think they would all agree that it’s an issue.

George comments:

I think most teachers are focused in their classroom and are trying to make things work. I think there is a lot of frustration with many of the teachers in the school, and some much more than others. We have lost a lot of very, very good young, hard-charging, really competent teachers because of some of these frustrations. I think the ones that are here are frustrated. Many of them are frustrated. And I’m not sure that is having, I don’t think it’s having a major impact or even much more than a slight impact on the teaching that goes on in the classrooms. I think
most teachers are able to separate their frustration with some of the policies with their ability to interact and to teach their kids.

When asked to tell about your school’s climate, Edith talks about the diversity of the student body at the high school and the school’s common goal of securing classroom interpreters.

Well, we have over 200 languages, I believe, here and we have an ELL program that has a lot of English as a second language [learners]. And because that’s English as a second language, and if you don’t have somebody in your class that can help to translate, then we have a few problems. We can send down to a place where we can let somebody know that we need help with translation and they will send someone down that can help us translate.

Through Shirley’s lens, school climate at the middle schools is quite different from previous years. She states, “The school climate has actually changed over the years. There is not a teacher in this building, other than myself, that was born and raised in [this city].” Shirley goes on to say:

You don’t have any loyalties to [this city] if you’re coming here to teach from [another state]. You’re going to tell me you don’t have any qualified teachers in [this] community? That feeling of grassroots or going back, coming back home is not happening here, because the people that work in this building don’t have that connection.

Michael believes the school climate at the middle school has improved over the last two years. He thinks the current school climate is “pretty good.” He goes on to say:
I think the school climate is probably better than it’s been for a while. I think it’s pretty good. I think most teachers feel like there’s a lot of freedom. They feel like no one is watching them every second to criticize them or whatever. I think they think the school is fair. I think that is with this present leadership and we’ve only been with this leadership for two years and this is the beginning of the second year.

Vera states that her belief is the faculty at her school believes that “it’s all about the students.” Vera comments:

We believe that everything we do is for the student. So, it doesn’t matter if I’m not comfortable. Like for example, look at it this way. I have a colleague that is big on having students create raps and having them come up with plays and things like that. Okay that’s not my comfort level. But as I watch her and I see that it’s really working with the kids then I’m willing to do those things and try those things. I think it all comes down to we all feel like everything that we do every day we come to work, we’re coming for the kids. In my school is that each classroom you walk into you know that it’s all about the students. We’re all here for them.

**Supportive Environment.** Experienced teachers in this study describe the course offerings and other resources that are available to them through their schools and school district. Shirley, who teaches at AHS, and Mary, who teaches at CMS, achieved National Board Certification that was offered through their school district. Shirley describes other professional development courses that she has pursued while at Conway. She says, “We
had the opportunity to take an international baccalaureate program, because they want to take the Devonshire School District to the IB level. I took advantage of that. They gave teachers an opportunity to learn Spanish for educators. I took advantage of that. They have a program called Skillful Teacher. I took it. Anything that the district offers that I think I would benefit from I always try to get in those programs.” From their research on teacher longevity, Patterson, Collins, and Abbott (2004) maintain that resilient teachers place a high premium on professional development and find ways to get it.

Like Shirley, Betty has successfully completed the Skillful Teacher training and she comments on additional professional development training afforded to her. Betty states, “Every year we have to do recertification points, and so we are involved with technology recertification, making sure we’re using technology so it’s up to date with what is going on in our world.” Bob describes the professional development courses he has pursued through the district. He says, “I have taken some college courses, but most of my [professional] development I do through in-house developments, because they’re convenient. I also think they’re pretty vigorous and useful. I sign up for the different offerings they have, everything from literacy to development to way of skillful teaching.” Bob has enrolled in a professional development course that explores “cooperative work and cooperative learning structures.”

George expresses that there is an unlimited amount of resources available in the school district. He says, “We are very fortunate to be in [this city], which is a very resource-rich city. We have so many resources that are made available to us.” George, however, states that there is one resource, which is limited to him. George comments:
I think the only resource that is one of my biggest gripes with some of the policies is time. There are so many competing activities that are laid upon us, and I’m talking instructional time, not just things that are taking place outside the classroom but things that are happening, requirements that are being put down that take instructional time away. So that would be the only thing, and I’ve made this point with the Principal and the Superintendent on a number of occasions that they just have to make bodies in the classroom time be the priority, end of story.

The lack of adequate classroom instructional time is a major concern for George as it limits his ability to teach efficiently. To retain experienced teachers, Wayne, Youngs, and Fleischman (2005) maintain, “Administrators must extend their roles beyond performance evaluation to include instructional support and not just helping with classroom management (p.76).

Agreeing that there are available resources at the high school, Edith also comments on the lack of space needed to teach. She says:

We have the adequate supplies, but we don’t always have the space to teach the station where we want to teach.” We may not have that all the time, but most of the time the supplies, the equipment can be ordered, and we’re accommodated with what we ask for. Even if it’s not this semester, it will eventually be in.

Edith goes on to say that as a physical education teacher, the school has provided her department with pedometers and heart monitors. She is required by the school to use these devices at least one time during the course of the year with her classes. Edith mentions that technology has been at the high school for an extended period of time. “As
a matter of fact, technology came to the school years ago, and that’s one of the things that they [administrators] want us to do in our classes is to make sure that technology-wise they [students] are using the computers.”

Vera describes the technology usage and other provisions available for teachers at her the middle school.

We all have computers in the classroom for student use and we try to use them on a regular basis. We have any type of manipulative that you want. They are housed in the school and you can always go to the math resource center and get anything that you need. If you don’t have it you can always put in a purchase order for it. And anything that you want that’s within your subject’s budget you can purchase it. So yeah, everything is pretty abundant here.

**Professional Atmosphere**

Collective efficacy beliefs within the school setting refer to the ability of the teachers, as a faculty, to work collaboratively to organize and execute the necessary actions that will have a positive impact on the organization (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004). Bob, Betty, Michael, and Shirley share their opinions concerning the professional atmosphere at their respective schools. Bob says about Brown Elementary School:

I think we’re all treated with respect and in a supportive way. I feel it’s more cooperative than hierarchical inside the building. Outside the building I don’t think that, but inside the building I do. We have teachers who help each other and collaborate with each other very well.
Betty has similar comments about the faculty at Brown. She says, “I love all of the staff at the school. We really work well together and we help each other out. And it’s not easy, but we’re here for each other and we help each other out.” Betty goes on to say, “Everybody is very collegiate and respectful to everyone.”

Two years ago, a new leadership team became a part of Michael’s school and he comments on the new team and the school district’s decision to implement specific goals. I don’t think the atmosphere of the school is good when you look at rulings that come down from the city. They think a lot of things are given to us to do that are worthless. That some of the goals are not what they should be for the type of kids that we have. So, it’s two ways of looking at it, at the school and our present leadership. At the principal’s level, everybody’s pretty happy with that and pretty enthusiastic. But the goals, the priorities at the city level have, I think people are not very happy about that. What makes it better is that we have leadership at a school that sort of serves. It balances things out.

Michael continues to describe his school’s professional atmosphere. He says, “It’s a fun environment to work with people you know. You find so many things that you have in common with these people as the years go by.” Shirley reflects on the professional atmosphere of her school when you returned, not as a student, but as an educator. She says:

When I first came back here to teach there were three teachers that I actually had, and one was [Ms. Jones]. She actually taught me. And the one thing when I came into this building to teach, it was kind of like coming back home, and she right
away was just really, really supportive, and I just felt like she was one of the teachers, one of the reasons that I went into teaching anyway. And I just came face to face with her. So it was kind of like déjà vu or here it is full circle, this is what you’re destined to do.

**Physical School Site**

According to Schneider (2003) the physical building where teachers work has an important role in teaching and learning and the condition of the school could determine a teacher’s decision to remain in the profession. The experienced teachers at Brown Elementary, Conway Middle, and Abbey High suggest that their renovated or newly constructed buildings are inviting, which has been a motivator for the teachers to continue teaching at their schools. Betty says that she loves the way Brown Elementary looks. “It’s a beautiful school. It’s an older building, but it’s still very welcoming.” Bob likes the way the elementary school has been renovated as well, but says, “We have been updated with some systems, which sometimes work and sometimes don’t.” Bob further says, “...but all in all I think it’s a good school. The physical building is a nice building.”

Three experienced teachers at the high school are grateful to work in such a state-of-the-art building. George describes Abbey High School’s physical building. He says:

It’s great. I mean we’re in a 100 million dollar school and you can’t beat it. Most people would give their eyeteeth to teach in a place like this, and I’m very grateful to the city and the taxpayers, one of which is me, for providing the resources that we do have available.
Edith and Kate have the same impressions about the high school’s physical appearance. Edith simply says, “We have a beautiful edifice here.” Kate remembers when she worked in the old building of Abbey High School.

I was in a room and the projector wasn’t working and it was a big deal. That was when we were in the old building and we would be in rooms where we didn’t have ceiling tiles half way across the room. So it’s certainly from that standpoint it [current building] has reliable technology, it’s clean, it’s safe, it’s dry, no leaks. And I think we have a lot of things built into the facility that maybe young teachers who are just starting out wouldn’t realize are so exceptional.

Kate uses webcam with her classes and interacts with schools within and outside of her state and she gets a sense of other teachers’ working conditions. Modern technology is nonexistent at some of the high schools that Kate sees on the webcam. Kate admits:

There is very, very little that I can complain about in terms of the place that I work. If I went to work in, I won’t name high schools, but if I went to work in certain high schools that I know, for example, [another county] I know they are where the old building was. And it’s discouraging, I think, when you come into a place and you’re not even physically comfortable there.

Kate, Betty, and Mary are delighted they have classrooms that they can call their own and a space where they can feel a sense of pride and ownership. Kate says, “My room is beautiful. I love my room. I have been in some crappy little rooms in my day.” Betty expresses her love for her classroom as well. “I take pride in my classroom. I like
to make it a welcoming setting. So, that is one thing I love. It’s a nice big space and yeah, I enjoy coming to work every day.” Mary comments on the area of the building in Brown Elementary School where her classroom is located.

There’s a brand new wing down here. My room is very nice. We get a lot of sunlight. I’ve got some new furniture in here. They have redone all the air conditioning and the heat. We’re a green school now. They dug all these wells out there to run—Now our heat and air conditioning are run through that. I don’t fully understand all of it, but they’ve made some huge changes. We’ve got a nice courtyard with the little pond. And it’s very nice when you’re walking through the building to walk by that and just look at the bubbling brook. It’s rigged, I know, but still it’s just nice to see that water flowing.

Bob recalls the area where he attended parochial school and describes the location where he and his friends had outdoor activities. “I grew up in the city. I went to a Catholic School. Our playground was the parking lot. There was no green grass.” The environment where Bob attended school is quite different from where he currently teaches. Bob speaks about the location in the elementary school where he currently works. “Everybody has got light coming in their rooms and a decent amount of space. Everyone has got a nice desk and chair [for teachers] and there is space to move around.”

Shirley believes that her classroom has the atmosphere for learning despite the obstacles she endured in getting her classroom to a level where she and her students could view it as a pleasant and inviting learning environment. Shirley comments:
I think I have the best classroom in the building. I have a beautiful [pause] my floor. I mean I had to fight for it, because I had carpet that was actually infested with mice, not mice, lice and mice and would go home itching and scratching every night with bumps, me and the classroom below me. And they finally figured out it was because the room was infested, the ceiling was infested. So, the environment at that time was horrible, because the kids would be in, a mouse would run around, they would pick their feet up. So, when we got rid of the carpet I said, “Just don’t put carpet back in here. Can I just get a different floor?” So the environment I think is nice, it’s inviting. The kids come in. The floor I think just puts you at ease. It just makes you just kind of relax. So I think I have a great classroom environment, I really do. This I love, and a lot of what I do I take with me when I go and I co-teach. So, the environments in those classrooms I notice kind of reflect what happens in this room or what you see in this room.

Summary

Experienced teachers revealed major cross-case themes relating to the characteristics of and influences on their careers that inspired them to remain in the teaching profession. Several findings in this study suggest that the experienced teachers have remained at their schools for various personal and professional reasons. They enjoy what they do and many of the teachers rely on their relationships with their colleagues as incentives for them to remain in teaching. These experienced teachers believe that they are making a difference in the lives of their students and they love, like, or enjoy
interacting with them. The next chapter of this study expounds on these findings and their implications and provides recommendations based on the results.
5. Discussion, Summary of Findings, Conclusions and Implications, and Recommendations

This chapter revisits the purpose of this study and reexamines how the conceptual framework serves as a comprehensive model for studying longevity of experienced teachers. I present notable findings related to the research questions and provide conclusions and implications based upon the findings. Recommendations for future actions by educators and policy markers, as well as further research, are offered.

Purpose—Restated

Teachers who are among the most effective in schools tend to be those who are also the most experienced (Nieto, 2003). This study specifically focused on that target population, seeking their stories firsthand. Examining aspects of experienced teachers’ personal and professional worlds give insight into influences on teacher longevity. Many teachers in the present-day workforce are abandoning the profession long before they are able to establish adequate expertise (Alt and Henke, 2007; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Ingersoll, 2003; Shockley, Guglielmino, and Watlington, 2006); therefore, it is rare for teachers, who are highly educated and deeply vested, to remain in one school for ten or more years (Cohen, 2009). Knowledge gained from this study provides an understanding of the complexities that experienced teachers face and the factors that led them to their decisions to remain in their schools. The findings may guide educational decision-makers
when implementing measures to improve retention rates of highly qualified experienced teachers. The purpose of this study is to identify personal beliefs, behaviors, and environmental factors that contribute to experienced teachers remaining in their schools for extended periods. This research is unique in that we learn what motivates teachers to remain in their schools for ten years or more.

**Conceptual Framework—Revisited**

In chapter two of this study, I present my conceptual framework. I use the lenses of social cognitive theory and theory of loyalty to guide this study in exploring why some experienced teachers choose to remain in teaching for extended periods of time. A conceptual framework that includes social cognitive theory is an effective means to study teachers staying in their schools because this theory “addresses how humans as individuals and as members of groups, exercise some level of control over their futures” (Goddard & Skrla, 2006, p.218). My study is based on social cognitive theory’s premise that human behavior, such as remaining in a classroom at a specific school over a long period of time, results from multiple influences. Efficacy beliefs, personal beliefs, behaviors, and environmental influences fall under the umbrella of social cognitive theory and help to explain teacher longevity. The responsibilities and duties of a teacher can be extensive and sometimes challenging, yet there are teachers who choose to remain in the teaching profession for extended periods. I included resiliency as a component of my conceptual framework as it is directly tied to longevity and Bobek (2002) maintains that resilience will increase teacher retention.
While enrolled in one of my doctoral courses, I was exposed to the Hirschman’s (1970) theory of loyalty, in which individuals within an organization use their voice in the decision making process in order to postpone their departure from the organization. As I delved into this theory more, I realized that aspects of the theory of loyalty were pertinent to my research project as well. Pairing social cognitive theory with the theory of loyalty provided the components of my conceptual framework, which influenced the manner in which I conducted my research.

Constructing my conceptual framework, I present internal factors such as personal beliefs and behaviors that may influence career longevity inside the circle with the teacher being the center of the image (see Figure 2) and efficacy beliefs supporting these specific factors. External environmental factors affecting a teacher’s decision to remain are depicted outside of the circle and include the school climate, physical site, and the impact school administrators and other stakeholders have on teacher longevity.

Extending my conceptual framework to encompass new external factors relating to reasons experienced teachers remain at their worksites would address additional findings from this study. One finding I did not anticipate was the impact salary has on a teacher’s decision to remain at a school for an extended period. Bob views his salary as a cost-effective means for him to support his personal obligations. His salary allows him to have provisions for living expenses and provide financial support to his extended family. Bob says, “It is important that they pay well for me to be able to stay [at BES].” Mary considers her salary as a financial reward and she believes this type of financial support is important. Salary is a tangible reward and the experienced teachers have realistic views
regarding teacher compensation. They view it as a motivator for them remaining at their schools, a factor that should be included in a more comprehensive conceptual framework.

**Summary of Major Findings**

This collective case study yielded cross-case themes common to the nine cases. These themes include: personal values, collegial relationships with peers, interactions with students, voice in decision-making, and positive working environment. I use the research questions of this study to examine the reasons experienced teachers in an inner-ring suburban school district remained ten or more years in a particular school.

**Research Question 1**

“What are the specific beliefs of teachers who remain in the same school for ten or more years?” Personal beliefs of experienced teachers are important qualities that motivate them to remain in one school for an extended period of time. Experienced teachers rely on their personal beliefs to sustain them as they remain at their schools (Brunetti, 2006; Leitch, 2010; Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2004). The cross-case themes relating to personal beliefs emerge from the values experienced teachers have regarding the teaching profession; values developed from their lives in and outside of the classroom setting.

**Personal Values**

When asked, “What led you into the field of public education in the first place?” the experienced teachers share their initial desires to become educators. Each entered the
field of education due to core beliefs, influential people in their lives, courses taken in college, or a sense of personal obligation to make a difference in the community. They made the decision to become a teacher after switching careers or were inspired to become teachers early in life.

Several of the experienced teachers in this study were influenced to become educators based on family values. Betty was born into an extended family of educators and she always knew she wanted to become a teacher. She learned early on from her family the importance of education and how it is the catalyst for molding and shaping her former and current students in becoming valued members of society. Betty states that she is proud to have had and continue to have a positive effect on the lives of her former and current students. Betty knew early on she wanted to become a teacher and her family values served as the catalyst in her pursuit to become an educator. As a young girl, Mary observed how her father, who was a newspaper editor, made a decision to go against the norms of society. His decision influenced Mary’s personal values and helped shape her desire to become a career teacher, giving all students equal opportunities to learn.

When Shirley’s ninth grade guidance counselor informed her that she was not “college material,” Shirley was determined to prove that that comment was an incorrect assessment about her future. Having achieved National Board Certification, Shirley has a strong passion for teaching and empathy for students, especially those who may not be accepted by their peers or may have a different way of learning and expressing themselves. “Experienced teachers who demonstrate staying power, refuse to give in to
the negative expectations that others may have of urban schools or the children who study there” (Nieto, 2003, p.52).

Shared Beliefs

Nieto (2003) identifies characteristics such as love and hope, along with the belief in the ability to shape the future, as internal factors that influence the teachers’ decisions to remain in the workplace. Many of the teachers in this study express their love for teaching as a personal belief that is a mainstay for them as they continue to teach at their school. These experienced teachers have varying reasons why they have such a passion for teaching. Mary says about teaching, “I love it. It was a calling to me. It suits my personality. I’m pretty resilient.” Betty loves the challenge of teaching students who think they are incapable of mastering concepts while another experienced teacher’s love of teaching is “…the joy of seeing the “light bulb” turn on or seeing that ‘aha’ moment where the students who were struggling finally began to see how math works.”

An educational belief that the experienced teachers have is the belief that all students can learn and many of the teachers prefer spending time with colleagues who share their same values. Mary believes that students can learn and all students should be treated fairly and equally. George has the same belief and states that there are members of the faculty at AHS who are willing to make adjustments in the way they deliver their lessons so that all students will be able to grasp the concepts being taught.
Lucrative Salary

Salary is worth noting as several participants voice how monetary compensation affects their staying power. Some of the participants in this study, however, did not mention salary while Betty, Bob, Mary, and Kate view their comparatively high pay as a tangible and personal reward for remaining. Personal obligations, such as providing financial support to extended family and others, make staying at their schools for several of the experienced teachers a realistic and practical decision.

Research Question 2

“What specific behaviors are evident among teachers who remain in the same school for ten or more years?” Relationships with peers and administrators impact the staying power of the experienced teachers in this study. Additionally, teachers’ interactions with students and mentoring students and teachers are among behaviors that experienced teachers utilize to remain in the teaching profession.

Collegial Relationships with Peers and Administrators

Teachers highlight both the personal and professional nature of the relationships with their co-workers, often commenting that their colleagues are their source of energy and strength as they meet the challenges of teaching in an inner-ring suburban school district. The teachers comment that their fellow teachers help them experience a sense of belonging, ownership, and satisfaction in their jobs, even when district mandates and bureaucratic pressures are mounting.
Kate insists that one major reason she has remained at AHS is because of the “bond” that she has developed with so many of the people at her worksite. “I think that relationships are important and that sense of trust that gets established, that sense of having someone you can go to when things get really frustrating.” George has developed lasting friendships with a “pretty large number of his colleagues” at AHS, with whom he socializes outside of the working environment. Mary also expresses the importance of maintaining lasting friendships with peers as she has established genuine relationships with two or three of BES’s former and present co-workers.

**Interactions with Students**

Several of the experienced teachers indicate in a variety of ways the powerful responsibilities that they believe teachers have for their students. Many teachers in the study go the extra mile to provide opportunities for student success. Betty, for example, increased her efforts in making sure her students had the necessary instructional materials needed for the new curriculum and George depended on his former engineer materials and experiences to facilitate higher learner in his classroom. Michael, who lives in the community, supports his students outside of the classroom setting. He attends extracurricular activities such as football games, track meets, and other sporting events as Michael believes that he should be a visible and positive support system for his students.

The positive relationship Kate has formed with her students also goes beyond the classroom setting. As a former lawyer, Kate worked with youth who were making poor choices, which caused them to enter a juvenile facility or adult jail. What Kate realized was “not so much their educational deficits as their lack of perspective on what options
were realistic for them and the consequences of the choices they were making.” Kate uses the knowledge gained from her former experiences to assist her students at Abbey High School. One of Kate’s former students, for example, asked her to assist him because he told Kate, “I want to be able to be a mechanic, but I don’t want to just get a minimum wage job.” Kate helped him get into the career center, assisted with college information, and provided him with other options and “all of those things that he never took seriously before.”

**Interactions with Principals**

To retain qualified experienced teachers and encourage teacher longevity, “Administrators must extend their roles beyond performance evaluation to include instructional support and not just helping with classroom management” (Wayne, Youngs, & Fleishman, 2005, p. 76). Several experienced teachers in this study cite the positive interactions with the principal at their school as an influence on teacher longevity. One teacher believes she is valued, respected, and supported by the principal. Mary, an elementary teacher, states that the principal is very understanding and supportive of her staff. According to Michael, the administration at the middle school is satisfied and enthusiastic with the current faculty. The relationship George has established with Abbey High’s principal provides opportunities for him to address his major concern regarding the lack of adequate classroom instructional time for students. He also has a level of respect for the administrative team even though he disagrees with some of the school’s policies. Other experienced teachers in this study did not comment on interactions with their principals.
**Voice in Decision-Making**

Teachers believe they are treated professionally as they are allowed to be a part of the decision-making process. Experienced teachers in this study indicated that they participated in decision-making by being able to voice their opinions in committees on which they participated. Giving teachers a voice in the decision-making process increases their level of self-efficacy and sense of loyalty (Smith & Rowley, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2007).

Vera served as a member of the Calendar Committee charged with ensuring that the district’s calendar matched the number of days (hours) set by the state. She also was the chairperson of the school based faculty council at Conway Middle School and she served as a member on the School Improvement Plan team. Kate uses her voice in several leadership roles at Abbey High School and is an active member of the committee charged with implementing change in her school. Additionally, she serves as the chair of an “in house” committee that addresses staff morale issues and is a recent member of her school’s transformation committee whose intent is to review and affect instructional management issues. George states that when he was a member of the Diversity Committee at Abbey High School, policies were developed by the committee to increase the number of minorities in Honors and AP classes. According to George, the district’s school board eventually adopted these policies.

**Loyalty**
The experienced teachers in this study reflect a sense of loyalty to the teaching profession. Many of the teachers in the study believe that they are there for “their students” and several teachers have a sense of obligation to the students and parents. Michael states that he cannot leave his job at CMS because he promised several of his students and their family members that he would remain so that he will be available to teach other members of their family. Betty’s sense of loyalty and commitment to her students were key factors in her decision to remain at BES. Shirley has a sense of loyalty to her students and loyalty to the community, in which she was born and raised.

**Teacher Mentoring**

Participating in the school’s teacher mentoring program motivated experienced teachers in this study to remain at their work sites by recognizing the value of their expertise. Mary is the only participant at the time of her interview who was serving as a mentor. Mary states, “I definitely enjoy assisting my colleagues.” Over the years, Shirley served as a teacher mentor to new colleagues. Michael has mentored teachers at CMS for seven years, but for the previous and current years, he has not officially mentored teachers. George is no stranger to the mentoring program as being a mentor at Abbey High School was an extension of his experiences in his previous career. Having served as a Battalion Commander in the Army where he mentored Company Commanders and other military personnel, George says, “I’ve always taken an interest in new people and helping them develop, helping them further their careers.”

At the time of their interviews, neither Shirley, Michael, nor George gave reasons why each made the decision to forego participating in their schools’ mentoring programs.
at CMS and AHS, respectively. These experienced teachers state that in previous years, however, each mentored first year teachers through the district’s mentoring program and express a level of satisfaction from assisting their colleagues. Other colleagues are also willing to mentor new teachers as 22 or 20% of the faculty at BES, 103 or 92% of the faculty at CMS, and 91 or 51% of the faculty at AHS participated in the district’s mentoring program at some point during their teaching career.

**Research Question 3**

“What environmental influences are present in teachers who remain in the same school for ten or more years?” Cross-case themes emerge that show a positive working environment that impact teacher longevity. The physical building where teachers work plays an important role in teaching and learning and the condition of the school could determine a teacher’s decision to remain in the profession (Schneider, 2003).

**Positive Working Environment**

With the recent renovations of two of the schools in this study and the building of a new state-of-the-art high school, many of the teachers are pleased to have natural sunlight in their classrooms. Additionally, teachers are delighted to have modern technology for student and faculty use and classrooms that have an atmosphere supportive of learning.

When Brown Elementary School was renovated, a courtyard with a pond was constructed, and Mary, who teaches there, thinks that the courtyard is very appealing. “It’s very nice when you’re walking through the building to walk by that [pond] and just
look at the bubbling brook. It’s rigged, I know, but still it’s just nice to see that water flowing.” Teachers at BES agree that their classrooms are spacious and every teacher has a “nice desk and chair.” Conway Middle School has a new wing and an old one, which was recently renovated. Michael’s classroom is located in the older section. He states that the building is easy to navigate and all of the resources are in close proximity to each other. The only drawback, according to Michael, is that his lunchtime is brief and there are restrictions on bringing in personal small appliances, but he insists that these small inconveniences are overshadowed by his love for his students and their families. Kate remembers the old Abbey High School building, where ceiling tiles were missing and “projectors did not work.” She adds, “I have been in some crappy little rooms in my day.” Kate acknowledges that the state of the new physical school site is one of the reasons why she has stayed at Abbey High School for years. Edith describes AHS as being a beautiful edifice, while George says, “We’re in a 100 million dollar school and you can’t beat it. Most people would give their eyeteeth to teach in a place like this.” These findings support the claim of Laine (2011) who reports that the physical environment of the school can influence teachers’ abilities to instruct the students and affect a teacher’s desire to remain in a given school.

There was a time when Shirley’s classroom at Conway Middle School was infested with mice and lice and she along with the students in her class would go home “itching and scratching” every night. Shirley states that the environment at that time was horrible. She was able, however, to handle the difficult situation by taking charge and
demanding a different type of covering for the classroom floor. Her classroom has now become an atmosphere for learning and the “floor just puts you at ease.”

Teachers in this study have various perceptions of school climate. Many of the teachers, when asked to describe their school’s climate, report on the shared beliefs of the faculty. George states that most teachers at Abbey High School are focused on the classroom responsibility of teaching their students and they are trying to “make things work.” Kate also states that one common objective the AHS faculty would agree upon is that students should be encouraged to reach high standards of learning and performance. She says, “I truthfully don’t think all people [faculty members] believe that it is possible for all kids, but I think that they think that that should be our goal.” Experienced teachers in this study who teach at CMS believe that their faculty is student-centered as Vera comments, “We believe that everything we do is for the students.” Working collaboratively is how teachers at BES describe their school climate.

**Summary of Survey Results**

The Collective Efficacy Scale was administered to determine the faculty’s ability as a whole to impact student learning in a positive way (Goddard, 2002) and to obtain an understanding from a different lens into the working world of the experienced teachers in this study. For example, at BES, collaboration appears to be an essential component in enhancing collective efficacy. Betty and Bob state that everyone at their school is very collegial, respectful, and supportive of each other.

Experienced teachers at both the middle and high schools also report on the collegial atmosphere at their schools. Even though the teachers in the study express their
positive thoughts concerning aspects of the school climate, it is worth noting an
observation one of the participants shared regarding the faculty at his school. George
states that there seems to be a large number of teachers at AHS who are frustrated, so
much so he says, “We have lost a lot of very, very good young, hard-charging, really
competent teachers because of some of these frustrations.” George concludes that most
teachers, however, are able to separate their frustrations regarding some of the district’s
policies with their ability to interact and to teach their students.

**Resilience and Self-Efficacy**

Teacher longevity has been directly tied to resiliency and efficacy beliefs and
Bobek (2002) maintains that resilience and a strong sense of self-efficacy will increase
teacher retention. It is important to note that these factors permeate throughout the
findings of this study. Demonstrating resiliency and having a strong sense of self-efficacy
affect the experienced teachers’ personal beliefs, behaviors, and environmental influences
as they made the decision to remain in their school.

Teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy are also more likely to approach the
task of assisting struggling students as a challenge to be mastered rather than a threat to
be avoided (Van Soest & Garcia, 2003). With this sense of efficacy, a person has the
staying power to endure the obstacles and hindrances that represent challenging situations
(Bandura 1994). Thus, a teacher with a strong sense of self-efficacy is more likely to
remain at a school for an extended period.

To deal with administrative decisions that might be somewhat distasteful, several
experienced teachers choose to cope by utilizing autonomy regarding the program of
study in their classes. To bounce back, Michael and George, both military retirees, simply “close their classroom doors” and teach their students because they believe they have the power to personally manage their working space. Individuals who believe they make a difference through their work are better able to tolerate the frustrations they encounter. When teachers have a strong sense of efficacy, they understand they make a difference in the lives of their students (Bandura, 1997) and they are willing to do whatever it takes to help students succeed.

**Conclusions and Implications**

Experienced teachers rely on a set of personal beliefs that sustain them as they remain in their schools (Brunetti, 2006; Leitch, 2010). The personal belief system of the experienced teachers in this study was instrumental in understanding reasons these educators have remained at their school for extended periods of time. I assumed that the personal beliefs of the nine experienced teachers would impact their staying power, but what I did not anticipate was the deep-seated, personal beliefs of the experienced teachers that contributed to their staying power.

All of the participants in this study are driven by a personal sense of mission that manifests through their specific actions and in the environment where they teach. As stated earlier, Betty, who comes from an extended family of educators, knew early on she wanted to become a teacher and her family values serve as the catalyst in her pursuit to become a teacher. Since most of Betty’s students come from families who live below the poverty level, Betty’s promise to herself greets her everyday through the eyes of her students. Mary grew up with a father committed to civil rights. This influenced her
decision to work in a diverse school, helping to make the world a place that is better than
the one in which a little girl died because of a lack of access to health care. Both cases
reinforce the work of Nieto (2003) who concluded that personal history is often at the
root of experienced teacher longevity support. The robust personal belief system of the
experienced teachers emerges as a primary cross-case theme of this study.

Several of the experienced teachers in this study express their shared beliefs
relating to their love of teaching and the feelings of success they feel for their students as
they see those who have been academically challenged finally succeed. The enjoyment of
being a teacher and teaching a specific grade or subject that they love increases the
experienced teachers’ level of self-efficacy. Pintrich and Schunk (2002) emphasize the
same conclusion. Teachers also share an educational belief that “all students can learn.”
Having shared beliefs aid in developing the way teachers interact in order to resolve
problems, build trust and mutual respect, and generate new ideas (Loukas, 2007). These
findings reinforce the perspectives of McArthur (2008) whose research supports the
notion that the shared beliefs of a faculty are positively related to job satisfaction, which
is a significant predictor of teachers’ intentions to remain in their schools.

Experienced teachers in this study comment on the collegial relationships with
their peers, which generate a great deal of loyalty and how several of these relationships
are now genuine, lasting friendships. A number of teachers socialize with their colleagues
outside of the working environment. Several teachers state that everyone at their school is
very collegial, respectful, and supportive of each other. One teacher insists that the one
major reason she is still teaching at AHS is because of the “bond” that she has with so
many people at her worksite. Collegial relationships in the workplace serve as a means for developing and maintaining teacher resiliency because without it educators are more likely not to remain in the workplace (Brenshausen & Cunningham, 2001). These findings support the perspectives of Cockburn and Haydn (2004) and MacDonald, (1999) who report that by fostering collegial and professional relationships with members of the professional community, teachers are encouraged to remain in their schools for extended periods.

As career educators, many of the experienced teachers in this study believe their role is to prepare students academically to the best of their abilities and also to instill in the students life skills beyond the approved district and state curriculum. Several teachers increase their efforts by making sure their students have the necessary instructional materials for the new curriculum and George depends on his former engineer materials and experiences to facilitate higher learner in his class. Teachers who experience success in the classroom enhance their sense of self-efficacy and the likelihood of remaining. Kate was willing to assist a former student in reaching his goals by assisting him with college information, helping him get into a career center, and providing him with other options and “all of those things that he never took seriously before.” This is consistent with the conclusions of Ruble, Usher, and McGrew (2011) who suggest that self-efficacy beliefs increase when teachers interpret their efforts in assisting as being successful and could impact teacher longevity. These findings also support the claim of Patterson, Collins, and Abbott (2004) who report that resilient teachers do whatever it takes to help their students be successful.
Several teachers in this study believe that student relationships are underrated and that a teacher can greatly impact a student’s desire for learning by just maintaining and fostering a positive attitude with the students. Michael, who lives in the community, supports his students outside the classroom setting by attending extracurricular activities, as this teacher believes he should be a visible and positive support system for his students. When teachers have a strong sense of efficacy, they understand they make a difference in the lives of their students (Bandura, 1997) and they are willing to do whatever it takes to help students succeed.

The retention of both new and experienced teachers in the public school setting is a challenge for school administrators and policymakers (Buckley, Schneider, & Shang, 2005; Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005; Loeb & Reinner, 2004; Nieto, 2003) and retaining effective experienced teachers should be at the center of the administrators’ efforts to improve student achievement (Haar, 2007). Several experienced teachers in this study cite the positive interactions with the principal at their school as an influence on teacher longevity. The prevalence of this theme highlights the critical role that principals play in the career decisions of the experienced teachers. They must provide an environment that is supportive of the experienced teachers’ work where they are allowed the opportunity to flourish and grow. This supports the perspectives of McDonald (1999), Nieto (2003), and Wong (2004) who suggest collegial relationships with administrators encourage teachers to remain in their schools.

Many of the experienced teachers in this study participate in the decision-making process at their worksite. Teachers at some point during their tenure had a voice on
various committees that include Diversity Committee to increase the number of minorities in the Honors and AP classes, in-house committee to address staff morale, and Calendar Committee to ensure the district’s calendar matched the number of days set by the state. Such results are consistent with similar findings from Smith and Rowley, (2005) and Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, (2007) who suggest that by giving experienced teachers the opportunity to participate in school-related issues can contribute to the experienced teacher’s sense of self worth, increase their self-efficacy, and school loyalty.

The experienced teachers who serve as mentors to their colleagues enjoy assisting their co-workers. Participating in the teacher- program casts experienced teachers in new roles, such as school-based teacher educators (Feiman-Nemser, 2003) and this type of school involvement provides opportunities for the experienced teachers to renew and/or reinforce their commitment to the teaching profession (Alvy, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2003). “Mentoring is one important mechanism for advancing the teaching profession, increasing teacher retention, and raising student achievement” (Virginia Department of Education, 2004, p.1).

Teachers’ working environment has a great impact on their staying power. The experienced teachers in this study believe the physical facilities where they teach are safe, clean, and appropriately equipped for effective teaching. This study reinforces what Imazeki and Goe (2009) found concerning the physical worksite and teacher longevity. Sergiovanni’s (2005) research noted the importance of providing teachers with a respectful place to work along with decent working conditions. In Schneider’s (2003) study, teachers considered leaving their work site due to the poor conditions of their
schools. The numbers were even higher for teachers who had experienced health issues related to poor facilities. Shirley, for example, finally got her floor changed because of infestation. From his study, Schneider concludes, “poor school conditions make it difficult for teachers to deliver an adequate education to their students, adversely affect teacher’s health, and increase the likelihood that teachers will leave their school and the teaching profession” (p.4).

The physical buildings where the experienced teachers work play an important role in teaching and learning and the condition of the schools could determine a teacher’s decision to remain in the profession (Schneider, 2003). Teaching in Devonshire School District, where stakeholders and local officials invest in capital improvements of their schools, provides opportunities for the experienced teachers in this study to work in facilities that are aesthetically inviting. Quality work sites support the perspectives of Buckley, Schneider, and Shang (2005) because they found that while improving the quality of school facilities can be expensive, it greatly benefits teacher retention.

Experienced teachers in this study share that the support they receive from the members of the faculty is one of the reasons they continue to work at the highest levels possible. The willingness to work together as a faculty is supported by the measured collective efficacy scale of each of the research sites. These findings support the claim that school climate is an important determinant that affects job satisfaction and teacher retention (Imazeki & Goe, 2009; Laine, 2011; Taylor & Tashakkori, 1995).
Research Recommendations

1. Personal values have important implications for teacher longevity (Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2004). Research into the importance of family values as they relate to teacher longevity may provide pertinent information about teachers’ personal histories. Family values and related factors may be important in identifying teacher resiliency and contribute to the longevity of inner suburban teachers.

2. Environmental influences have a great impact on teacher longevity and explain whether teachers are happy at their workplace (Henson, 2001). More research is needed in the areas of school climate and the impact collective efficacy has on teacher longevity.

3. More research is needed in the area of individual self-efficacy relating to the school’s faculty and its impact upon teacher longevity.

4. The beliefs of experienced teachers who remain in their positions for extended periods of time are so strong, further research to delve into these shared beliefs may provide additional insights into other factors that are important to teacher longevity.

5. Environmental influences have a great impact on teacher longevity and explain whether teachers are happy at their workplace. More research is needed in the areas of school climate and the impact collective efficacy has on teacher longevity.
Recommendations for Practice

1. Of the nine experienced teachers interviewed in this study, one of these teachers is a graduate of this school district. This experienced teacher has a passion for teaching in the school district where she received her formative education. To retain a work force that could potentially become dedicated to the teaching profession, administrators and school district officials should consider establishing programs that would introduce students to the teaching profession. This would consist of preparing individuals early in their educational careers to work as teachers in the community where they were raised and educated and entice them to return to the community by providing them with incentives regarding housing, financial consideration, and children education.

2. Principals should provide opportunities for the experienced teachers to grow by listening to these experienced, effective teachers and provide them with opportunities to share their expertise. Principals should establish site-based collegial longevity networks. These teams should be developed in a systematic manner in order to provide sustainability and allow experienced, effective teachers to serve as facilitators. Principals should be actively involved through strong communication and encouragement.

When teachers remain in their posts, students benefit. Teachers who are driven by mission and purpose excel. This research and the literature that supports it demonstrate important factors that motivate teachers to be loyal to their schools and follow their passion to teach students well.
Appendix A

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF SURVEY SUPPLEMENTAL TO COLLECTIVE EFFICACY SCALE

The purpose of this survey is to understand reasons some teachers remain at one school for ten or more years of their careers. My specific research question is: What influences contribute to the longevity of experienced teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools in an inner-ring suburban school district? The district, schools, and interview participants will be assigned pseudonyms to protect anonymity. Prior to beginning the Collective Efficacy Scale, teachers will be asked to complete five questions relating to demographics. This research is completely independent from the school district. School officials will have access to conclusions in my dissertation but not to specific surveys.

CONTACT

This research will be conducted by Theresa Beasley, a doctoral student at George Mason University and under the supervision of Dr. David Brazer. For questions or to report research-related problems, contact Theresa Beasley by email tbeasley@gmu.edu or Dr. Brazer may be reached at 703-993-3634 or by email at sbrazer@gmu.edu. You may also contact the George Mason University Office of Research if you have questions or comments regarding your role as a participant in this research.

Demographic Information:

1) What is your total number of years teaching? _________
   If you are not a teacher, please give the total number of years in education. _________
2) What is the total number of years you have taught/worked in this school? ______
3) What is your gender? (Check)   ___Male   ___Female
4) Your age is between (Circle) [21 – 30] [31 – 40] [41 – 50] [51 – 60] [61 or above]
5) Have you participated as a mentor in this district’s mentoring program? _Yes _No
### Collective Efficacy Scale (Short Form)

Directions: Choose your level of agreement with each of the following statements from STRONGLY DISAGREE (1) to STRONGLY AGREE (6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teachers in this school are able to get through to difficult students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teachers here are confident they will be able to motivate their students.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>If a child doesn’t want to learn teachers here give up.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teachers here don’t have the skills needed to produce meaningful student learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Teachers in this school believe that every child can learn.</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>These students come to school ready to learn.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Home life provides so many advantages the students here are bound to learn.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Students here just aren’t motivated to learn</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Teachers in this school do not have the skills to deal with student disciplinary problems.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The opportunities in this community help ensure that these students will learn.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Learning is more difficult at this school because students are worried about their safety.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Drug and alcohol abuse in the community make learning difficult for students here.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Goddard & Hoy, 2003)*
Appendix B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The purpose of this research is to understand reasons experienced teachers have remained at one school for ten or more years of their professional careers. My specific research question is: What influences contribute to the longevity of experienced teachers in the elementary, middle, and high school settings? All schools and individual participants will be anonymous with pseudonyms in all published material. Participation in this research is voluntary.

1) How long have you been in education?

2) What is the highest degree you have earned?

3) What led you into the field of public education in the first place?

4) How long have you been at this particular school?

5) Research has shown that teachers with fewer than five years of teaching experience leave the workplace in large numbers. Why have you decided to stay at this school?

6) What kinds of personal gratification have you received by working at this site?

7) What professional development opportunities have you pursued?

8) Do you feel a particularly strong attachment to the students and/or your colleagues? Please explain.

9) How do you feel about the accomplishments of your students?

10) What are your personal reasons for staying in the field of education?
11) Have your original goals for becoming an educator been realized?

12) Have you ever thought about leaving this school?
   - What are some of the influences that tempted you to leave?
   - What are the most important influences that have convinced you to stay?

13) What are your professional goals for staying in the field of education?

14) Have you ever held a leadership position? If so, please share your experiences.

15) Do you have the freedom to do what you want in your classroom?
   - Do you have the resources to teach in the way you would like to teach?
   - Do you have adequate supplies?
   - Do you use the resources that are available to you?

16) How are you treated at your school both personally and professionally?

17) How are you treated by your school district?

18) How much latitude do you have in delivering your lessons?

19) Have you participated in the decision-making process? If so, please share your experiences.

20) What educational beliefs do you think the faculty has in common?

21) Tell me about your school climate and any shared beliefs of the faculty.

22) Tell me about your physical work environment.

23) Is there anything else you would like to share relating to your length of time at this school?
Appendix C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (Survey)

INFLUENCES CONTRIBUTING TO THE LONGEVITY OF EXPERIENCED TEACHERS IN THE ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE, AND HIGH SCHOOL SETTINGS

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research project is being conducted to understand the influences on experienced educators’ decisions to teach in the same school for ten or more years. If you agree to participate in this research, you will be asked to engage in a survey. The survey will be taken during regular faculty meetings. Every effort will be made to protect the confidentiality of your transmissions.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks involved in your participation in this research project.

BENEFITS

There are no direct, tangible benefits to participants in this research.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be kept confidential. Only the researcher will have access to the results, which will be kept in the researcher’s possession at all times. A pseudonym will also be used for the school and the area of the United States in which the school is located.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party. This research has been reviewed according to George Mason
University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONTACT
This research is being conducted by Theresa A. Beasley, a doctoral student at George Mason University, and under the supervision of Dr. David Brazer. For questions, or to report research–related problems, Theresa A. Beasley at 703–824-6750 or via email at tbeasley@acps.k12.va.us. Dr. Brazer may be reached at 703–993–3634 or by email at sbrazer@gmu.edu. You may also contact the George Mason University Office of Research Subject Protections at 703–993–4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your role as a participant in this research.

CONSENT
I have read this consent form and agree to participate in this study.

Yes

No
Appendix D

Explanatory Letter (Teachers)
Supplemental to Informed Consent Form

Dear Ms./Mr. ______________________

I am requesting your participation in a research study I am conducting related to influences contributing to the longevity of experienced teachers in the elementary, middle and high school settings. As a doctoral candidate, I am carrying out my research under the guidance of faculty sponsors, Dr. David Brazer, Dr. Penelope Earley, and Dr. Earle Reybold, of George Mason University, Graduate School of Education. The findings of this study will contribute to the completion of a doctoral dissertation in the field of education, as well as add to the body of literature regarding the influences on experienced educators’ decisions to teach in the same school for ten or more years. Your participation in this study is voluntary.

Purpose of this Study

Teachers are the cornerstone of our schools. Accomplished or effective teachers in schools tend to be among the most experienced (Nieto, 2003). According to Warren (2009), “For the longest time, the attainment of ten years in teaching was the benchmark for achieving accomplished [experienced teacher] status” (p.28). Darling-Hammond (2003) states, “Effective teachers constitute a valuable human resource for schools--one
that needs to be treasured and supported” (p.9). When examining current teacher workforces, it appears that teachers are leaving schools prior to the establishment of adequate expertise. Thus, America’s educational system is facing substantial challenges retaining the public school teaching force.

The purpose of this exploratory study is to understand the influences on experienced educators’ decisions to teach in the same school for ten or more years. This study presents teachers’ own voices to explain why they have decided to remain in a single school for an extended period.

Knowing why experienced teachers have decided to remain at a particular school for 10 or more years will provide valuable information for district and school officials. Understanding the specific personal attributes that the experienced teachers possess and the factors that influenced them to enter the field of education will give me insight into their working lives. Knowing why experienced teachers entered the profession initially, the roles they play at their schools and their personal and professional reasons for remaining in one school will give me valuable insight into their worlds as teachers in the educational profession.

**Procedures**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to give your written consent to the researcher to participate in the research study on the enclosed Informed Consent Form. Your participation will include:

- Participating in an online survey related to school climate. The survey will consist of twelve questions and should take approximately fifteen to twenty minutes to
complete. Only the researcher conducting this study will have access to survey results.

- An interview lasting approximately 45 minutes each, in a location of your choosing. You will be asked to provide general background information about yourself, including your educational and teaching experiences. Interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. No one will have access to transcribed interviews or notes, other than the researcher. Transcriptions will take place only in the researcher’s home.

**Potential Risks and Discomfort**

The researcher does not anticipate any risks to you for your participation in this study. Pseudonyms will be used for both you and the school and no specific identifying information will be used. You also do not have to share any information that you decide is confidential or private. You have the right to withdraw at any time for no stated reason.

**Payment for Participation**

You will not receive payment for participation in this study.

**Participation and Withdrawal**

Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. You may also refuse to respond to any specific question and still remain in the study.

**Confidentiality**

The following measures will be taken to protect the confidentiality of your participation in this study:
• You will be given a pseudonym, which will be used throughout all phases of this research project, including the transcription of interviews, the analysis of data and reporting of findings.

• No one will ever be told of your participation in this study.

• Any information contained in this study that can be linked to you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. You will have an opportunity to provide feedback on your teacher profile, with regard to confidentiality, accuracy, and completeness.

• Published or otherwise shared transcript excerpts, field notes, and findings will be disguised through the use of pseudonyms for the participants, school district, school site, and the individual participant.
Appendix E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (Teacher)

INFLUENCES CONTRIBUTING TO THE LONGEIVTY OF EXPERIENCES TEACHERS IN THE ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE, AND HIGH SCHOOL SETTINGS

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research project is being conducted to understand the influences on experienced educators’ decisions to teach in the same school for ten or more years. If you agree to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in a 45 minute interview. Every effort will be made to protect the confidentiality of your transmissions. Interviews will occur at a time and place convenient to you and the researcher. The researcher will ask your permission to record interviews. You will be told when taping begins.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks involved in your participation in this research project.

BENEFITS

There are no direct, tangible benefits to participants in this research, other than to further research on the influences that contribute to the longevity of experienced teachers in the elementary, middle, and high school settings.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be kept confidential. Only the research will have access to audio tapes and transcripts, which will be kept in the researcher’s possession at all times. At the completion of the study, audio files, interview transcripts, and audio tapes will be destroyed. Only the researcher will know your name and pseudonyms will be used in gathering and reporting data. A pseudonym will also be used for the school and the area of the United States in which the school is located. Published or otherwise shared
transcript excerpts, field notes, and findings will be disguised through the use of pseudonyms for the school district, school site, and the individual participant.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party. This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Theresa Beasley, a doctoral student at George Mason University, and under the supervision of Dr. David Brazer. For questions, or to report research related problems, contact Theresa Beasley at 703–824–6750 or via email at tbeasley@acps.k12.va.us. You may contact Dr. Brazer at 703–993–3634 or by email at sbrazer@gmu.edu. You may also contact the George Mason University Office of Research Subject Protections at 703–993–4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your role as a participant in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this consent form and have been given a copy to keep. I agree to participate in this study.

I am willing to be audio taped: Yes ___ No ___

________________________  ______________________  _________
Participant Signature     Affiliation              Date
Appendix F

TO: S. David Brazer, College of Education and Human Development
FROM: Aurali Dade
Assistant Vice President, Research Compliance

PROTOCOL NO.: 8070  Research Category: Doctoral Dissertation

PROPOSAL NO.: N/A

TITLE: Influences Contributing to the Longevity of Experienced Teachers in the Elementary, Middle, and High School Settings

DATE: May 4, 2012

Cc: Theresa Beasley

On 5/4/2012, the George Mason University Institutional Review Board (GMU IRB) reviewed and approved the above-cited protocol following expedited review procedures.

Please note the following:

1. Copies of the final approved consent documents are attached. You must use these copies with the IRB stamp of approval for your research. Please keep copies of the signed consent forms used for this research for three years after the completion of the research.

2. Any modification to your research (including the protocol, consent, advertisements, instruments, funding, etc.) must be submitted to the Office of Research Integrity & Assurance (ORIA) for review and approval prior to implementation.

3. Any adverse events or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects including problems involving confidentiality of the data identifying the participants must be reported to the ORIA and reviewed by the IRB.

The anniversary date of this study is 5/3/2013. You may not collect data beyond that date without GMU IRB approval. A continuing review form must be completed and submitted to the ORIA 30 days prior to the anniversary date or upon completion of the project. A copy of the continuing review form is attached. In addition, prior to that date, the ORIA will send you a reminder regarding continuing review procedures.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 703-993-5381.
References


Curriculum Vitae

Theresa A. Beasley graduated Petersburg High School, Petersburg, Virginia. She received her Bachelor of Science in Public School Music from Virginia State University and her Master of Arts in Education, with emphasis in counseling, from California State University at San Bernardino.