

2013

Listening To Teacher Voices: Using Narrative Inquiry To Understand The Lives Of Beginning, Experienced And Veteran Female English Teachers

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PURDUE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL
Thesis/Dissertation Acceptance

This is to certify that the thesis/dissertation prepared

By Tiffany M. Sedberry

Entitled

Listening to Teacher Voices: Using Narrative Inquiry to Understand the Lives of Beginning,
Experienced and Veteran Female English Teachers

For the degree of Master of Science in Education

Is approved by the final examining committee:

Melanie Shoffner _____
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Tara Star Johnson _____

Janet Alsup _____

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Approved by Major Professor(s): Melanie Shoffner

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Head of the Graduate Program Date

LISTENING TO TEACHER VOICES:
USING NARRATIVE INQUIRY TO UNDERSTAND THE LIVES OF BEGINNING, EXPERIENCED
AND VETERAN FEMALE ENGLISH TEACHERS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of

Purdue University

by

Tiffany Michelle Sedberry

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

of

Master of Science in Education

May 2013

Purdue University

West Lafayette, Indiana

"To me the sole hope of human salvation lies in teaching." - George Bernard Shaw

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, to my beloved Poppy, who believed I could do anything. Though you have passed on from this life, I hope my existence is a continuing reflection of hard work and ambition that you so inspired me to achieve. By the same token, to my Momacita, you have been my biggest fan in all endeavors. You have never wavered in support or love as I pursue my dreams in academia. Also, to my Grammy, a woman of towering strength whose support and love is inspiring and humbling. Thank you for all you've done.

Second, to my dearest friends, Annie Echelbarger, Lydia Capps and Taylor Norman, you three have journeyed alongside me during discovery and growth. Your love and friendship means more than I could say. Thank you for not only asking about my dreams and listening to my ramblings, but also for remaining constants in the darkest times when I lost faith or lost sight. Equally, to Eric Reiger, who has taught me much about myself during graduate school, thank you for the times of challenge, the times of support and the moments of unfailing love where you refused to let me second guess my own capabilities.

Third, I would not hold the passions I do today for teaching, students, and English Education without the experiences from my former teachers, working alongside my colleagues in the field, and instructing my students. Each of you have ignited in me a

dream of seeing changes in education so future generations are free to think, free to challenge, and pushed to reflect. It is because of you that I work for a stronger future for all in public schools.

It is with a humble heart, I thank the women on my committee, Dr. Melanie Shoffner, Dr. Janet Alsup and Dr. Tara Johnson. A “thank you” seems so small. You have opened doors for me, had faith in my abilities, and guided me in learning, reflecting and critically thinking about what I know and what I hope to know someday.

To my teachers who participated in this study, your stories are all worthy and beautiful. Thank you for inviting me into your thoughts and your memories in order to form this story of my own

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ABSTRACT

Sedberry, Tiffany M. M.S.Ed., Purdue University, May 2013. Listening to Teacher Voices: Using Narrative Inquiry to Understand the Lives of Beginning, Experienced and Veteran Female English Teachers. Major Professor: Melanie Shoffner.

Research shows that teacher retention is an issue of serious concern. Job dissatisfaction from personal and professional stressors is causing teachers at different experience levels to reevaluate their commitment to the classroom. Veteran teachers who complete their career are also evaluating whether or not teaching is worth what is invested. This project is grounded in narrative inquiry, in hopes of understanding the lives of female English language arts teachers. For the participants in this study, financial concerns and family commitments, issues of student accountability, and educational reform worry them equally. For all teachers, regardless of experience level, student apathy remains a source of discontent. The teachers in this study feel they are part of a profession that is being devalued by multiple sources inside and outside the classroom.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Researcher's Story

I was three years old when I decided to be a teacher. My thoughts were preoccupied with which dolls to put in the desks my grandpa had carved for me. For years, I played school as many little girls do by mimicking what my teachers did. One teacher had a pointer, so I went out and snapped a twig from a tree. One teacher read us stories and I made sure to show my dolls the pictures just like she had done in class. And when my dolls were bad, I'd practice giving "the look" before making them stand in the corner like the bad students had to do.

My first job wasn't what you could call typical, let alone ideal. My first classroom had no windows, no desks, no textbook, and no chalkboard. I was placed in the old home economics room, complete with six kitchen stations where counters, cabinets, and drawers full of discarded kitchen appliances and utensils surrounded tables, which held six to twelve students at a time. I never thought I'd have to say, "Johnny, put the mixing bowl back in the cabinet!" in the middle of a lesson. I hadn't practiced for those conditions with my dolls.

Teaching was intense both professionally and personally. Losing my dad three months into the profession, I found myself struggling to keep from walking out after only one semester. After my bereavement leave, I returned to school heavyhearted to a

room full of posters, cards, and presents from my students and colleagues. My fellow experienced and veteran teachers flocked to me and helped me survive the first year and thrive the next. However, I cannot take credit for my success without acknowledging my students. In their moments of anger, kindness, success, failure, and laughter, I came to understand why teachers love the job. It is the relationships formed with students and playing a role in their lives as they mature and discover that keeps teachers coming back year after year. No matter how poorly students would behave, they were never my top complaint about teaching or the top complaint of my colleagues.

Why did I leave? My answer is complex because I never planned to stay. But I had a very specific purpose. I knew that I wanted to work as a teacher educator and researcher and spend my life helping teachers. In order to do that effectively, I needed to know what a teacher's life was. What I found was a profession with wonderful people who yearned to make a difference. Unfortunately, my fellow teachers and I are in a profession of very real restrictions and constraints, where we often came to work defeated, not because of issues with students, but because of what schools have come to represent – a place of limitations for all those working inside the classroom. To improve the educational system, we must listen to those who are working within it on a daily basis and encountering its perfections and flaws from all angles. To get to the heart of teaching, we must listen to teachers.

1.2 Participants' Stories

Josephine: Beginning Teacher #1

Josephine's face is rarely without a smile. She sits across from me after a day of teaching, content and calm. By looking at her, you would think she had the easiest job in the world instead of one of the more challenging in education. Josephine is a third-year teacher in an inner-city school. While her degree is in English Education, her job title demands more than what she was educated to do. Josephine's title is Reading Coach, but the title is misleading. For the first three periods of the day, she works with the lowest sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students who typically read at least three grade levels below their current grade level. In the afternoon, she is the reading program intervention director, responsible for gathering data for all students in the junior high in order to show academic improvement and teacher effectiveness. She is also a co-teacher in other content classes to help incorporate effective reading and writing strategies. Josephine, however, thrives under the pressure and insists it's a job she wanted: "I applied for it, not really thinking I would get it because I had so little experience." She shies away from the fact that she beat out veteran teachers, but delights in their admiration of her successes.

Natalie: Beginning Teacher #2

As a third-year teacher, Natalie is starting to find her stride as a sophomore language arts teacher. She has no real discipline issues, no dire special needs cases, and little trouble getting students to engage with her teaching. Her students are, without a

doubt, the perk to the job: “I love the kids. They’re obviously the reason that I go to work every day. I just like being around them...I think they have good ideas.” However, Natalie admits that she may become a statistic and exit her teaching career long before retirement.

I feel like we’re being held to all of these crazy accountability standards that we can’t ever possibly meet. At the same time, I think there are good things happening, but not in the best way. Would I be as happy in a profession like I am in teaching? Probably not. Would I miss teaching? I’m sure I would because I really feel like I belong in the classroom. I love my job. I love going to work. I miss my kids when I’m not there. I feel good when I walk into my classroom. I like telling people I’m a teacher, but at the same time, I hate that it boils down to money. But at the end of the day, it kind of does.

She worries about the long hours and her fiancé’s lower income job and the future that she hopes includes children. While she would love to remain a teacher, she does not believe it is a financially wise choice and feels there is not enough incentive to endure the stress and remain a teacher. She has thought about acquiring an additional degree, but there is not a specific field she is leaning toward.

Gretchen: Beginning Teacher #3

Gretchen grew up playing teacher and forcing her brothers to do homework. Since childhood, teaching has been the goal. Beginning her third year teaching 7th grade English language arts in a rural school, she also runs junior high Student Council and

coaches varsity boys' swimming. Teaching, she admits, has been a rollercoaster of emotions: "Nothing ever goes according to plan. There are going to be days where you will get home and you will sit down and say, 'Why the heck am I a teacher?' Then a couple days later, you'll have that feeling that there's nothing else I'd rather do."

Gretchen believes a major source of student discipline and lack of engagement is due to poor rapport. She feels that if a teacher is kind and compassionate, then those issues are minimal. Despite her love of the profession and working with students, she is not entirely convinced she will finish her career in the classroom.

Kristen: Experienced Teacher #1

When a former high school teacher told Kristen she would be a teacher, she didn't believe it. Now, she teaches alongside that teacher as her colleague in the high school she attended. Actively involved as a beginning teacher, she ran journalism and yearbook and coached varsity girls' golf for five years. However, motherhood prompted her to leave coaching behind to focus on her daughter and teaching duties. Looking back on the six years in the classroom, Kristen said, "There are moments of really great joy and success. And then there are more, a lot more discouraging time of feeling like, 'Ugh... it's one thing after another.'" But her complaint and feelings of frustration do not stem from her students. Motherhood and family overwhelm her, but it is the demands of the job and the "hoops that you have to jump through" that make her feel education is not focusing on students as much as it should.

Bridgette: Experienced Teacher #2

Like many teachers, Bridgette was inspired by a former English teacher to enter education. After college graduation, Bridgette returned to the high school she graduated from and has spent her entire career there. She had plans to “save the world,” reaching all students and engaging them in the classroom, but demands of the job and a growing family has made Bridgette rethink teaching altogether despite having eight years invested: “I enjoy teaching. I do. And it’s been an experience. But once I had kids, a family, I’m not going to lie. It’s not my number one priority. I think things have changed.” Currently on maternity leave, she cradles her daughter in one arm and keeps watch over her toddler son playing on the rug nearby during our interview. But it is this joy coupled with the increasing pressures placed on secondary English language arts teachers that has Bridgette making her exit plans. When asked if she would last until retirement, Bridgette heartily responded,

Honestly, I’m going to be honest, no. I don’t intend to stay. It’s just too much.

Too much pressure. Too much time. I like to be home with the kids. Do I think I’ll be teaching for 40 years? Absolutely not. I’d say another 5 to 10 years.... It used to be enjoyable without all the stress of accountability and all that stuff. I don’t mean to be negative, but it’s turned me that way.

Joanna: Experienced Teacher #3

Even though her first grade teacher told her that she would never amount to anything, Joanna realized as a second grader the power of a teacher dedicated to

success, which forever altered her views of school, teachers, and her ability to succeed: “By the end of [second grade], I had gone from being in the lowest reading group to the highest. I decided from there on that I wanted to be a teacher so that I could be like [my second grade teacher] and never like my first grade teacher.” Entering her fourteenth year in the classroom, however, Joanna is starting to feel the frustration dampen her enthusiasm for teaching. She feels the heat from the state level to increase student scores and for students to earn passing status on standardized tests. While most teachers also have this pressure, Joanna’s four sections of special needs and low-level remedial students intensify the anxiety in a career she once greatly enjoyed: “I do not get excited about much anymore. I was so excited to work, but that is fading.... I have moments of doubt at whether I can continue to do this. I believe that I am good at this, but sometimes that is not enough.”

Mary: Veteran Teacher #1

When Mary was a little girl, she drove her “poor, little brother absolutely out of his mind,” making him play school, complete with worksheets and homework. Childhood was also where she found a love for reading, partially due to her father taking an active interest in what she was reading. He would read books with her and discuss them at the breakfast table. She feels that parental interaction and support contributed to her academic success and love of reading. Her biggest concern regarding reading and current students is that lack of interaction at home, which may contribute to some of their disengaged attitudes. Concerning teachers, she is “upset” and has “negative

feelings” toward the political changes teachers are facing in her state. Mary has spent thirty-nine years in the classroom and is looking toward retirement in a few months with a heavy heart, but also with anticipation. She is struggling with the balance of personal time like spending enough time with her grandkids. She admits that the workload is getting too much and she cannot bear to do her job “less than well.” “That’s really the motivation,” she says with a sigh. “It’s going to be hard [to retire]. I’ll need therapy!”

Susan: Veteran Teacher #2

A respected veteran and master of her craft, Susan has been teaching in the same high school for forty years, even after a “rotten” student teaching experience. A pillar of the community and standard of teaching excellence, many would think she had planned on being a teacher since childhood. She did not decide to teach until college when she was offered a job in New York as a magazine editor. She was terrified of moving to the big city and working in journalism, so she decided to put her writing skills and love of literature into good use by becoming a teacher. No one could ever doubt her commitment to the job. For years, she had a three-hour daily commute to her teaching job at one of the lowest paid schools in the state. Despite a master’s degree, her salary was capped under \$60,000 once she reached thirty years, a salary equivalent to what her daughter makes at a different school corporation with only nine years’ experience. Even now, she has no plans to retire because she is having “such a good year.” She jokes that because she taught everyone on the school board and a large number of the teaching staff, she has “job security.”

Connie: Veteran Teacher #3

Connie knew that she would be a teacher at the age of twelve. Her sixth grade teacher gave her responsibility above all other students to help in the classroom by grading papers and looking after younger students. A love for language and literature helped her decide on English and she has never wavered in her decision. For students, she has a “passion to see language put into written form,” which is fed with the “enthusiasm of watching a kid, watching the light bulb turn on.” To turn on those “light bulbs,” Connie is a teacher who gets down to business. Known for her no-nonsense demeanor and high expectations of all students, Connie’s nickname is “The Colonel.” She has maintained a reputation that garners respect during forty-one years in the same school system. Even after forty-one years, Connie has no intentions of retiring anytime soon. When retirement does come, Connie laughs that she won’t miss grading papers, but it will be difficult to let “the fun and good interactions with the kids” go and miss the opportunities to watch students “grow academically and personally.” Though she has loved teaching the past four decades, she is outraged with the direction teaching is heading. She admits that these political changes have altered her perception of teaching. In good conscience, she can no longer recommend teaching for those considering it.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher. The word itself evokes a very distinct image in the minds of everyone who has attended school. Perhaps it is a first grade teacher with a sweet smile who read magical stories from brightly colored pages. Perhaps it is a history teacher who came to school armed with jokes and current events, challenging all students to change the world for the better. Maybe it is a teacher who inspired respect, or maybe fear, with a frowning countenance and a no-nonsense approach to learning. Who is Teacher?

2.1 History of Female Teachers

Teaching has not always been a predominately female profession. It was not until the implementation of public education in the 19th century that women became the primary leaders of the classroom (Lortie, 2002; Drury & Baer, 2011; Apple, 1986). The last time men would hold the majority in the teaching profession in the United States was 1860 (Apple, 1986). At this time, men typically taught in order to finance a collegiate education or to prepare for another profession like the ministry (Grumet, 1986). Women were typically confined to teaching during the summer months in the early 1800s when most men were busy working on farms. Once teaching required proper education and training, the majority of men who were in the teaching profession

were against investing time and money in order to remain in the classroom (Apple, 1986; Grumet, 1988). As other professions opened up for men, teaching positions began to open up for women, meaning that one of “the most apparent explanation[s] for the preponderance of women moving into teaching... is that a plethora of job opportunities became available to young men who chose not to labor on farms” (Grumet, 1988, p. 37).

For both men and women, teaching represented a short, irregular commitment for young singles who were not tied to any family responsibility. Teachers typically boarded with families in the community, thus the need to be free from spouses and/or children was essential. Once female teachers married and become mothers, they were often removed from their teaching posts (Apple, 1986). Subsequently, if women elected to marry or mother, they had to resign as teachers. Over time, however, female teachers became a commodity for those hiring teachers because their salaries were generally 60 percent lower than those salaries of male teachers (Apple, 1986).

Ironically, what was considered ideal for women in 19th century America was to be a mother and a wife, first and foremost (Apple, 1986; Grumet, 1988). Teaching, however, allowed women to do for others what they were already expected to do at home: care for children. Before the rise of public education, dame schools allowed women (who were generally widows) to educate children in their homes where reading and basic academics were taught. However, the majority of dame schools were seen to have accomplished little more than “further[ing] domestic skills, social polish, and parlor savvy” (Sweet, 1985, p. 41).

Once public education had been implemented and female teachers became the majority due to their availability and accessibility of lower pay than their male counterparts, teaching became stigmatized as “women’s work.” Reason being, women were seen as merely expanding their “proper place” in the role of mother, which was now realized even for single or widowed women. Even childless women could “mother” children in the classroom (Apple, 1986). Catherine Beecher, an American educator and advocate for female education during the 19th century, boasted, “The great purpose in a woman’s life—the happy superintendence of a family—is accomplished all the better and easier by preliminary teaching in school. All the power she may develop here will come in use there” (Grumet, 1986, p. 37).

2.2 Considering Men and Women

With the population of teachers changing so drastically, the image of teacher undoubtedly began to shift as well. Lortie (2002) notes that the use of physical force discipline by teachers diminished as more females became teachers while the focus on nurturing students in emotional ways has increased. Thus, the male-dominated teacher as authority persona has shifted into one that would more likely resemble a parent persona, even for current male teachers. Further, Grumet (1988) states, “the magnitude of this contact with the classroom for young women bridge[d] the time between adolescence and their own motherhood suggest[ing] that females influence[d] the character of teaching” (p. 37).

Even though the number of teachers has more than doubled in the past fifty years, the makeup of the workforce has not changed. Of the current 3.2 million teachers, 75% of teachers are female and that number is growing, while the number of male teachers has been consistently on the decline (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2011). Today, teaching is still viewed by society as a women's profession, due to the association of childcare being long associated with women's work (Lortie, 2002; Apple, 1986; Grumet, 1988).

Lortie's research from the 1970s showed that 71% of men view teaching as a temporary profession, whereas, women are more likely to view the profession terminally (p. 86). Over half of male teachers hope to advance in the public school setting by becoming administrators while only 9 percent of women have the same goals. Male teachers have long felt the pressure to answer why they chose to be "merely a teacher" instead of advancing on to a more prominent vocation (Brill & McCartney, 2008, p. 759). The concern with supporting a family on a teacher's salary might explain a man's exit of the profession or plans to advance in position and in pay. "For most men teachers, a teacher's income has "less 'value' than for women teachers: [women] represent a less useful contribution to the performance of their principal roles" (Lortie, 2002, p. 10). This is evident when considering the large number of male teachers who acquire additional employment compared to the number of female teachers who do (Lortie, 2002). Thirty years after Lortie's research, male teachers still place high importance on financial responsibility to their families, more so than female teachers (Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, & Meisels, 2007).

Women, according to Lortie (2002), do not hide their intention to put family (spouses and/or children) ahead of their career aspirations. No longer are women expected to remain single and/or childless in the teaching profession. In fact, some women who long to be wives and mothers are attracted to the teaching profession's unique scheduling. While some women may view teaching as a profession with a revolving door that can be stepped in to and out of fairly easily, for pregnancy or concessions to their husbands' occupation, the majority of men view the teaching profession as a stepping stone for leadership (Lortie, 2002; Kersaint, Lewis, Potter & Meisels, 2007; Brill & McCartney, 2008).

2.3 Marriage

Today, however, marriage is one of the reasons (though there are many) swaying commitments and views of the job. In the 1970s, both marriage and motherhood influenced many female teachers because "more than half looked ahead to teaching as an 'in and out' engagement hinging on marital and maternal commitments" (Lortie, 2002, p. 87). Leaving the teaching profession for women, according to Lortie's research in the 1970s might be family related incidents (80%), marriage (78%), and motherhood (60%). Ironically, these reasons for leaving the profession are consistent with the consistent appeal for the profession (Goodson, 1992). Over half of teachers interviewed by Lortie said they would return to teaching after these circumstances had resolved, meaning their marriage had been established or dissolved, their children were in school, or perhaps their parents' health had stabilized.

In the mid-1980s, results were much the same. Out of 255 female teachers who left the profession, two-thirds (172) left full-time work completely after having children. The other third changed occupations completely (Stinebrickner, 2002; Brill & McCartney, 2002). Ingersoll's (2001) findings of teachers surveyed in the mid-1990s show similar results when 45% of teachers reported leaving the workforce for personal reasons such as pregnancy, parenting, health, and family relocation. Even a decade later in the mid-2000s, findings were consistent with Ingersoll. When teachers were asked to report on reasons for staying and reasons for leaving, time with family was recorded highly for those who left the profession, "particularly for those that are female" (Kersaint, et al., 2007, p. 782).

Casey (1992) asserts that the female teacher view of teaching as a "temporary, pre-marital employment is a pattern of the distant past" (p. 190). Marriage, however, still does represent career conflict between spouses when several members of Casey's study cited leaving teaching when their husbands accepted jobs with a possible higher salary in a different location. Casey does not deny that marriage still factors in to some female teachers' decisions to relocate or to leave teaching altogether if their partners' jobs are financially higher. After relocating, not all women leave working with education or children behind. Some women who relocate, may not return to the traditional classroom, but may view their work to be educational work as political activists, youth workers, or religious servants, but these experiences are not regarded as classroom practice experience, even though they may be using similar skills and methods (Casey, 1992).

2.4 Motherhood

Motherhood, in particular, is always paralleled to influencing women's views on teaching, job satisfaction, and reasons for entering or leaving the profession. Historically, teaching was seen as a temporary career for women before their 'real' career of motherhood came (Brill & McCartney, 2008, p. 759). The teaching profession holds the appeal for women with children due to its unique scheduling because it allows mothers to be home when their children in the evenings, on weekends and in the summer. That "compatibility" (Casey, 1992, p. 191) of convenience, however, has prompted assertions that female teachers "lacked commitment to their work, that they were more interested in affairs of the heart than of the mind" (Biklen, 1995, p. 9). To say that female teachers, generally those with spouses and children, lack commitment because of their preoccupation with "affairs of the heart" is to assume that motherhood determines this wayward devotion or this sentimentality. It is important to note that those female teachers without spouses or children are often perceived and, some argue, become mothers vicariously. The perception that teaching is "women's work" is largely based on the notion of being in charge and caring for children. Even for childless women who were teachers or widows that instructed in dame schools, these women were linked to motherhood due to their lives being devoted to the care and service of children. As stated earlier, the shift in education from discipline to emotional support and well-being has made the teachers' role that of a parent persona. According to Grumet (1988), "Even if we choose not to be a parent we are not exempt from the reproductive process, for we have each been a child of our parents. The intentions, assumptions, emotions,

and achievements of educational practice and theory are infused with motives that come from our own reproductive histories and commitments” (p. 6). Adults have a “responsibility for the future, whatever form [those] projects of nurturance assume” (p. 7) and for teachers, those projects of nurturance are the students in the classroom. Teaching and motherhood continue to remain a link for many female teachers even though it has evolved from its original source of conflict.

The motherhood link to teaching is a two-sided coin that feeds passion for the profession or has the power to extinguish it. The “burn-out” factor in teaching, particularly for female teachers, may be linked to the mother as martyr ideology, suggesting that women’s lives are crafted for the service and upbringing of children. Alsup (2005) asserts that many young women “insist that a good teacher must give herself to her students by putting her students’ needs above her own.” Alsup connects the accomplishment of “good teaching with emotional and physical devotion” to a culturally construed perception of motherhood. These teachers take on students’ failures as their own and some eventually become “bitter, empty reflections of their former teaching selves” and end up leaving the profession altogether. Teaching is “expressive, interactive, responsive, supportive, and most of all, nurturing and labor intensive [and has] frequently characterized burnout as a result of time-demanding children or wall-to-wall students” (Pease, 1993, p. 133).

Despite the enormous responsibility laid before them, many female teachers embrace this as a reason to keep going. The human element of teaching makes it difficult because “it requires teachers to establish and actively manage an emotional

relationship with students” (Labaree, 2000, p. 229) which requires a delicate mix of mentor, parent, and friend. In 2000, Sonia Nieto collaborated with seven respected and experienced urban teachers, five of whom once held the title of “Boston Teacher of the Year,” to articulate why they remained in education. Love, hope and the ability to shape the future were among the reasons they chose to stay. Through “teachers’ caring [they] promote an essential sense of belonging for students” (p. 16), which ultimately can “change lives forever” (p. 18). These three elements, one could argue, align with parents’ aspirations for children—to love, hope for success and a better life, and the impact to change a child’s life for the better. Some teachers burn out from these things, as Alsup stated, but Nieto’s teachers thrive.

2.5 Commitment to the Job

Despite claims that women lack commitment to the teaching profession when marriage and motherhood arise, the reality is that the female teaching population remains steady, reinforcing the fact that many remain in the profession. Women continue to flock to the teaching profession, whether they are married, mothers, both or neither. The persistent belief that contributing to society and helping others was “paramount” to 72% of young teachers entry into the profession, rather than monetary gains. These teachers believe that their zeal for teaching students is something that is “palpable, vastly unappreciated and a valuable asset that money can’t buy” (Nieto, 2005, p. 3).

Cochran-Smith (2004) asserts that good teachers are the ones who stay in teaching, despite trying times and with trying students because it has “more to do with teacher’s heart than with either its physical conditions or the availability of the latest techniques” (p. 388). Good teachers, according to Cochran-Smith, are not just staying in upper class, homogenous schools that can afford the latest technologies and the nicest facilities. Good teachers can work in poor communities without bells and whistles because they hope to help the generation that sits before them. These teachers see students’ unfortunate circumstances as reasons that they need to be in the classroom and believe in the possibilities for all students by hoping for better lives beyond the current circumstances. They have a conviction to help students and believe that their instruction can impact their lives for the better (McCann, et al., 2005). According to Nieto (2003), “hope is the essence of teaching,” meaning hope and faith in the abilities of themselves as teachers, their students, and in the system to public education” (p. 16).

Unlike many professions who “rent their expertise,” teachers are imparting knowledge to cement a foundation for students’ future expertise (Labaree, 2000, p. 233). In doing so, a teachers’ expertise has become “common knowledge” and the real expertise of good teaching comes from connecting with students and motivating students, a skill that is often overlooked. In order for this skill to be developed, teachers need schools dedicated to supporting teachers and provide opportunities to bring teachers out of their isolated classrooms to include them in leadership, decision-making, and professional development, which generally comes with more experience (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Veteran teachers who have served out their lives in the classroom all cite their experience as a great asset to the job. After years of teaching and molding their craft, another asset is the likelihood that veteran teachers have had current students' parents as former students, which helped them to establish themselves as important figures in their communities (Sikes, 1985). Towards the latter half of their career, families had developed and grown and were not as reliant on them, which meant they were able to devote more time and focus to teaching. The number one factor that keeps teachers in the classroom, however, is the perception that their job is important. It is not about pay or advancement, but the interaction and instruction of students (Lortie, p. 106). Veteran teachers who last through retirement eligibility, however, only make up one-eighth of teachers leaving the profession (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

2.6 The Retention Crisis

Despite the number of teachers who remain committed to instructing generations of students, there are teachers that do leave. Even the increasing pressure of student performance and teacher accountability is a growing concern, it is not the main reason teachers walk away from the profession. Goodson (1992) notes that younger teachers are reluctant to enter the teaching profession due to decreasing public opinion, the lack of respect, limited opportunities for upward mobility, and the general misconception that those who teach have no other options. "The general perception that the substantive skills and knowledge that teachers possess are

thoroughly ordinary...It is not elite education; it is mass education.... Schoolteachers are seen as masters of what most adults already know” (Labaree, 2000, p. 232).

While many believe teaching is necessary, it is a profession in which the workers (teachers) are seen as replaceable because what they do is “routine, remedial, even monotonous. Teaching is repetitive... but is often treated as unimportant, an experience exasperated by the teacher’s own sense that the work should be offered freely and spontaneously as a gift to students” (Pease, 1993, p. 135). Teachers are public servants whose work is “central to our lives” (Pease, 1993, p. 135) but society undoubtedly overlooks the expertise of teachers and the work that goes into all aspects of the job.

Half of teachers leave the profession altogether because they are dissatisfied. “Teachers who seem unlikely to persevere in teaching talk about how the workload is unreasonable and hopeless” (McCann, et al., 2005, p. 34). Many teachers that leave the profession are consumed with the demands outside of the classroom rather than being driven out by the needs of their students (p. 36). Demands outside the classroom included marriage, motherhood, the hours and workload required of the job beyond teaching and unforeseen life circumstances (Lortie, 2002; McCann, et al., 2005, Ingersoll, 2001). Teachers, both male and female, also cite feelings of being underpaid, not being supported by administrators who make decisions without teacher input, student discipline issues and student apathy. Most recent, the demands of standardized testing and the need to teach to the test have become growing concerns (Drury & Baer, 2001). With testing comes more work with data and increased amounts of paperwork. “The contemporary obsession with performance intensifies teachers’ work and has the

potential to erode vocation enjoyment and job satisfaction” (Brill & McCartney, 2008, p. 756) because performance is demanded teachers based on the performance of students.

One problem that arises from being in such a practice is that these ‘practitioners depend on their clients to achieve any results’ (qtd. Cohen 57) A surgeon can fix the ailment of a patient who sleeps through the operation and a lawyer can successfully defend a client who remains mute during the trial, but success for a teacher depends heavily on the active cooperation of the student. The student must be willing to learn what the teacher is teaching. Unless this intended learning takes place, the teacher is understood as having failed (Labaree, 2000, p. 228).

2.7 Early Flight

Even in the 1970s, Lortie (2002) noticed problems beginning teachers face, placing them in a “quagmire” that was unlike any other profession. Beginning teachers are often thrown into a classroom and expected to perform like the 25-year veteran teaching next door. “Teachers normally teach under conditions where they are the only professional in the room left to their own devices to figure out a way to manage a group of 30 students and move them through the required curriculum” (Labaree, 2000, p. 230). Novice teachers have the same schedule and responsibilities as a veteran, limited support, and often feel isolated from the rest of the staff. When negligence of novice teachers continues, schools are left with a hoard of young professionals seeking alternate employment. “To keep good teachers, we must find ways to achieve the

unfulfilled promise of public education...we need to do more to change the conditions faced by teachers” (Nieto, 2003, p. 18).

The issue at hand is that the zeal beginning teachers feel begins to fade. Subsequently, the percentage of teachers leaving in general is higher than many other professions. Twice as many teachers leave their profession over nurses, which is also a female-dominated profession. Five times the number of teachers leave when compared to the number of lawyers and professors who do (Ingersoll, 2001). McCann, Johannesson, and Ricca (2005) note findings by the National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future (2003) that compared teacher preparation to pouring water into a bucket with a “fist-sized hole in the bottom” (p. 8). Beginning teachers who are inexperienced may find the pressure to perform well on administrator evaluations and prove effectiveness through students’ test scores to be overwhelming and discouraging. If those feelings are not reconciled, then it is very likely those beginning teachers will leave the profession. “The teaching pool keeps losing water because no one is paying attention to the leak. That is we’re misdiagnosing the problem as recruitment, when it’s really ‘retention’” (McCann, et al., 2005, p. 3).

Ingersoll (2002) reports that there is an ample number of pre-service teachers enrolled in college and universities and teacher shortages cannot be attributed to college supply or retiring teachers who have served out their careers in the classroom. Ingersoll asserts that teachers are leaving the classroom at such a rapid pace and new teachers are not staying around with the intention of retiring out of the teaching profession. “Some observers continue to lament that teaching is not a lifetime career or,

in fact, a full-time commitment for many of those engaged in it” (Lortie, 2002, p. 23), causing the issue of teacher retention to warrant much attention. Partially, the intensity of the attention is due to the fear that students across the nation may not be receiving a quality education when their teachers are not highly qualified with little experience (Ingersoll, 2001), particularly when the increasing pressures for standardized testing performance was critical for funding, teacher evaluation, and students’ futures. As stated earlier, more and more teachers are citing standardized testing demands and the new “teach to the test” mentality as cause to leave the profession (Drury & Baer, 2011).

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Narrative inquiry, “stories lived and told” (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000, p. 20), was determined for a framework because the study would “consist of focusing on studying individuals, gathering data through the collection of their stories, reporting individual experiences, and chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 70). Lives of individuals are a constituted collection of experiences needing to be understood, which Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert to be the foundation for narrative inquiry. Through their lived experiences, the lives of people are a conglomeration of stories that are constantly being told, altered, reflected on, which go on to influence future stories. “Stories lived and told educate the self and others” (p. xxvi) providing researchers with qualitative data to be studied and explored. “Educators are interested in life... Educational researchers are, first, educators, and we too are interested in people... People’s lives and how they are composed and lived out are what is of interest” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxii).

For the purposes of this study, *beginning* teachers are defined as having less than five years’ experience, *experienced* teachers are those with six to nineteen years’ experience, and *veteran* teachers are those with more than twenty years’ experience. Parameters were defined before participant selection. Teachers who were teaching in

central Indiana made the sample of participants one of convenience, meaning all participants was easily accessible for interviews (Creswell, 2013). All teachers were invited by phone or by e-mail with a scripted invitation to the study. Three beginning teachers, three experienced teachers, and three veteran teachers were selected to discuss how they came to teaching, their lives as English teachers, and their future in the profession.

Gretchen, a beginning teacher, Bridgette, an experienced teacher and Susan, a veteran teacher were former colleagues of mine at a rural public school. Josephine and Natalie, two beginning teachers, were peers of mine during my undergraduate teaching program. Mary, Susan, and Joanna, two veteran teachers and one experienced teacher (respectively) were recommended to me by some of their former students. Kristen, an experienced teacher, came to the study through a joint university assignment to mentor a student teacher. All participants were given pseudonyms.

3.1 Participants

Since the majority of teachers in the United States are white, middle-class females (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2011), I elected to have a participant group that reflects this majority. The current study was conducted in hopes of understanding the lives of these teachers at various stages of their career because “more needs to be known about how, for example, teachers’ lives outside classes influence their teaching and the crucial

episodes and watersheds that mark shifts in attitudes in their careers” (qtd. in Ball & Goodson, 1981, p. 13).

Beginning teacher Josephine is divorced with one child and has completed three years as middle school English language arts teacher. In her current position, she serves as a literacy coach in the mornings and as a school data coordinator in the afternoons. She teaches in an urban school located approximately seventy miles from her hometown.

Beginning teacher Natalie is engaged with no children and has completed three years as a high school English language arts and creative writing teacher. She teaches in a small, rural school located approximately forty-five miles from where she grew up.

Beginning teacher Gretchen is single with no children and has completed two years as a middle school English language arts teacher. She teaches in a small, rural school located approximately twenty miles from where she grew up. She also coaches varsity boys swimming.

Experienced teacher Kristen is married with one child and has completed six years as a high school English language arts teacher. She teaches in a suburban school where she attended as a student. After becoming a mother, she gave up her appointment as a yearbook and newspaper advisor and her position as the varsity girls' golf coach.

Experienced teacher Bridgette is married with three children and has completed eight years as an English language arts teacher. Her current position is at the middle

school level. She teaches in the rural school she attended as a student. After becoming a mother, she gave up her appointment as the girls' volleyball coach.

Experienced teacher Joanna is divorced with no children and has completed fourteen years as a high school remedial English language arts teacher. She teaches in a rural school located approximately sixty miles from where she grew up. She is the National Honors Society sponsor.

Veteran teacher Mary is married with three children and will be retiring after the completion of her thirty-ninth year as a high school English language arts teacher. She teaches mostly AP courses at a suburban school located several states away from where she grew up.

Veteran teacher Susan is married with two children and has completed forty years as a high school English language arts teacher in the same school corporation. She teaches mostly AP courses at a rural school located several states away from where she grew up.

Veteran teacher Connie is single with no children and has completed forty-one years as a high school English language arts teacher. She teaches mostly AP courses at a rural school located approximately forty-five miles from her hometown.

Table 3.1 provides a general view of each participant based on years' experience, years in the same school corporation, the school setting, their current teaching assignment, their personal relationship status, and number of children, which all contribute to their identity in the classroom.

Table 3.1

Teacher Name	<i>Josephine</i>	<i>Natalie</i>	<i>Gretchen</i>	<i>Kristen</i>	<i>Bridgette</i>	<i>Joanna</i>	<i>Mary</i>	<i>Susan</i>	<i>Connie</i>
Years of Experience	3	3	2	6	8	14	39	40	42
Years in the same school	3	3	2	6	8	9	33	40	42
School Setting	Urban	Rural	Rural	Suburban	Rural	Rural	Suburban	Rural	Rural
Teaching Assignment	Middle School-Remediation	High School	Middle School	High School	Middle School	High School - Remediation	High School -AP	High School -AP	High School -AP
Relationship Status	Divorced	Engaged	Single	Married	Married	Divorced	Married	Married	Single
Children	1	0	0	1	2	0	3	2	0

3.2 Data Collection

A semi-structured interview guide with open questions (Appendix A) was designed and implemented. Patton (1980) describes an outlined basic set of questions to be explored throughout the interview to make sure “relevant topics are covered” as a “general interview guide approach” (p. 198). Eight basic questions were posed to participants throughout the interview with the sole intent of inquiring about their stories as English language arts teachers. There were a total of three sets of questions: one for each stage of teaching (beginning, experienced, and veteran).

Additional questions occurred only for elaboration on participants’ comments. Success in an interview is derived by following the direction in which the participant goes (Seidman, 1998). “Although the interviewer comes to each interview with a basic

question that establishes the purpose and focus of the interview, it is in response to what the participant says that the interviewer follows up, asks for clarification, seeks concrete details and requests stories” (Seidman, 1998, p. 66). Actual wording and sequence of questions may vary from interview to interview depending on how the participant directs the interview as a result of her stories (Patton, 1980).

For instance, as veteran teacher Susan described how she came to teaching, she stated that her biggest concern when she began teaching was appearing knowledgeable. I followed up her comment with the question, “Did you feel intimidated that they would ask something you wouldn’t know?” My follow up question allowed Susan to clarify her feelings, which led to a discussion of her teacher education program, aging and becoming a mother, and the impact of her master’s program assisting her teaching. My questions for clarification make the interview more informal, more of a conversation. This, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) is unavoidable. Researchers begin interviews “with the intention of conducting an interview, [but], the interview often turns into a form of conversation” (p. 110) when dialogue is exchanged back and forth between researcher and participant.

Each audiotaped interview was between 45 and 60 minutes long. I took notes during each interview and transcribed the interviews within a month after the interviews took place, producing approximately 75 single-spaced pages of total transcription.

3.3 Data Analysis

The transcriptions were read once through and narratively coded by theme where it was easy to see the “story lines that interweave and interconnect, gaps or silences that become apparent, tensions that emerge, and continuities and discontinuities that appear” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131). As more interviews were collected, each story began to inform the others, which solidified further themes among each group of teachers. The transcriptions were read a second time through with a focus on the commonalities in the participants’ teaching experiences. In other words, the narratives were first viewed holistically and then analyzed thematically (open coding).

Narrative inquiry also lends itself nicely to grounded theory analysis, which according to Strauss & Corbin (1990) “is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon” (p. 24). Due to my broad inquiry study investigating teachers’ lives on general terms, I anticipated forming a theory from the stories my participating teachers told. From their stories, I hoped to discover an overarching truth for my participants that might speak to teachers on a larger scale. According to Creswell (2012), grounded theory occurs when a researcher “is constantly comparing data gleaned from participants with ideas about the emerging theory” (p. 85) where the researcher can place “more emphasis on the views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions and ideologies of individuals than on the methods of research” (qtd. in Creswell, 2012).

As themes emerged and were documented through open coding, I implemented selective coding to identify the most frequent themes that occurred within each group of teachers and the over-arching topic spanning all three groups.

For example, coding led to one theme unique to the first few years of the career is when teachers have to reconcile the realities of teaching with their idealized expectations of students, administrators and their own teaching abilities. The three beginning teachers and two of the three experienced teachers discussed a “bubble bursting” effect that occurs between teacher preparation and the actual profession where idealizations about teaching, schools and students become realizations. Here, each beginning teacher recounted the ideal classroom and students they had envisioned throughout college were not what they encountered once they entered the profession after graduation.

A theme unique to the experienced phase of teaching is the fizzling of passion towards teaching. The experienced teachers were really focused on how they felt about their jobs, which had started to wane, taxing them professionally and personally. These demands inside and outside the classroom has caused disenchantment with the teaching profession making each teacher in this category question if finishing her career in education would be enjoyable, beneficial, or worthwhile. Since, the experienced teachers also recounted having a “bubble bursting” when they began teaching, I hypothesized that this might have aided in their current dissatisfaction with teaching, supporting the grounded theory notion of comparing teacher stories (data) together for an emerging theory (Creswell, 2012).

The final group of veteran teachers was focused on internal motivations that led them to success in the teaching profession. In other words, what are the veteran teachers doing 39+ years in the field which helped them overcome the “bubble bursting,” the taxing effects of the job the experienced teachers are currently facing, and the demands of personal life to help make their career successful? While reading veteran teacher transcripts, commonalities of assets they spoke of were linked together as keys to their success and staying power.

For all three sets of participants, the concern and frustration with student apathy was the lone issue combining these participants regardless of their experience level. They voiced particular concern for student apathy in regards to student performance on standardized testing, which will influence teacher evaluation. This concern was not tied to experience level, job satisfaction, or career plans of the participants. Comments regarding this issue were collapsed into a final theme, which will be analyzed at length, in my implications section.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

Each group of teachers had very specific experiences and concerns that were unique to their experience level. These experiences and concerns that beginning teachers voiced in their interviews were also recollected in interviews with the experienced and veteran teachers. Similarly, experienced teacher sentiments were recalled by the veteran teachers, producing a layering effect. Student apathy was the sole source of concern and frustration that crossed experience levels.

4.1 Beginning Teachers – Less than 5 years

Beginning teachers, or those with less than five years of experience, learn a great deal when they officially step into their own classrooms. Josephine, Natalie and Gretchen all discussed awakenings concerning students, administration, workload and community that had not become a reality until they became full-fledged teachers. These realizations lend themselves to a “bubble bursting” effect when dreams of perfect lessons, motivated and compliant students, and praise from faculty and administrators fail to become the everyday norm. Specifically for beginning teachers, the diverse needs and gaps in achievement are sometimes overwhelming.

Josephine and Gretchen always wanted to be teachers, but Natalie decided much later after the influence of a former English Language Arts teacher. Natalie actually started college saying she would “never be a teacher.” But it was the “love” for reading and writing, much like Josephine and Gretchen, which aided her in selecting English Language Arts as a content focus and a hope to impact students. Gretchen’s mother, a high school math teacher, was a big influence on Gretchen choosing education, and an asset in preparing her somewhat for the life of a teacher. Josephine cited a strong love of reading as a reason for steering her toward English Language Arts. However, these women would come to realize that not all students shared their love for school or achieve the same success.

4.1.1 Bubble Bursting

All three of the beginning teachers cited this bubble bursting that occurred when they walked into their own classroom as a professional educator. The idealizations of teaching they held (stemming from childhood for Josephine and Gretchen) were not realized when they become teachers. Thus, they have had to reconcile the difference. Despite being in the classroom as pre-service teachers for observations, practicums, and student teaching field experiences, all three beginning teachers still felt unprepared for several aspects of the job. Natalie voiced that the teaching profession is “idealized” and warns other who think about teaching that “it is nothing like what your professors tell you.” Josephine also voiced having to face realities of teaching her first year:

There's this burst of your ideal bubble when you first start teaching. And it's not exactly what you thought it would be. First year, my first experience was an open house and I was so excited. I had everything set out and I had 6 parents show up. These kinds of things we dream about with our perfect classroom and you don't necessarily get that.

The community and home life for Gretchen and Josephine impact their teaching daily. Gretchen attributes some of her lower performing students' scores to uninvolved parents who do not see the value in education. On the opposite end of the spectrum, she attributes higher-performing students' scores to overinvolved parents who sometimes try to intimidate teachers into placing their child's interests above other students by "babying" them. "That infuriates me...My job is to teach them responsibility and to make sure they are learning and growing as people, which sounds kind of like a mother, but it's become part of the job now." Josephine's urban school community is a cause for concern with poverty and home life factors which affect learning, but she contests that most parents just "want what is best" for their children and eventually come around to working with her.

The daily successful lessons and the hopes that all students will participate and understand, unfortunately, are not what these three women have experienced on a daily basis. Gretchen and Natalie found this to be a discouraging reality. Gretchen said, "You will have a student that it does not matter what you do, you are not going to reach them." Natalie echoed her sentiment, "You can't get everybody. They tell you that you

can, that if you try these different things and all of these different methods, you'll get everybody."

The students who do not pass their classes and/or standardized testing, Gretchen, Josephine, and Natalie categorize as low-academic achieving students. Exactly how low some students were was something middle school teachers Josephine and Gretchen were not prepared for. Gretchen's describes some of her middle school students as "non-readers" who come to her classroom with a faint understanding of anything beyond sight words. "I don't know if it's because I've just forgotten how I was in 7th grade or if they really are just low. That was the main shock for me. We had four kids who were "below record" in reading," she says.

In order to combat the low ability of her students, Josephine felt the need to take additional trainings in order to effectively teach these students since her education did not prepare her enough for the students she currently has. Natalie feels that teacher education programs adequately prepare teachers to "teach to the middle," but it is up to the teacher to learn how to teach to the gifted or the struggling. To do this, teachers have to invest additional time and resources, which can potentially be stressful. Josephine feels that the "overwhelming" work load, including the "additional responsibilities on top of teaching and lesson planning" required of teachers was something she was not prepared for.

4.1.2 Inexperience

In addition to time management and students' needs, there is another issue regarding the teachers themselves. Being young and inexperienced was a cause for concern for all three beginning teachers during their first year as a classroom teacher. Josephine remembers an encounter with a male student when she taught high school. She was "hit on" in her first year. "A guy was like 'Hey, are you new here?' And I was like, 'Yeah, I'm the teacher. He was immediately quiet and walked away. They almost see you as 'one of them.'" When students are aware of youth, some teachers worry about that communicating inexperience and incompetence. This was a large concern for Natalie who recounted, "My main source of worry was that they weren't going to take me seriously. When I started teaching, it was 'Oh, you're only four years older than us. We could have been in college together!' And I was like, 'Yeah, we really could have!" In addition to being young, Gretchen feels her physical size sets her at a disadvantage and causes an additional concern. "I'm twenty-four, but I'm a small person. I'm 5'3," about 125 pounds. I have a baby face. My first year of teaching, my students thought I was 18 and straight out of high school. I look like one of them! I walk down the hallway and half the kids are taller than I am. My first year, twin girls invited me to a sleepover!"

Age, however, is not always a source of conflict. After the first year, Josephine, Natalie and Gretchen all cited their age as being an asset to the job. Josephine, in particular, works in an urban school where she says her kids are very "pop-culture oriented"; therefore, engaging with students in ways beyond academics through television and music is a solid way to build rapport. Natalie says, "It is nice to be young

because you're still cool." Natalie asserts she tries to use her "coolness" to her advantage by discussing important issues with them on their level, coming from a similar generational mindset, in hopes that she can get them to think and act responsibly regarding social issues. Gretchen hasn't been invited to another sleepover since those first few weeks her first year, to which she attributes her ongoing presence in the school and having former students' younger siblings. While being young does have its benefits, these three participants do note that their limited experience is daunting considering what is expected of them.

4.1.3 Educational Reform

Beyond students, the job itself affords its own issues that Josephine, Natalie and Gretchen worry about. While instructing and working with lower students is not a complaint, Josephine worries about what their low performance means for her, for her school and for the community. "My concerns are obviously day to day stuff, budgetary cuts, evaluations, all of those things we hear about in the media." With her state pushing hard for student performance and data driven decisions, she cannot help but feel pressure. However, she is optimistic it will pass. "I think that education works as a pendulum and we are seeing a really strong push right now of taking away from the classroom with government control. And I think eventually we will see a swing back to a more happy medium." But as it stands and the push for high scores continues, Josephine notes that it is a struggle to get those not involved in education, like parents, to "buy into" the importance of scores for teachers' jobs and school funding. "There's

just so much we need to prove.” Natalie’s fear was heightened her first year as a sophomore teacher, due to the ECA exam in English Language Arts. But that fear has subsided year after year when her students continue to meet goals. However, her concern with scores stems from lack of support for students who fail to meet the goal. “I still feel a little bit lost in the fact that when my kids come in, the kids that are going to pass it are the kids who have always passed it. The kids who aren’t going to pass are the kids who’ve always struggled.”

Gretchen also worries about the lack of support. For her lowest class, she has four students who are below record in reading and another twelve with IEPs. Though she has an aide in the classroom, the aide is not trained for special education or English Language Arts. This, Gretchen feels, puts her and other teachers like her at an “incredible disadvantage” that might reflect poorly in her evaluations, thus, affecting how much she earns.

4.1.4 Stay or Leave?

For the future of these beginning teachers, only Josephine is currently planning on remaining. Her goals, however, will take her out of the classroom. She has enjoyed the literacy coaching aspect of her current position that she hopes maybe she could “move on to something more of an educational leadership role” someday. Gretchen worries, but is at a loss for what other profession she would turn to. “I’ve tried to think of what else I could do, but nothing else fits.” She acknowledges the emotional rollercoaster of the job, but on a whole, she is happy:

There will be days where you will go home and say, ‘Why the heck am I a teacher?’ What in the world made me do this job?’ Then a couple days later, you’ll have that feeling that there’s nothing else I’d rather do. This is amazing.’ She says she is planning to stay, but she is not fully committed. “The only reason that would change is if I got married and my husband made enough money that I could do something else, something smaller.”

Natalie is so unsure of the teaching profession right now that she even tells her students who consider teaching, “Don’t go be a teacher. It’s a scary field right now!” For herself, she hesitates to say she will remain a teacher until retirement. “I don’t know, I really don’t [know if I will stay in education].” “Just because I’m a teacher now that doesn’t mean I know what I want to be when I grow up.” Changing policy, salary concerns, and limited support feed her hesitation:

I can’t imagine doing anything else, but things are getting scary... Would I be happy in a profession like I am in teaching? Probably not. Would I miss teaching? I’m sure I would because I really feel like I belong in the classroom. Part of me says I’m a lifer... and part of me says, ‘I don’t know if I can afford to stay here that long.’”

4.2 Experienced Teachers – 6-19 Years

Experienced teachers, those with at least six years but fewer than twenty to their credit, are familiar with the inner workings of their school, gain comfort in their identity as a teacher, while looking for opportunities to keep the job from becoming tedious.

Kristen, Bridgette and Joanna all discuss the lull in their passion as commitments outside the classroom beckon their attention and changes within the educational system incite fear for the future. They attribute these factors as reasons for their current state of dissatisfaction with teaching, causing them to reevaluate the rewards versus the hardships of remaining a teacher.

Kristen, Bridgette, and Joanna did not know they would be teachers until they had reached adulthood. Even so, they had great plans. Bridgette hoped to “save the world” in her classroom. Kristen wanted her students to like being in her room even if they hated her content, hoping that she could get them to care, “understand and be able to talk about a subject or a story or a play, to talk about it intellectually at some point if they have to.” Joanna remembered an elementary teacher and dreamed of emulating that teacher’s caring attitude, in turn, making students feel valued and capable of achieving the academic tasks set before them. The zeal they initially felt has faded since they first began teaching.

4.2.1 Remembering the Bubble Bursting

Like the beginning teachers, it was a common finding that the experienced teachers also experienced a bubble bursting effect when they first began teaching. They recalled “gray” issues that weren’t specifically addressed in their teacher education classes in college or in field experiences. To make up for this, they have had to learn on the job in order to cope with the tensions of being so close to students in age, that not all students are equally motivated, serious discipline issues, and the workload in

teaching extends beyond instruction and grading. Kristin remembers toeing the line between being a college graduate and a professional. "I think sometimes the lines were blurred, maybe. I was a 22 year old person coming in to teach an 18 year old how to do everything." Unlike Joanna, Kristen and Bridgette had the additional complication of attempting professionalism when they came back to teach at their former high schools while working with former teachers. Kristen admits, "I wasn't ever thinking about coming back to my high school... having my administrator call me 'kiddo' because he called me that as a high school student was awkward." Bridgette recalled the same issues, but said after a few years, their views seemed to change and they began to see her as an adult and a professional teacher instead of a former student.

Like the beginning teachers, Bridgette had the disheartening realization that she would fail to "save" all students. She remembered thinking in her first year she could "fix everybody" while maintaining control and earning students love and respect. Her reality of teaching, however, failed short of that idealistic expectation. Joanna's schedule and environment shattered her idealistic vision right away. "Nothing could have prepared me for five preps my first year" when she had different grade levels and classes to prepare for each day. With that stress, she also worked in a school she compared to "working in a zoo," in which a female student physically assaulted her.

4.2.2 Personal and Professional Stressors

"Bubble bursting" has not been the only common experience among the three experienced teachers. They all noticed a shift in the amount of work required of them

as the increasing pressure for students to perform on standardized tests impacts students' futures in academics, their teachers' pay and their school's reputation. Kristen stated that her biggest frustration with teaching is the feeling that "it's a lot of work that doesn't seem to be bringing anything to the table." She noted that she wants to work hard and wouldn't be against working more if she could see the goal and understood why it was worth the work invested. Bridgette and Joanna also cited the workload outside teaching to be taxing on their job satisfaction. Bridgette, in particular, noted that many people do not understand what teaching is unless they have taught:

People think teachers go to school from eight to three and then you're done. We don't get overtime for all the grading and all the other stuff we have to do. I think it's very time consuming.

Aside from grading, Joanna stated that teachers are now required to "prove" they teach by documenting student mastery of content. She said she was "uncomfortable with all the data-driven work," in part because of her assignment with remedial students who she believes will not test as well as other teachers' groups of academic or advanced students.

The workload aside from preparing lessons and grading papers has also added to the stress and pressure these experienced teachers feel. As her state has adopted the Common Core standards and implemented a new merit-pay system, these teachers have undergone large changes from when they first entered the profession. The focus on so much standardized testing has Bridgette viewing her class periods as a test-prep hour because "there is little room to do anything else."

While Kristin has several general classes to rely on, Joanna has four periods of low-level students, three of which have a special education co-teacher. Despite fourteen years as a classroom teacher who has primarily worked with struggling students, Joanna's experience does not ease away her stress regarding teacher evaluations and merit pay, which are influenced by student scores. Joanna's concerns steepen when her students have no intention of going to college; therefore, do not see the value in school, further intensifying the anxiety in a career she once greatly enjoyed.

Kristin and Joanna have the lower level students, which both feel has its own added pressures as their state heads toward an evaluation model that considers student standardized test scores as an indicator of teacher effectiveness. Kristin is unsure of what this means for her: "We have orders that are so vague, yet we're accountable. I feel like we're just being thrown to the wolves and it's going to be on the front page of every newspaper that our school is 'failing'. That means that we are failing." If her students do not do well on tests, Kristin feels that it will become the sole measure of her abilities as a teacher. Joanna echoed this sentiment when she stated, "I hate the fact that I will be 'graded' on how many students I have passing or that show improvement."

Even Bridgette feels the heat, despite having one section of academic eighth graders and only one section of remedial students. The class she will have next year has nearly twenty percent with documented IEPs and she only has one period with an aide who is not trained in special education. However, she is not only worried about students who struggle with academics. If students have an off day or have difficulty engaging or seeing the value in a standardized test, their scores will soon be reflective on the

teacher's abilities. The pressure, these women feel, is greater for English Language Arts teachers over other content areas. Bridgette asserts, "There's a lot of other factors that go into these kids not passing and I feel a lot of pressure. At times, it's just overwhelming and too much and it makes me not want to do it."

While the pressures and stressors inside the classroom are great, there are also factors outside the classroom to consider. Bridgette and Kristin have young children at home who are also influencing the way they feel about their jobs. Both Bridgette and Kristin are married to secondary teachers who are coaches. While marriage did not deter their time or passion for teaching, motherhood has changed the way Kristin and Bridgette view the job. Bridgette remarked, "Once I had kids, a family, I'm not going to lie. It's not my number one priority. I don't have the time to put into it that I should." Kristin tried to continue as a teacher and a coach as a new mother, but found it too overwhelming:

I went through one season with my little girl and it was just hard. I was gone a lot. My husband is a varsity basketball coach and we went from one season to the next and it was constant getting home late, missing the weekends, Saturday tournaments you were gone all day. I was ready to be done it if meant missing her growing up. I didn't want to do that.

When they had children, both quit coaching. Bridgette stated that her husband's football coaching job paid more money so it made sense for her to quit coaching volleyball. Kristin also noted her husband's basketball coaching job paid more than her girls' golf appointment.

4.2.3 Weighing Their Options

After investing several years in the profession, Kristin, Bridgette and Joanna find themselves weighing their options. Kristin does not have set plans to leave, but she is not ruling out leaving the classroom. “It depends on how things shake out politically... what happens if something happens? I feel confident in myself, but what if something else happens?” Thinking about the workload, falling perception of teachers and political changes frighten her, but she noted that “making a difference” is what keeps her in the classroom. “If I feel like I can’t do that anymore because everything is so restricted, I think that might be when I’m so discouraged that I can’t do it anymore.” Like Kristin, Joanna’s satisfaction with teaching has begun to sour:

If I would have been asked if I would stay in education several years ago, my answer would have been a resounding yes. I love my job. Currently, I’m in a funk. I am scared of where public education is going.

Bridgette is the most disillusioned with teaching. She is certain she will leave the classroom; however, she is unsure when that will be. She has financial concerns about leaving since her husband is also a teacher, but she no longer enjoys teaching. “It used to be enjoyable without all the stress of accountability and all that stuff. I don’t mean to be negative, but it’s turned me this way.”

4.3 Veteran Teachers – More than 20 years

Veteran teachers are those with at least twenty years of active teaching who are perfecting or have perfected their craft. Most are close to retirement eligibility, but the

three women in this study surpassed this and continue to teach.. Mary, Susan, and Connie, have taught roughly four decades in the secondary English Language Arts classroom, which has had its share of struggles. However, these three women have become legends in their classroom to their students and also to beginning teachers who hope to have the same staying power. Mary, Susan and Connie have been in the teaching profession 39, 40, and 41 years, respectively. When asked how they felt about spending their lives in the teaching profession, they all smile and recount stories of reward, change, and pride.

Mary and Connie had dreams of teaching since they were young girls. Mary “drove [her] poor, little brother absolutely out of his mind” when she made him play school, complete with worksheets. Connie’s sixth grade teacher took a special interest in her, allowing her to grade papers, which “whet the appetite” for teaching. Connie continued to assist her teachers all through high school. Susan’s student teaching experience with a former high school teacher was less than stellar, which left her conflicted on entering the profession. Upon graduating college, she ended up taking her first teaching job over an editor position at a magazine. “I came back to the idea of teaching out of fear of going to New York!” she claimed.

4.3.1 Keys to Success

Mary, Susan, and Connie were not master teachers their first few years in the classroom. As different as their personal lives are and their missions in the classroom,

Mary, Susan and Connie have four very distinct commonalities they attribute to their success.

One, all admit to time and experience being the greatest teacher once they took over their own classrooms. Practice and determination resulted in the experience needed to become a master. Mary stated, "As time went on, I gained a wider repertoire that I memorized and I can just crank out." Experience in other areas also gave Susan an edge she didn't have when she began teaching: "When I hit my 30s and I had my own child, I felt grown up. My most important concern was that they think I was knowledgeable. When I got into my master's program, more confidence came." Connie agreed stating that "it probably took me ten years to really feel like I knew where I was going and where I wanted [students] to go."

Two, they have all taught in the same school district the majority of their careers (Mary taught thirty-three of her thirty-nine years in the same district, while Connie and Susan have spent their entire careers in the same district). Their longevity has helped them become staples in the community and a prominent figure in the school. Susan jokes that she has "job security" because some of her former students are on the school board. Many of her former students have succeeded in college, thanks to her intensive writing instruction. Some have even gone on to receive their doctorates, thanking Susan for their strong foundation in academic writing. Connie's reputation as "The Colonel" has been running strong for several decades. Describing herself as a no-nonsense, "tough taskmaster," Connie attributes this reputation's staying power to teaching the children of former students who already know what is expected of them. Mary also

attributed her prominence in the community to the prolonged contact she has had with families by teaching former students.

Three, all three veteran teachers have a master's degree which allows them to teach advanced placement English courses (AP) because the master's degree is a prerequisite to instructing an advanced group of students. As mentioned earlier, Susan cited her master's degree as an asset in confidence while Mary noted that obtaining her master's degree and more experience in the classroom expanded her repertoire. Susan described her emerging "confidence" that grew tremendously with age, but particularly with her master's degree. She felt earning an advanced degree eliminated the fear about students questioning whether she was "knowledgeable" or not. She also stated that the master's program allowed her to get into the "more fun" aspects and concepts of literature and instruction. Connie joked that her nervousness only returns when the school adopts a new textbook. After earning her master's degree and gaining ten years' experience in the classroom, she said, "I knew what I needed to do, where I needed to go with them."

Four, with a reputation and additional training, these three veteran teachers believe they would struggle if they did not strive to remain relevant to their students. Mary and Connie both rely heavily on personal stories to make content more relevant and accessible. Mary has found that teaching vocabulary words like *somnambulate* in connection to a story about her brother, who used to sleepwalk, help students retain information much longer. Susan also brings in media sources like *Saturday Night Live* to the classroom to teach concepts like parody and sarcasm. Mary also has been known to

bust out in song or sing along with students who are singing Taylor Swift, aweing students that someone her age even knows who Taylor Swift is. Susan and Mary strive to read what her students are reading. The books don't necessarily have to be from the Young Adult genre or academically stimulating. Susan refers to some of the books her students read as "mind-numbing," but attributes her relationship with some students to her understanding of something they enjoy. But she also connects with students who read classics like *Pride and Prejudice* and can direct them to other classics they may not be aware of. Mary "really enjoys young adult literature" because it is "fast" and "fun" and she designs fun projects around YAL that is different from a traditional book report to encourage students to keep reading.

4.3.2 From Veteran Eyes

Retirement eligibility has passed all three veteran teachers by nearly a decade and Mary is the only one retiring this year. When asked about plans for the future, Connie joked, "Some days I think, 'What am I doing?' Especially when I look at those stacks of papers and think, 'You've got to be kidding me!'" But she says it is her belief that she has work left to do. Plus, the love of students keeps her in the classroom. Susan also stated that retirement "certainly won't be this year" because she is having such a good year. She is going to take it year by year to see when she will officially leave. Mary, who plans to retire at the conclusion of the 2011-2012 school year, says she is too exhausted and cannot quite keep up anymore, especially with her AP classes. But she confesses to having "mixed feelings" because it will be "so hard" to leave her students.

In regards to the political changes, she even feels guilty about retiring, as if she is “betraying” her colleagues by “leaving them in a mess without leadership.”

While their careers are nearing their end, they are concerned about the future of teaching and teaching English Language Arts. The teaching profession feels like an upcoming war full of “derision” where “teachers will be more competitive and more unwilling to work as a unit... to do good things for the kids,” according to Mary. Connie noted a declining work ethic and devotion to a company, where teachers are becoming “so demoralized” they feel that teaching is “just a paycheck.” All three women feel that even as veteran teachers, their experiences and opinions matter little to politicians making decision about education or even to their administrators who are following orders.

Mary noted that her content is taken “less seriously” because of the increasing focus on math and science. For their content, English Language Arts is undergoing a serious makeover with the implementation of the Common Core. As literature and narrative writing are taking a backseat to informational texts and analytical writing, the job of an English Language Arts teacher is beginning to look unfamiliar to those who are currently practicing. Connie believes that schools are developing students for “fluent research in the business world” as reasons for the literature and creativity edge out. Susan stated that by lessening the importance of literary and creativity is to “lose the heart” of English Language Arts.

Sadly, all three veteran teachers said they would rethink their teaching career if they were entering teaching right now. Mary said she’d “think twice” because it is such

“a mess” and the requirements of teachers weren’t there when she began her career. Susan said she “wouldn’t do it” if she “didn’t love it,” but she would urge those who have just begun a career in teaching to “give it time.” Connie even urges those considering a career in teaching to reconsider:

If someone asked me if they should go into education, I would say don’t do it.

And that’s sad because this has been my life. And I don’t think anyone should do it. It’s the politics and it’s scary right now.

4.4 Spanning the Years: The Concern of Student Apathy

No matter their background, teaching assignment or experience level, every participant voiced that student apathy was a topic of concern and/or frustration. Apathy rears itself in students who do the bare minimum to get by, that Connie noted, or to the other end of the spectrum, as Joanna mentioned, where students blatantly refuse to even pick up a pencil.

For beginning teacher Josephine, she notices it more in “general” classes rather than in classes with struggling students. She believes that in the lower performing classes, they feel so defeated that when “someone is working with them at their level, they are eager to participate.” When she thinks about her general education classes, she said that those apathetic students just seem “shut off” and no matter what teachers try, the switch does not get flipped. Gretchen said apathy appears in every class, no matter the level: “Certain students, even though they’re low or learning disabled, they are some of the hardest workers you’ll ever meet” but others, she notes, “refuse to try.”

She said she is shocked when it comes to engaging in the classroom; there is “no in-between [for students]. They either do it or they don’t.” Natalie remembered one sophomore boy in particular who just sat in her class every day. She attributes it to “laziness” because “he is smart enough to do the work.” Natalie does not understand the reason for his unwillingness and lack of motivation.

Experienced teachers Joanna, Kristin and Bridgette are frustrated with apathy and what it means for their students’ futures. With all the political changes, however, they are increasingly concerned for their jobs since they are now being held accountable for student scores. Joanna says it’s unfair that she has to “account for failures” when students refuse to do the “limited work” she asks of them or to even “stay awake” in class. She feels that schools communicate “low expectations of students” each year by doing away with responsibility and homework. By doing that, she argues, schools are “turning out young people with no work ethic.” Bridgette said her biggest frustration with teaching is not laziness or lack of work ethic; it is the perception of “the kids that don’t care.” Students who say, “Fuck this. This is stupid” make Bridgette wonder why she even bothers: “I just think that’s the most negative. I mean the kids that refuse to do anything, that’s the most negative and frustrating thing to get past.” When Bridgette taught high school, she noted that it was worse. In middle school, “you can still get the kids to care. They’re not as apathetic.” In the high school, Kristin attributes apathy in her junior and senior level classrooms to students being academically misplaced year after year. When students are allowed to take the “easier road” or not placed in the correct class to challenge them, they “slip through the cracks.” She also feels that a lot of what

is expected to be taught is “outdated,” but because it is “approved material,” it sticks around. She feels teachers need to “reinvent the wheel each year” in order to keep kids interested.

Being a veteran with experience and an advanced degree does not exclude Connie, Mary or Susan from dealing with apathy in their classrooms. After thirty-nine years in the classroom, Mary’s biggest concern remains with students “that don’t try. The kids that come in and put their heads down on the desk. That just drives me nuts!” She is overly sympathetic to students who struggle, saying, “I don’t care if they don’t get it. I will help them get it! But if they don’t try to get it, that’s just a problem.” Sally feels that the curriculum may be to blame because we are “missing our deeper thinkers” because curriculum is not combining writing with critical thinking. Instead, she argues, we are “producing automaton work rather than the genius type of that that has driven our country in public education.” Connie feels that students’ appreciation of education has decreased over the years and sometimes it feels like “pulling teeth” to get them interested. In a world of advanced technology, anything from a different time seems irrelevant. She also feels the bombardment of standardized testing has jaded students. She feels politicians and policymakers have “asked too much, too quick” and “can’t expect these kids overnight to learn stuff they’ve never been introduced to.” Merit pay has Connie’s colleagues worried because they feel policymakers have forgotten that “the kids have to buy into [standardized testing] and they don’t. They don’t care.”

CHAPTER 5. IMPLICATIONS

On a daily basis, teachers like the women in this study encounter stress from all different contributing sources. These women walk a fine line between the frustrations of the job and the reward of impacting students, the reason they entered teaching to begin with. Only time will tell if frustration or reward will win out in the battle toward retirement. For the veteran teachers who are retirement eligible, their reflections on a career in the classroom tell a powerful story to recruit or repel future teachers.

5.1 Is Teaching Worth It?

Even if teachers are able to withstand the classroom reality of non-perfect students, teaching responsibilities, and administrative pressures, there are still additional stressors in the profession causing teachers to hesitate committing fully to teaching. Changes in educational policy and reform have been going on for decades, but the current high stakes accountability culture is changing teacher roles while taking an intense toll on classroom teachers (Valli & Buese, 2007). The demands of standardized testing and increased teacher accountability have changed teacher roles and are changing the experience of the profession. Teacher instruction is becoming increasingly mandated and confined while teacher focus has shifted to grouping students according

to academic levels, differentiation expectations and data collection and analysis of student performance (Valli & Buese, 2007). These factors, commented on by all nine participants, regardless of experience level, are reasons for recent dissatisfaction and growing concern with the future of the teaching profession.

Particularly for experienced teacher, Joanna, teacher accountability based on student scores is worrisome for teachers working with remedial students who are performing lower on standardized tests. If administrators choose to believe that student scores are true indicators of a teachers' effectiveness, then if even one student fails, a teacher is failing in some aspect. Then, the reverse must also be true. If students succeed, teachers succeed. "Since these outcomes are labeled 'outstanding' the inference is that most teaching falls short of those standards. The implication is clear; teaching is intensely problematic and its psychic rewards are not automatic" (Lortie, 2002, p. 121). Alsup (2005) argues this is more taxing for female teachers who take on their students failures as their own and internalize it. Klassen & Chiu (2001) also note that female teachers have higher levels of stress than their male counterparts due to several factors, including demands in domestic areas and the habit of internalizing stress as Alsup asserted. If teachers are overloaded, stressed and not seeing results in the classroom, their job satisfaction understandably decreases along with their perceptions of themselves as teachers (Klassen & Chiu, 2001).

The changes in educational policy undoubtedly affects educational practice causing teachers from all experience levels to become increasingly dissatisfied in their profession. As this study shows, practicing teachers are discouraging younger people

from entering the teaching profession. Three of the women in this study recounted times of telling their own students who were college bound for teacher education not to enter teaching because of political changes and rising pressures of the job. The three veteran teachers who devoted their lives to instructing students said they would “think twice” if they were entering the profession in its current state. One beginning teacher and two experienced teachers are considering departure while one beginning teacher and one experienced teacher have plans to leave. Only one participant of nine views teaching more positively and has a solid intention of staying, while recommending the profession to others.

5.2 Expectations Do Not Meet Reality

The whirlwind of political changes, like the rising expectations of students and teacher responsibilities influence a teacher before she even takes a position as head of a classroom. For beginning teachers who have high expectations and idealized visions of the classroom, the realities of the profession might be discouraging when lesson plans go awry, students misbehave, or administrators are unsupportive. Often, the disenchantment with the profession and frustration with students, administrators and self take hold. All nine of the participants recounted their first year as a period of reconciling themselves to the realities of the teaching profession. While the beginning teachers in this study, Josephine, Natalie and Gretchen, were primarily focused on how they were currently adapting, the experienced teachers (Kristin, Bridgette, and Joanna) and the veteran teachers (Susan, Connie, and Mary) remembered walking in as novices

and encountering “shock,” “disappointment” and “frustration” when teaching was not what they had envisioned. “Frustration results in part from the significant mismatch between the teacher’s expectation for the experience of teaching and the realization of the actual experience” (McCann, et al., 2005, p. 21) leading to disenchantment with teaching. This beginning teacher predicament causes added stress, adversely working against effective decision-making and performance reflection (Lortie, 2002).

Particularly for beginning teachers, the pressure is arguably greatest due to the changing climate of high stakes accountability. Even as a novice, beginning teachers are expected to masterfully teach, assess, plan and cope as a professional (McCann et al, 2005; Lortie, 2002; Shoffner, 2011). If beginning teachers fail to measure up to the performance expected of them, feelings of failure, waning confidence and dissatisfaction are likely to take hold (Shoffner, 2011). It is apparent that the first few years of teaching are critical. When expectations of pre-service teachers are “fulfilled” or “undermined” after they transition to practicing teachers, the experience that measures up to expectations or the experience that falls short is shaping a path that will continue to gain momentum. Consequently, if a teacher is happy in the classroom the first few years, she is more likely to stay than the teacher whose experiences fall short of her preconceived expectations (Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007).

Beginning teacher Josephine, who is thriving and has been promoted to an advanced teaching position, is the only teacher of the beginning and experienced group that is definitely planning to remain in education, though she is considering moving upward and out of the classroom. Her position, however, sets her apart from the other

women in this study because she is leading her school in the adoption of standards, testing, and data analysis required from both. Hence, she is given time in the school day to devote to the focus on standards and accountability instead of adding these issues on top of a full day of instruction.

But not everyone is embracing teaching like Josephine. Several of the participants remarked on the negative perception of teachers they have encountered from those outside the classroom. Experienced teacher Kristin stated, "It's really hard dealing with public opinion. I feel like teachers used to be held in high regard and that has certainly swayed." Veteran teacher Connie remarked how students' respect for teachers has gone "tremendously downhill," but more so, she feels teachers cannot rely on parents of students for support like they once could. In regards to teachers, she said, "we're in the wrong" on any conflict between a student and a teacher.

All three of the veteran teachers stated that they feel less valued by their administrators now than at any time in their career. Mary said, "I feel less respected as an English teacher" because "they're concentrating on the STEM things, the science, technology, engineering and math." Connie also acknowledged this decrease in respect, but thinks it is because administrators "feel the pressure [from the state]" and are being held accountable to their teachers' performance because "[consequences] will come down on them, too."

The demands from the state department of education, lack of parental support, and administrative pressures are chipping away at the vision of teaching these teachers once held. The women actively planning their departure from the classroom (Bridgette

and Natalie) and those who hesitate to commit through retirement (Joanna, Gretchen and Kristin) are approaching a breaking point in their profession. Essentially, with all the political changes faced by their state, which is impacting their school districts, these teachers will have to reconcile themselves to these changes in instruction, emphasis on data-driven decisions, teacher accountability, and other issues of concern or their satisfaction will continue to deteriorate.

5.3 Student Apathy

Beginning teachers often find themselves disillusioned with the realities of the teaching profession, but student apathy in particular lingers as the sole issue in which all nine of the participants in this study cannot release their idealizations. In schools across the country, expectations of students and teachers are also on the rise with the implementation of the Common Core Standards for students and stricter teacher evaluation procedures. Despite these intensifying expectations, however, some students are not moved to prove themselves in the classroom, which is perhaps the most devastating for the nine women in this study to realize year after year. The reality of the classroom is that not all students will pass, not because they are incapable, but because some do not see the value in the education they receive, an attitude difficult for teachers to understand and breach. Since the disenchantment with schooling begins around third or fourth grade, secondary teachers face increasing difficulty as they encounter older students who are combatting years of apathy and resistance to schooling (Fried, 2001).

When teachers are faced with students who are unlike themselves, a wall exists, dividing and distancing the possibility of mutual success. For teachers who are confident in the power of school and dedicated to education, coming face to face with a student who distrusts and dismisses the notion of education is often difficult to overcome. This is particularly evident in schools where the student body is not dominated by the homogenous race and/or class of its teachers, posing its own set of challenges (Shoffner, Brown, D'Arcy, Long, & Salyer, 2010).

Issues of power are particularly relevant for programs that most often prepare white, middle class teachers from small towns or suburbs to teach in communities (of color in high poverty urban schools). Studies show that such teachers generally have 'limited experience with those from cultures or areas different from their own': many have 'negative attitudes and beliefs about those different from themselves (Warshauer Freedman & Appleman, 2008, p. 112).

The contrasting view on education is a primary source of conflict when a teacher assumes that an apathetic student does not buy into the value of learning. Most teachers had a positive experience with education and former teachers, which contributed to a decision to enter teaching in the first place. Teachers may find it easier to relate to students who are most like themselves (Olson, 2008). If teachers were successful in school and compliant with teacher assignments, a student who refuses to engage and does not complete tasks is a source of discontent. Student apathy, according to all the participants in this study, regardless of experience level, is a phenomenon in the classrooms evoking anger, frustration, and fear due to the

increasing pressure for students to perform well on standardized tests. The conflict arises when “the student must be willing to learn what the teacher is teaching. Unless this intended learning takes place, the teacher is understood as having failed” (Labaree, 2000, p. 228).

5.4 The Value of Teaching

The bar of success for teachers is high and, according to Lortie (2002), teaching holds a “high respectability of a particular kind” (p. 10). However, there is a disconnect because teachers “do not receive the level or types of deference reserved for those working in the learned professions occupying high government office or demonstrating success in business” (Lortie, 2002, p. 10), where promotions for advanced degrees are encouraged, valued, and rewarded. Labaree’s (2000) astute assertion is that the general perception of teachers hinges on the belief that they possess skills and knowledge that are “thoroughly ordinary,” (p. 232) making them masters of common knowledge. Veteran teacher Mary stated that people “think they are experts in school because they have attended school.” Even teachers themselves do not perceive teacher education as “conveying something special – as setting them apart from others” (Lortie, 2002, p. 160), implying that teacher training does not make them masters of a difficult skill or unique expertise.

The Indiana State Board of Education voted to change licensing law under REPA II, which now allows anyone with a college degree, a 3.0 grade-point average, and a passing content examination to become a teacher, meaning teacher training, student

teaching experience, or classes on instructional methods are no longer required, communicating to teachers that even their initial training is moot (Ritz, 2012). If teacher training in a bachelor's program is no longer required, then a master's degree is certainly unnecessary.

In 2011, 52% of public school teachers had a degree beyond their initial teacher training (National Center for Educational Statistics). In 2011, twenty-four states promoted teachers earning advanced degrees. Only sixteen required paying teachers additionally while the other eight required it for top licensure (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2012). The view of teacher's additional training has changed tides, considering the high emphasis on student achievement. Senior Policy Analyst at the Center for American Progress, Raegen Miller stated, "The relationship between the [master's] degree and student achievement is nonexistent" (Sawchuk, 2009, p. 6). Miller's organization did find that content area advanced degrees held a positive relationship with student achievement, but those with advanced degrees in education or school leadership held "far less evidence" (Sawchuk, 2009, p. 6). In 2012, Forbes magazine ranked teaching as the fourth worst profession to earn a master's degree when considering pay, employment benefits, and mobility (Smith, 2012). The devaluing of teacher training and teacher education is further communicated to teachers of Indiana with the elimination of the master's degree incentive.

Since the participants' state has abolished additional pay when teachers receive a master's degree, Susan felt it was a "real shame." She thinks removing an incentive for further education will undoubtedly "lessen the profession," communicating a devaluing

of what teaching requires. Mary expressed concern about fairness. In order to teach advanced students, who will perform better on standardized tests, teachers will have to have a master's degree. Those that are financially able to earn a master's degree will teach the advanced classes, which could cause "dissent in the ranks" since schools are ceasing to assist with tuition. She acknowledges that teaching AP classes require more work, but she also noted the benefit and reward that accompanies that position, such as having a more motivated group of students, teaching more complex material, and teaching college-credit courses. Connie believed that the number of teachers with a master's degree would decrease over time because merit pay will also make it difficult for struggling teachers to improve. She believes it is a political move to "destroy public education" because the teaching profession is losing its passion. Teaching, she feels is becoming "just a job." Beginning teacher Gretchen said she had planned to get a master's degree, but has changed her mind:

The master's degree is obsolete. You don't have to have it. Why the heck would I pay thousands of dollars to get my master's degree when I won't go up in pay grade and I'll have to pay back all the loans anyway?

Despite the benefits veteran teachers in this study expressed concerning the master's degree, further education is losing its allure for beginning teachers. While the veteran teachers give credit to higher education instilling more confidence, helping them gain access to teaching higher-level classes, and "expanding their repertoire," Gretchen exemplifies a changing attitude toward teaching. By taking away the master's degree pay promotion, it communicates to teachers that furthering teaching skills is not

valuable; thus, Gretchen does not feel a master's degree would warrant the self-sacrifice of her own financial means. This could possibly indicate that if the state does not support teacher interests then teacher opinions are altered accordingly.

Even before the elimination of the master's degree, veteran teacher Susan's school corporation is one of many that does not bestow raises on teachers once they reach thirty years of service. Despite having a master's degree and teaching forty years in the same school district, Susan makes less than \$60,000, and has for the past ten years. Her salary is the equivalent of her daughter's teaching salary of only nine years' experience in another corporation. Also noteworthy, Susan's school has one of the lowest starting salaries for teachers in the state.

5.5 The Woman Conflict

Susan's story may be astounding when considering other occupational payout advancements. However, she is not alone or an anomaly in teaching. Teaching and "women's work" have long been synonymous for those that seek to instill patriarchal control, by suggesting that "women's work" is not as important, as laborious, or as demanding as men's work (Apple, 1986; Grumet, 1988; Olson, 2008). With teaching being consistently paralleled to motherhood, the focus tends to remain there. The connection between teaching and motherhood has spun into something new, but nonetheless recognizable over time. Once women dominated the teaching population, teaching was seen as instilling "soft pedagogies" (Olson, 2008, p. 30) with a primary goal of nurturing and caring for children instead of pushing and challenging students as

academics. Teachers have fought this perception over time. However, plans for the profession are still shaped around marriage and motherhood. These “women’s issues” coupled with teaching (particularly the compatibility of teaching with motherhood) have “braided together into tangles of cause and effect, truth and fiction, sexism and opportunity that for many women (and men) influence a career in teaching” (Olson, 2008, p. 30).

Contrary to this established compatibility, most notably linked to the schedule of teaching, the experienced teachers in this study did not feel that teaching accommodates mothers during the school year, due to the workload. The demands of motherhood shifts priorities and causes teachers who are mothers to forego duties they once participated in in order to care for children. For Bridgette and Kristin, this included coaching. Important to note, the demands of motherhood are coupled with the demands of accountability, standardized testing and workload of the teaching profession for stress and feelings of being “overwhelmed” and “frustrated,” according to the women in this study. This struggle between motherhood and teaching has caused experienced teachers Bridgette and Kristin to reevaluate their plans to remain teachers through retirement and has Bridgette determined for an early exit.

As found in the 1970s (Lortie, 2002), the 1980s (Stinebrickner, 2002) and even in the mid-2000s (Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, & Meisels, 2007), marriage still factors into teachers’ decisions to stay, leave, and migrate between school corporations. Even a decade later in the 2010s, beginning teacher Natalie from this study, voiced that her

concern is primarily financial when deciding on whether or not to pursue teaching until retirement:

There's no money. It's getting harder for us to make more money. Now that I'm looking to getting married and starting a family, I don't make a lot of money! And I look at what my fiancé makes too and it's going to be hard just to support ourselves. So that makes me want to go back and do something that will make more money.

For beginning teacher Gretchen, financial concerns also play a role in her decision to stay or leave teaching. She admits that marriage to a man of sustainable financial wealth would be an incentive to “do something smaller” like work in a library or focus on coaching. Both Kristin and Bridgette stated, “My husband is also a teacher” implying the financial limitations of teachers' salaries, particularly when both marital partners are practicing teachers.

The financial debate over teacher salaries is nothing new and these teachers make legitimate explanations for their financial concerns. However, there remains a suspicion, which arouses when teachers seek increased financial gains, prestige and power because the very core of teaching is thought to be self-sacrifice and service to students. Hence, the expectation is “to mute personal ambition” (Lortie, 2002, p. 102). Teachers are expected to self-sacrifice, while working for less and remaining quiet regarding any discontentment, showing that traditional expectations of women are holding strong where “women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless and subject to the whim of external authority” (Grumet, 1988, p. 16).

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

Job dissatisfaction, job stress, and demands of personal life are not novel issues when investigating the lives of teachers. What is groundbreaking about what the women in this study experience is that their stories are captured in the wake of major changes in educational policy, changes which are grossly impacting how they view teaching and themselves. Indiana is one of several states adopting rigorous standards of instruction, more critical teacher evaluations, and higher expectations of students that will determine teacher pay. Like Natalie, Gretchen, Kristin, Bridgette, and Joanna, many teachers might work in the new conditions but end up throwing in the towel, ultimately deciding that teaching really is not worth what is required.

The undercurrent attitude of teacher devaluing is steadily gaining voice. Rooted largely in a historical position that teaching is “women’s work” (Apple, 1986; Grumet, 1988), teachers are still seen as “masters of what most adults already know” (Labaree, 2000, p. 232) with limited skills. Teachers like Natalie, Kristin, and Mary are dealing with the effects of this perception through interactions with parents, administrators, and through the policies they are required to abide by.

Now, the message is subtly whispered from the government with the elimination of incentives for higher education for teachers to advance and hone their abilities to instruct students. Claims that higher education does not increase student scores and does not produce more effective teachers (Sawchuk, 2009) have school corporations revoking the incentive and pay promotion of teachers with master's degrees. While the veteran teachers of this study partially attribute some of their success to holding a master's degree, beginning teachers like Gretchen do not see the purpose in working toward something that is no longer valued or rewarded.

According to the women in this study, the message is reinforced from students who do not value education and from the parents who do not support teachers or the time required of studies. While there are many factors that contribute to a student's disenchantment with school, the divide remains between teachers and students who appear not to care. This issue, as Joanna pointed out, is likely to intensify since teachers are now being held accountable to student performance, regardless if they care, try, or participate in the learning process.

Finally, the message is probably most powerful from practicing teachers themselves who are rethinking, regretting and even warning others not to enter the profession they have chosen. When veteran teachers like Mary, Susan and Connie no longer wholeheartedly promote a career they have dedicated their lives to, it is a powerful message that teaching may not be worth it. That message is something teachers like Natalie, Gretchen, Kristin, Bridgette and Joanna find themselves pondering frequently as they decide whether or not to remain in the classroom. If society, students,

parents, and even teachers are not for teachers, then there is a dire disintegration of a job that, according to George Bernard Shaw, saves those being instructed.

6.1 Researcher's Conclusion

As I transition from Tiffany the teacher to Tiffany the researcher, I am still learning what it truly means to be a teacher. The women in my study have provided insight with their stories into the lives of practicing teachers who are losing heart. I have found the condition of teaching to be much more dismal than I had originally thought. Not all teachers plan to work in higher education like I did. Instead, they face a choice: continuing in a profession they are not happy with or starting over. For teachers like Natalie, Bridgette, and Kristen who face financial constraints, sometimes there is no option.

Even for Connie, Mary, and Susan who have dedicated their lives to teaching, they evaluate the current conditions to be frightening and stressful. To not recommend a system they have invested forty years of their lives in disheartens me. There is a true crisis looming in the teaching profession when teachers are not for teaching. While I am not in the classroom, living the experience, I believe that I can use my position to give voice to those who are living it daily, in hopes that their stories will propel change.

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APPENDIX INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Beginning Teacher	Experienced Teacher	Veteran Teacher
1. What is your personal mission as a teacher in the Language Arts classroom?	1. How has your personal mission as a teacher changed from your first year to now?	1. Describe your mission as a teacher. How has the mission changed from the time you entered the profession to now?
2. What do you believe is the purpose of the LA classroom according to the state, the school corporation, and yourself?	2. What do you believe is the purpose of the LA classroom according to the state, the school corporation, and yourself?	2. What do you believe is the purpose of the LA classroom according to the state, the school corporation, and yourself?
3. In what ways did you feel unprepared for the teaching field? In what ways is it what you expected?	3. Looking back on the first half of your career, describe your feelings about your experience with the teaching profession.	3. How have your goals changed over your career?
4. Describe your feelings about remaining in the teaching profession for the next 25-30 years.	4. Looking forward, describe your feelings about the teaching profession. Why do you intend to stay?	4. How did you avoid burn out? What has made you stay in the public school system as an educator?
5. What's most challenging to you about beginning a teaching career in Language Arts (different levels, special needs inclusion, class sizes, access to engaging materials, etc)?	5. How long had you taught before you began feeling completely comfortable with your role as an educator? What events led to this contentment?	5. What strategies for reading and writing have proved timelessly effective?
6. Why did you become a teacher? Who and what influenced you to enter this field?	6. What are you most passionate about teaching? Reading or writing? How and why did you develop that passion?	6. What are you most passionate about teaching? Reading or writing? How and why did you develop that passion?
7. What is the greatest obstacle you face when trying to achieve student engagement? What factors contribute?	7. How do you engage students on a daily basis in your classroom?	7. What do you feel has become the most effective way to engage students in your classroom?
8. What is the one moment in your career so far that you felt was most rewarding? How did you impact a student's life and stir a desire to read or to write?	8. What is the one moment in your career so far that you felt was most rewarding? How did you impact a student's life and stir a desire to read or to write?	8. What is the one moment in your career so far that you felt was most rewarding? How did you impact a student's life and stir a desire to read or to write?