



January 2015

How Shared Experiences Impact Teachers Who Remain In American Indian Elementary Schools More Than Five Years

Rae Marie Wilkie-Villebrun

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HOW SHARED EXPERIENCES IMPACT TEACHERS WHO REMAIN IN
AMERICAN INDIAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS MORE THAN FIVE YEARS

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Grand Forks, North Dakota
December
2015

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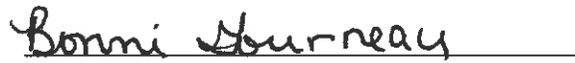
This dissertation, submitted by Rae Marie Wilkie-Villebrun in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.


Dr. Pauline Stonehouse

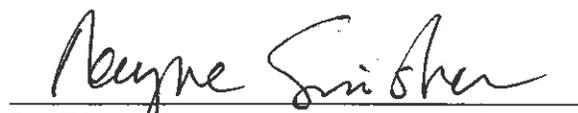

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Rae Marie Wilkie-Villebrun
December 3, 2015

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have had this goal of earning a doctoral degree by the time I reached the age of 45 since 1994 when I finished my teaching degree. Don't ask me why I picked 45, but it seemed like a good age at the time. You know what? I turned 45 this July, and I did it! It has not been easy, and life didn't always go the way I wanted it to go. Here is what I learned: Most of the time you have to work so hard that you have no idea how you are going to finish, but you don't give up; you ask for help; you pray for guidance; you keep going; and before you realize it, you made it. I made it, but sure didn't make it alone. I had lots of support and guidance along the way.

What would I have done without Dr. Pauline Stonehouse? She was there when I felt like there was no way I was going to finish. She told me I could and would finish, and continued to check on me making sure I was doing my part. She read and read and read. She gave me the support and encouragement I needed when I needed it. Thank you, Dr. Stonehouse! All students should be as lucky as me to have an advisor as wonderful as you!

Thank you to my first advisor and first contact at the University of North Dakota! I contacted Dr. Sherry Houdek in 2011 about how to get my principal's certification in North Dakota, and she encouraged me to think about the PK-12 Doctoral Program at UND. Then one day while sitting in a workshop, the keynote speaker said that if you didn't do something within one day of wanting to make a change, you wouldn't make the

change. Immediately, I looked online and found a new Grand Forks cohort in PK-12 Educational Leadership was starting in June of 2012, and so I called Dr. Houdek. I went to my first class on June 1, 2012, and have loved every minute of my experience. When she decided to leave, I was devastated. I didn't think there was any way I was going to finish without her encouragement and continuous support. Even though she isn't at UND any longer, she continued to encourage, guide, and support me. Some day, I hope to be the same encourager and supporter and leader for others that she was for me. Thank you, Dr. Houdek! I am grateful to you for encouraging me to be part of the Grand Forks Cohort.

Thank you to my heart, my soul, my love, and my husband, John! Thank you could never convey how much I have appreciated your love and support through every part of my life, but especially, these last 3 years, while I was going to school. Without you, my life would not be the same; and every day, I thank God for giving you to me!

Thank you to my children, Nicholas, Alexander, Patia, Savannah, Ian, and Hailey who I am so blessed to have! You have not had the mom you deserved for the last 3 years. I have been preoccupied with classes and papers, and you suffered for it. I know you saw me struggle, want to give up, and heard me mumble and grumble about how much work I had to do and sometimes how hard it was. From this, I hope you realize that everything that is worth anything takes effort and hard work. It is okay to complain and think you aren't going to be able to make it, but it is never okay to give up. I love you all more than you could possibly know! You make me incredibly proud.

Mom and Dad, it is to you that I am eternally grateful. It is because of your faith, love, and support that I know I can accomplish anything. You have given me the skills to

be the strong and motivated person that I am today. I have watched you and dad give up things for your family, but never give up on each other. Together you reached your goals and helped your children reach their goals. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to the top of my soul!

To my baby sister, Dr. Misty Wilkie-Condif, thank you for being a role model to all of us. Your kind and generous heart have always been something I have admired. Knowing you have my back and that I could call to complain about how long it was taking me to finish gave me the strength to get through.

To my baby brother, Rick, thank you for being the brother you are. You are so smart and I have always admired how quick your brain is.

To my cousin, Jami, thank you for being one of my best friends. I'm sure I drove you crazy when I would call you at the crack of dawn when I was driving to class and then talk to you for hours. You are one of my biggest supporters. I can always count on you to make me feel better.

To my cousin, Wayne Trottier, Jr., thank you for being my role model and inspiration. I remember when you were working on your doctorate and when you graduated, and thinking how proud I was that I had a doctor in my family; and some day, I would be one, too. I'm not sure if I would have made earning this degree a goal if it hadn't been for you. Thank you for being a great cousin, great role model, and one of the greatest leaders I know!

To my Grand Forks Cohort . . . THANK YOU! It is because of your dedication to being the best leaders you could be; I have grown in my leadership skills. There was never a time in the past 3 years when I didn't absolutely love going to class, and that is

because I knew you were there. We have experienced so much these past 3 years, and I feel blessed to have experienced it with you.

I would like to thank the teachers who volunteered to be part of my study. Without them, this would have not been a possibility. I am grateful for their willingness to share their stories, successes, and sadness. I have learned so much from each of you.

And last, but not least, thank you, Jesus! It has been my faith in you and your love for me that I have been able to get to this point in my life. I will be forever grateful for my family who instilled the importance of you in my life. God Bless me, my family, my friends, and those who positively impact the life of a child!

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined shared experiences of teachers who remain at American Indian schools teaching for five years or more in an attempt to help administrators understand what factors impact a teacher's decision to stay. Teachers, regardless of their race or gender, who have worked at an American Indian school for five years or longer, were interviewed. The teachers were recruited to participate in this study through their superintendent/principals and personal contacts. The theoretical framework used to guide this study was a social support model studied by LaRocco, House, and French in 1980. They examined the effect of perceived social support on stressful work situations. This support could come from different sources and through different modes. Teacher retention has been a concern for many years especially in schools with students living in areas of high-poverty and high minority rates. American Indian schools fit this profile of high-poverty and high minority rates as well as having families and students who suffer from historical trauma. With American Indian schools having what could be considered a tough population to work with, finding what experiences impact teachers' desires to remain at American Indian schools could benefit the students, schools, and communities. Three themes (relationships, communication, and race) emerged from the data and overlapped one another. Race and communication impacted the relationships teachers developed with their students, colleagues, students' parents or guardians, and administrators. These relationships, especially the relationships

with the students and colleagues, were deep and lasting. The relationships were strengthened through stress, uncertainty, and chaos described by the participants. It was through these relationships participants were able to continue working in situations that caused them to feel as though they lacked the skills and knowledge of effective teachers and question their ability to the job as they had been trained to do.

Keywords: American Indian schools, teacher retention, social support model, administrators, poverty, minority, race

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 2005, I began my first job as principal of a K-12 school located on a reservation in the Midwest with a population of 350 American Indian students and 41 certified staff. One of my first tasks as the new principal was to hire teachers for both the high school and the elementary school. Due to a termination and a resignation, two teachers were replaced in the middle of the year. At the end of the year, the teachers who were hired in the middle of the year needed to be replaced along with two elementary teachers who resigned. This was the pattern during my four-year tenure as principal. After leaving that principal position in June of 2009, I visited the school in the fall of 2014 and found so many new faces I did not recognize. Teacher turnover was still an issue.

When teacher turnover is a problem, students may feel they do not belong to their school or cannot relate to their teacher; student achievement can decrease; and students' negative behaviors can increase (Hughes & Chen, 2010; Liberante, 2012; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). While resolving teacher turnover is important in all schools, resolving this issue in American Indian schools is particularly important because research shows American Indian people have difficulty connecting and trusting people. Reyhner (1994) proposed the reason American Indian people distrusted education was because of how American Indian people were educated during the "boarding school era."

From the 1860s to the 1960s, education to American Indian people meant loss of their identity and being forced to live in a manner that was foreign to them. When American Indian children went to boarding school, the first actions school officials took were to cut the children's hair, change their clothing, and force them to stop speaking their language (Adams, 1995). Furthermore, adults who might be expected to protect the children and keep them safe often caused them pain and suffering (Adams, 1995; Lomawaima, 1994; Szasz, 1999).

Changes forced on American Indian children have caused lasting effects. Formal education for American Indians continues to be a topic that causes anger and resentment. The need to "kill the Indian to save the man" (Grandbois, 1994) has changed family dynamics, caused trust issues, affected the ability to build relationships, and forced American Indians to fight a system that was developed to change their very existence (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Pewewardy, 2002; Reyhner, 1994). The result of these actions to assimilate American Indians into the dominant culture has caused historical trauma for American Indian people. Historical trauma is defined as grief and loss that is sustained over time and through generations (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Sotero, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

Teacher retention has been a long-running issue for school administrators. Chapman and Green (1986) surveyed teachers who earned a teaching certificate from the University of Michigan in 1963, 1967, and 1971 to examine reasons why teachers were not staying in the field of teaching. Researchers have spent time studying reasons why teachers generally leave their positions, whether it is to completely leave the teaching

profession or education field or to stay in education but move to another school (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). Ingersoll et al. (2014) found that 40 to 50 percent of teachers leave teaching within their first five years in the job, and 45 percent of the turnover occurs in schools where the number of minority students and students in poverty has been high.

Teacher retention, particularly in American Indian schools, is a concern because the turnover rate of teachers impacts the students' ability to build relationships with their teachers (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Pewewardy, 2002; Reyhner, 1994). One reason has to do with the high number of children living in poverty on reservations. On average, 12.4% of children living in a Midwest state live in poverty. When it is broken down by reservation, percentages range from 10.0% to 55.2% with an average of 27.6% of children living in a Midwest state and on American Indian reservations living in poverty (Children's Defense Fund – Minnesota, 2015). The reason this is such a concern is because research shows that most schools having large populations of minority students who live in poverty have the highest number of teachers who are new and who leave the school shortly after being hired (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007; Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, & Meisels, 2007; Renzulli, Parrott, & Beattie, 2011). Also, there is a gap in research on teacher retention in American Indian schools as evidenced by one study conducted that examines why teachers in Montana choose to leave schools on American Indian reservations (Erickson, Terhune, & Ruff, 2008). It would be a benefit to American Indian students, communities, and schools to discover the reasons teachers continue to work in American Indian schools longer than five years.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to use phenomenological research methods to understand experiences of teachers who remain working in American Indian schools for five years or more. By focusing this study on teachers who have worked at American Indian schools for five years or more rather than focusing on teachers who work at American Indian schools for less than five years, I hope to discover the characteristics of schools, administrators, and communities where teachers continue to work at American Indian Schools. By focusing on teachers who have remained teaching at American Indian schools for more than five years, I was able to hear stories and experiences of those who have chosen to remain in American Indian schools. It is through these stories and experiences that I have gained information that will help administrators and school boards/tribal councils of American Indian schools keep other teachers from leaving.

Importance of the Study

American Indian students need teachers who are members of a stable workforce in American Indian schools. Since education was first introduced to American Indian people in the early 1800s, it has not been easy for the children. American Indian families did not get to choose whether or not their children were educated to accept the norms of the dominant culture. The children were forced to attend boarding schools and live away from their families (Adams, 1995; Szasz, 2005). Due to children running away from schools, the federal government built schools far from the homes of American Indian families and required their children to live at the schools. The history of American Indian education comes with negative connotations causing trauma for many American Indian families. It can be very difficult for American Indian students to build relationships with

their teachers. American Indian students have trust issues that can be traced back to years of negative interactions with the dominant culture. The lack of trust and anger toward the dominant culture has been an ongoing issue since the boarding school era (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Faimon, 2004). When new teachers are continually hired to replace teachers who have left a school, students have a difficult time building and maintaining a relationship with their teachers.

While the topic of teacher retention has gained considerable attention, the same cannot be said for teacher retention in American Indian schools. Therefore, it is imperative that more studies be conducted. If the goal is to improve achievement for students, and the relationship between students and their teachers plays a part in determining that success, finding factors that keep teachers wanting to work in American Indian schools is vital.

Research Question

The research question was: What are the shared experiences of teachers who work at American Indian schools for five years or longer? A sub-question to be answered was as follows:

- How do relationships with students, parents, administrative personnel, and colleagues impact a teacher's decision to remain working at an American Indian school?

Teachers who teach in public schools in a Midwest state receive tenure after working in a school district for three consecutive years. During the fourth year of teaching, a teacher can choose to move to another school district and keep their tenure status after a one-year probationary period. If a teacher should leave a school district by

choice or nonrenewal of their contract before the third year of teaching is completed, they must start their three-year probationary period over (Teacher Tenure Act, 2014). It is my assumption that if a teacher stays a fourth year and a fifth year at the same school where they received tenure, they would be vested in the district and would likely choose to stay longer.

Theoretical Framework

Erickson et al. (2008) examined stress and satisfaction factors of teachers working at American Indian schools in Montana. Erickson et al. used the Quality of Teacher Work Life (QTWL) survey to conduct their study, doubling a 5-point Likert scale in the study so the highest score was 10 and the lowest score was 2 with a neutral score of 6.0. The study showed three satisfaction factors scored below the neutral value of 6.0, indicating teacher dissatisfaction in these areas. Teachers were dissatisfied with the factors: “Student Value of Learning,” scored at 4.91; “External Support,” scored at 4.94; and “Professional Worth to the Administration,” scored at 5.86. With the first factor of “Student Value of Learning,” teachers were asked to think about whether students were motivated and the relationship between teachers and parents. With the second factor of “External Support,” teachers were asked to think about support for education of students from parents and the community. With the third factor of “Professional Worth to the Administration,” teachers were asked to think about whether or not they were respected and recognized for their work and if there were opportunities for advancement (Erickson et al., 2008).

Since it appears that support is a key factor in the success of teachers, a social support model will be used as the theoretical framework for this research. The social

support model states perceived social support impacts perceived job stress, job related strain, and mental and physical strain. LaRocco, House, and French (1980) used perceived social support as the basis for determining whether support given to an employee during stressful situations made their jobs less stressful.

Social support can be physical or psychological in nature. Social support can involve meetings, encouragement and fostering of positive feelings, and may be available whenever it is desired. Social support can come from different sources (House & Wells, 1978). In the case of this research, the researcher will focus on support teachers receive from administration, colleagues, parents, and community members.

Greenglass, Fiksenbaum, and Burke (1996) found that perceived stress was a cause for teachers feeling like they could no longer teach. However, if a teacher had support from their principal and colleagues, there was a buffering effect. It was also found that emotional support and informational support were an integral part of the buffering effect. When teachers felt like they were emotionally supported, they were better able to see their students as individuals and were able to relate to them.

Scope of Study

This qualitative research began with me contacting tribal councils from reservations in a Midwest state to seek permission to conduct this study on reservation lands. Tribal councils either granted me permission to conduct the study or they had me seek permission from their school boards. Once permission was granted, I contacted superintendents and/or principals of potential participants via email or telephone to inform them of my study. These superintendents and/or principals were administrators of

schools with a 90% or higher American Indian student population. Teachers who had been working at these schools for five years or longer were invited to participate.

Administrators were sent an email asking them to forward my email to teachers who fit the criteria of teaching within their schools for five years or longer. Since I have a professional relationship with administrators of schools involved in this study, I trusted they knew their staff well enough to send my email to teachers who fit my criteria. Teachers were forwarded my email explaining the determining criteria of respondents, how long the interview would take, and choice of location at a time and place convenient for them. The volunteers were encouraged to think about things that kept them working in their school. My contact information was given, and teachers were asked to contact me if they were interested in participating in my study. To ensure the superintendent or principal forwarded my email to potential participants, especially if I had not received any contacts from teachers responding to my email, I contacted administrators a second time via phone to check on the progress of finding volunteers.

To be included in the study, teachers had to have worked at an American Indian school in the Midwest for more than five years. Teachers did not need to be American Indian. They only needed to work in an American Indian school. This study was only for certified teachers and not other school employees such as paraprofessionals, counselors, speech clinicians, etc.

The study was completed using only elementary teachers and/or middle school teachers as long as the middle school had self-contained classrooms. The teachers worked at Bureau of Indian Education (BIE)/tribally operated schools and public schools. The sample of teachers was selected based on responses to my email asking for participants

and the criteria listed previously in this section. Schools that fit the criteria to participate in my study had an average of 87 certified teachers who teach in their schools.

Definitions of Terms

American Indian. A member of any aboriginal peoples of the western hemisphere (“American Indian”, 2015).

American Indian school. For this study, it is a school where 90% of the student population is American Indian.

Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). The organization that oversees education in tribally operated American Indian schools located on American Indian Reservations (Bureau of Indian Education, 2015)

Culture. The beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place or time; a particular society that has its own beliefs, ways of life, art, etc., (“Culture”, 2015).

Dedication. A feeling of very strong support for or loyalty to someone or something (“Dedication”, 2015).

High-poverty school. A school where the percent of students receiving Free and Reduced Lunch is between 50.1% and 100%. (The Condition of Education, 2015)

Minorities. A group of people who are different from the larger group in a country, area, etc., in some way, such as race or religion, (“Minorities”, 2015).

Poverty. A person lacking in the following: Appearance, Expectation for Jobs, Housing, Food, Health Care; and a person feeling the following: Economic Constraints, Loss of Control in their Lives, Communication/Language Barriers, Educational Barriers (Beegle, (2003). “The U.S. Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition. A family, along with each individual in it, is

considered poor if the family's total income is less than that family's threshold” (Glossary, 2015).

Public school. A school that is funded by state money and follows state rules and regulations (“Public school”, 2015).

Race. A family, tribe, people, or nation belonging to the same stock: a category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits (“Race”, 2015)

School administrator. A person hired to manage a school (“School administrator, 2015).

Tribal Grant School. The Bureau of Indian Education provides funding for tribal grant schools and provides rules and regulations that must be followed by the schools, but a tribal government has more control over what is done with the money than if schools were Bureau of Indian Education schools (Bureau of Indian Education, 2015).

Tribal Council. The body of enrolled tribal members elected to oversee the laws and revenues and expenditures of the reservation. The tribes were given this right to govern themselves through the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (BIA, n.d.).

Organization of the Study

Chapter I gave background information on this study and explained the significance of the problem regarding teachers who do not continue working at schools where student populations are predominantly American Indian. This chapter outlined the statement of the problem, purpose of this study, importance of this study, research questions, theoretical framework, scope of this study, definitions of terms, and described the overall organization of this study.

Chapter II examines literature related to American Indian education and teacher attrition in terms of support. Specifically, areas examined in teacher attrition were: support from administrators, support from colleagues, support from community, and support from family. There were parts within each area that needed to be reviewed including working conditions.

Chapter III introduces the qualitative research design of this study. This chapter contains a review of researcher's subjectivities, researcher's background, case selection, data collection, data analysis, verification, and ethical considerations.

Chapter IV describes the data of the study. The data are examined and organized through the themes. As the data results discussed, it is supported with detailed accounts expressed by the respondents.

Chapter V discusses the findings and presents conclusions. This chapter is organized according to themes identified in Chapter IV. Chapter V contains a summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations for stakeholders.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to use phenomenological research methods to understand experiences of teachers who continue to work in American Indian schools for more than five years. Focusing on teachers who continue working at American Indian schools rather than focusing on teachers who leave allowed me to find characteristics of a school, administrators, and community that teachers find impact a positive teaching environment and give them the support they need to continue working at American Indian schools. Focusing on teachers who remain five years or more at a school also allowed me to investigate any personal characteristics that kept them persistent and able to cope with difficulties they may have encountered.

Chapter II begins with a historical background of American Indian education. Due to the manner in which American Indian people were educated in the past, negative effects of this past education are still impacting American Indian people today, physically and emotionally (Adams, 1995, Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998, Faimon, 2004, Pember, 2007; Reyhner, 1993; Szasz, 2005). Following a historical background, the review of literature will move into teacher retention and why teachers are leaving the profession altogether or moving from building to building. The final two sections of Chapter II will include literature on support teachers are receiving. Literature that examines how

teachers, who feel they are supported by administrators, colleagues, and parents/community, tend to remain working in schools will be included in the following sections: “School Staff Support” and “Community Support.” “School Staff Support” will include administrative support as well as support from colleagues. The “Community Support” will include parents, community members, school board members, and students.

Historical Background of American Indian Education

At the time America was colonized by European migrants, the settlers believed they had the right to the land because they would use the land in a more profitable manner. Due to this belief, the settlers moved on to the land and removed the American Indian people by insistence and/or by force. However, if the American Indians would accept the culture and religion of the settlers, they were free to stay (Olson-Raymer, 2015). It was at this point that education for American Indian children went from parents teaching their children how to be productive, successful citizens of society to a formal classroom setting for instruction. Prior to the formal education, American Indian children would watch and listen to their parents, grandparents, other relatives, and elders of a tribe. From these actions, they learned what needed to be done and how they were supposed to do it (Pewewardy, 2002; Trennert, 1989). This type of learning and parenting was in contrast of the missionaries who settled near the American Indians. The missionaries believed that American Indian parents were too lenient on their children. The European practice of corporal punishment was not practiced with American Indian children (Reyhner & Eder, 2015).

While it worked for American Indian parents to educate their children in this manner, and the children proved to grow into productive members of their tribe, aspects

of a tribe's values did not fit into the cultural values of the dominant culture of the United States. The United States government was looking for its citizens to fit certain criteria. Adams (1995), an American Indian author, stated that in the late 1800s, educating American Indian people had several purposes. It was cheaper to educate American Indians than it was to kill them. The cost of going to war with American Indians cost the United States government \$22 million over a 10-year period, while the cost to educate 30,000 American Indian children for one year was \$5.5 million (Adams, 1995). This sentiment of it being more cost effective to educate American Indian children by teaching them skills to assimilate would benefit the child and the country (Trennert, 1988).

Another purpose of educating American Indians, according to the federal government, was they did not fit into the industrialized communities being developed at the time, and they did not have the capacity to make decisions regarding what was best for themselves and their families. Educating the children would give the United States government an opportunity to provide American Indians with the ability to read, write, and speak English and acclimate them into a more civilized world (Reyhner, 1994).

Pewewardy (2002) explained how past practices for the education of American Indian children allowed them to be taken from their homes and moved into boarding schools. Through this process, American Indian children and families lost traditional teachings and methods of educating children as well as traditional languages, values, and culture. The main goal of the federal government was to assimilate American Indian people into the predominantly "white" culture. This meant indoctrinating cultural values, morals, and ideas on family, work, gender roles, political ideas, wealth, and possessions into American Indian value systems. The American Indian people did not lose their way

of life because the military forced them to change; they lost their way of life because of educational institutions and the teachings imposed upon them by the federal government (Adams, 1995; Szasz, 1999).

Therefore, in 1879, General Henry Pratt, an officer in charge of prisoners from the Red River War, originated the first American Indian boarding school. He believed that education was important for everyone, including American Indians (Adams, 1995). In a speech given by General Pratt, he said:

To civilize the Indian, put him in the midst of civilization. To keep him civilized keep him there. Kill the Indian and save the Man. We have tried to take civilization to the Indian. The better plan is to take the Indian to civilization. (Grandbois, 1994, p. 4)

This was the beginning of the boarding school era for American Indian people, a time of being formally educated, but at the same time, a time of being stripped of their identity and way of life. From the late 1800s to the mid-1990s, education was used as a tool to remove the culture and language of the American Indian people from America (Szasz, 1999).

Education for many American Indian people during the boarding school era was a time of stress and sadness. Students at the boarding schools were expected to give up their way of life, many of them were defiant and would not follow teacher directions. Passed down from generation to generation, the attitude of American Indians toward education has become one of distrust. For many parents, the requirement of attending school was the only reason their children attended (Reyhner, 1994).

There have been and still are negative connotations that surround education. Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998) described how forced haircuts; loss of language,

emotional abuse, and isolation from families has caused a “generational trauma.” Trauma that is unresolved in one generation is often passed on to the next generation (Castelloe, 2012). This trauma, also known as “historical trauma,” is still part of the lives of those who attended boarding schools, and it also affects their children and grandchildren. For today’s parents, grandparents, and great grandparents, getting an education meant giving up whom they were and where they came from and that affects our students (Grandbois, 1994).

An expected outcome of educating American Indian children when they finished school they would be for them to move to a “white” community and begin their lives. However, this was not the case. American Indian children moved back to their reservations, and to their dismay, they struggled to fit in. They no longer knew their community and did not possess the skills to be successful in that setting. The education they received while at boarding school alienated them further from their home; reinforced their distrust of education; and the idea that education was neither useful nor important (Reyhner & Eder, 1992).

Education for American Indian children changed as the federal government and religious organizations found other methods of providing formal education. Schools were built on the reservations so children could attend school during the day. After school was finished for the day, the children would go home to their families. Parents were more agreeable to sending their children to school when they knew they would be home at night (Reyhner & Eder, 2015). The learning that took place in the day school was similar the learning occurring in the boarding school.

As the education of American Indian children evolved over time, teachers helped students learn more effectively and to be active participants in their education by utilizing certain strategies. American Indian children have been found to experience success in schools where teachers allow them to work in cooperative groups rather than in an atmosphere where they are competing against one another. Teachers who give students the opportunity to observe tasks before expecting them to complete the tasks have students who are more successful than students who complete tasks only through listening (Swisher & Deyhle, 1992). While these strategies are important for all students, finding and using strategies to improve American Indian children's perceptions and their families' perceptions of education is exceptionally important. Parents could change their perception of education when they see their children treated as an individual by a teacher who values their individuality.

Building a cooperative working relationship between school and families of American Indian children takes continuous work. The relationship is necessary for the students to be successful. Parents must believe their child is being educated in a school setting is essential for the student's success to be a reality. American Indian parents who have a positive view of education and of those who are educating their children will help their children to be successful learners. Teachers who take the time to build a relationship with parents will be able to talk to them about topics that might normally be difficult. "Teachers must make it their business to get to know parents, share information with them, and enlist their involvement with the school" (Charleston & King, 1991, pg. 7). Including parents in educational decisions about their children will not only improve the

attitudes of parents, but will increase positive behaviors, self-esteem, and achievement in students (Butterfield, 1994).

The number of students who live in poverty and attend an American Indian school, as defined for this study, in the Midwest is almost double of the students who attend a non-American Indian school (Minnesota Department of Education, 2015c). While the students who attend an American Indian school would not be considered minority with a 90% American Indian population, the teachers who work in the schools are typically not American Indian. The graduate dropout rate is the highest in the country. The number of students who are in special education is also higher than the state average (Minnesota Department of Education, 2013). For these reasons, working in American Indian schools could be viewed as more difficult than working in a typical school in the Midwest.

Teacher Retention

Teacher retention has been an on-going concern in education. According to the Consortium for Policy Research in Education report, *Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force* (Ingersoll et al., 2014), teacher attrition increased during the years of 1989 to 2009. The number of teachers leaving the profession increased from 6.4% to 9%, which is a 41% increase. There are several factors that may have caused this increase in teacher attrition including lack of support from administration or colleagues, placing newer teachers in schools that are high-poverty and/or high minority, and low salaries that cause teachers to either change schools or leave teaching all together (Grissom, 2011).

According to Boe, Sunderland, and Cook (2008), special education teachers and general education teachers tend to leave the profession within the first 3 years of their teaching career. A higher number of teachers were found to have left the teaching profession because they were looking for career advancement or did not find satisfaction in their career instead of leaving for personal reasons. New teachers typically leave the teaching profession one and a half times more often than experienced teachers (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). Kukla-Acevedo discovered that “Teachers who were younger than 30 years old were more than three times as likely to exit teaching and more than four times as likely to switch schools than were teachers who were 50 years old or older” (p. 447). The age of teachers leaving or staying in the teaching profession would support the finding that teachers leave because they are looking to advance in their career or do not find satisfaction in teaching (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Grissom, 2011). Switching from school to school might be a result of teacher dissatisfaction.

While leaving the teaching profession to advance their careers or because they are not happy in their positions, teachers may experience unhappiness due to student behavior. Tsouloupas, Carson, Matthews, Grawitch, and Barber (2010) conducted research on student misbehavior and a teacher’s emotional exhaustion and how the two played a part in teachers’ dissatisfaction in their positions. They found that teachers who could find something positive in a situation were better able to handle students’ behavior and did not feel the emotional exhaustion that would normally occur in response to student misbehavior than teachers who could not focus on positives. However, if a teacher only pretended a student’s behavior was not impacting them rather than dealing with the behavior, a teacher would continue to feel emotionally exhausted. The

researchers noted it was more likely for teachers who participated in this study to look for the positive in a student's behavior (Tsouloupas et al., 2010).

In Barnes, Crowe, and Schaefer's (2007) study of the cost of teacher turnover to five school districts, they found teachers left the teaching profession at a higher rate than those teachers who moved to another school. The percentage of teachers leaving the profession ranged from 11.6% to 38.1% while the percentage of teachers moving between jobs ranged from 0% to 11%. In three of the five districts in Barnes et al.'s study, it was teachers with five years or less experience, who had the highest turnover. However, in the largest district, it was the teachers who had six to ten years experience who had the highest turnover (Barnes et al., 2007).

Barnes et al. (2007) also found that schools with the highest poverty rates had the highest turnover rates. "The turnover rate for the schools with the highest poverty (36%) was 1.5 times the turnover rate for the schools with the lowest poverty (24%)" (Barnes et al., 2007, p. 41). Low poverty was considered as less than 50% of the student body qualified for free and/or reduced lunches and high-poverty was considered as more than 75% of the student body qualified for free and/or reduced lunches. Not only was poverty found to be a contributing factor in teachers leaving schools, but schools with higher rates of minority students was also a contributing factor in teachers leaving schools (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2006). In this study, schools with a population of minority students 95% or higher had a higher rate of teachers leaving than schools with a population of less than 95% minority students (Barnes et al., 2007; Ladd, 2011).

Similar results of higher teacher turnover in schools with high populations of minority students were found in a study of urban elementary schools and teacher perceptions in North Carolina (Guin, 2004; Ladd, 2011). Part of this turnover might have had to do with racial mismatch as studied by Renzulli, Parrott, and Beattie (2011). In a racial mismatch study, Renzulli et al. (2011) found that when teachers were racially different than their students, the academic level of their students determined job satisfaction.

In contrast, a study completed in the southern part of the United States found that teachers were likely to stay in schools where there was a higher rate of poverty. In fact, teachers in this study tended to stay in schools where student populations had higher rates of poverty longer than they stayed in schools with lower rates of poverty. This was attributed to a lack of choices when it came to careers in rural areas. Also, the teachers were found to have no problem with their school facilities or the resources that were available to them. Where they did have issue was in the area of salary. Teachers who were happy with their salary tended to work until they retired (Hughes, 2012).

Additional reasons for teacher retention include school climate and characteristics within a school. Teachers who were interviewed as part of a study conducted by Guin (2004) discussed how teacher turnover was a distraction to their teaching because time they would normally spend with students was diverted to helping new teachers fit into their school system. This particular school had a student population that was 90% minority. However, over time the teacher turnover rate for this school had been decreasing. Teachers attributed the lower turnover rate to a new administrator who they trusted. The previous administrator lacked a leadership style teachers connected with, and

the new administrator had a leadership style that valued teachers and brought them together (Guin, 2004). In another school participating in Guin's study, teachers discussed their need for collaboration but found it difficult because collaborating was not a priority for the teachers.

Liu (2007) used a 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey to examine the effect of teachers having influence on school policy impacting teacher retention. The results of the survey showed that when teachers had influence over school policy, teachers who were in their first year of teaching tended to stay in their school. Liu (2007) found "the predicted probability of first-year teacher attrition can decrease from 19% to 4% as teacher influence at school changes from no influence to a great deal of influence" (p. 13). However, this influence is not over governing policy but revolves around curriculum and instruction.

Teacher retention is concerning because it impacts many parts of education from the cost of replacing the teacher to how it affects the learning of the students and the attitude of the teachers left behind (Barnes et al., 2007; Shockley, Guglielmino, & Watlington, 2006). Factors that contribute to teacher retention can include the type of school where a teacher works, how supported teachers feel from administration, and how many years a teacher has been a teacher (Boe et al., 2008; Kraft et al., 2012). A teacher induction program for new teachers does increase the likelihood that teachers will persist through difficult situations in their jobs because they have the support they need (Shockley et al., 2006).

Based on this research, it would appear policy makers and administrators know factors that impact teacher decisions to remain working in their schools. They also know

strategies that would minimize some of the factors that affect teachers choosing to leave their schools. However, teacher retention remains a problem. Teachers with resources for support through stressful work situations have the means to work through the stress. These sources of support vary by who is providing the support and how they are supportive.

Social Support

School Staff Support – Impact of Administrators and Colleagues on Teacher Retention

In a job where every day is different based on the student, administrator, and colleague interactions, a teacher never knows what to expect when he/she goes to work. However, the relationship a teacher has with his/her administrators and colleagues can make a job bearable, easier, or so tough that a teacher is no longer interested in working in that environment (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2006; Hancock & Sherff, 2010; Pas, Bradshaw, & Hershfeldt, 2012; Tickle, Chang, & Kim, 2011). The kind of support a teacher is given and whether or not the teacher perceives the support as helpful impacts the degree of satisfaction a teacher may have with his/her job (Fernet, Guay, Senecal, & Austin, 2011; Scheopner, 2010; Tickle et al., 2011). Another factor impacting a teacher's degree of satisfaction is the location of teaching, the demographics of the student population, and how administrators deal with situations that arise from working with this population of students (Grissom, 2011).

Support Systems

Teachers who stay at schools feel like they are supported in what they do and how they do it. This support can come from colleagues, teaching assistants, parents, and

administrators (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010; Pas et al., 2012). When teachers are going through difficult situations, which could be caused from students, other teachers, parents, policies or procedures, they need to have a support system they can seek out. Teachers can learn to navigate through a support system through a mentor program but also through trial and error. Through interviews, Castro et al. (2010) found that mentoring programs for new teachers did not always work. When a mentor and new teacher did not form a relationship, a successful new teacher was resilient enough to go out and seek the help he/she needed.

Kutcy and Schulz (2006) reported if teachers were going to be successful they needed to have supportive school conditions. Teachers could be dealing with frustrations stemming from interactions with students and parents as well as administrators who placed teachers in classes they were not prepared to teach. Teachers were also frustrated that colleagues were not always held to the same standards as they were held. Frustrations also came from policies that caused teachers to feel like they had no control over what went on in their classrooms or with their students. These frustrations can cause burnout in teachers when the feeling of no control continues, and they do not have the support they need from administration or another support network (Fernet et al., 2012; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

Teachers who feel a sense of belonging in a school are more likely to stay in the school. This feeling of belonging comes from support of colleagues and administration as well as being trusted to do their job. Participants from Skaalvik and Skaalvik's (2011) study in Norway stated teachers "feel like I belong in this school," "feel I am accepted by my school's leadership," and "feel like my colleagues have faith in me" (p. 1033). When

teachers feel this way, their job satisfaction increases and the likelihood of leaving decreases.

This phenomenon of teachers staying or leaving the profession of teaching or teachers moving from one school to another school has been studied extensively not only in the United States but also in other countries (Mafora, 2013; Pas et al., 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Smith, 2007). The reasons teachers choose to leave are many and can be grouped into several categories. The categories range from working conditions to family issues and from lack of support to not enough training (Berry, 2012; Béteille et al., 2010; Hancock & Sherff, 2010).

Administrator Support

When seeking to satisfy teachers, administrators must realize how important their (the administrator's) actions are in determining whether or not teachers are satisfied (Grissom, 2011). However, it is not only administrators playing a part in keeping teachers satisfied. The relationship teachers have with their colleagues and the school environment is also important to developing teacher satisfaction (Berry, 2012; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Kutcy & Schulz, 2006). In a study completed by Berry (2012), special education teachers were surveyed regarding their work relationships. The special education teachers noted that the relationships they had with colleagues were helpful and that by working together they were able to share responsibilities.

According to a study conducted by Béteille, Kalogrides, and Loeb (2010), examining retention and development of high quality teachers, when a high quality teacher works with a low quality principal, the likelihood of the teacher leaving increases. However, if the teacher is low quality and the principal is high quality, there is also a

likelihood of the teacher leaving. If teachers are going to remain in schools, there needs to be high expectations for both teachers and principals (Ladd, 2011; Grissom, 2011).

A study conducted in Scotland by Dunlop and Macdonald (2004) discovered that teachers wanted to be supported emotionally by their administrators and have administrators who were approachable. Characteristics of being approachable and being supportive were more important in the well being of teachers than any other role an administrator might take on including reducing workloads, engaging with staff, or disciplining students (Guarino et al., 2006). This same study also found that teachers preferred to rely on their colleagues for support rather than the administrator with a percentage of 21.2% to 13.1% (Dunlop & Macdonald, 2004). Hancock and Sherff (2010) found a similar pattern of support. Teachers who felt supported by their colleagues were less likely to leave their positions than teachers who did not feel support of colleagues, and teachers who felt supported by their administrators were less likely to leave than teachers who did not. When teachers feel supported, they are able to do their jobs. When they are able to do their jobs, they feel satisfied. When the teachers feel satisfied, they stay (Scheopner, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

When administrators trust teachers to do their job, teachers feel a sense of self-worth and value. Teachers have been leaving the field of education to find careers where they feel valued, are motivated, and are allowed to their job the way they were taught to do it (Easley, 2008; Tickle et al., 2011). Teachers stay when they are trusted not only to do their job, but also to be part of the goal setting, and are part of the decision-making process (Boyd et al., 2011; Easley, 2008; Ladd, 2011; Nahal, 2010; Sheopner, 2010). As teachers determine their purpose in a school and are able to direct their efforts toward that

purpose, and feel supported as they navigate their way through their job, they have what it takes to feel successful and remain in their positions (Parker, Martin, Colmar, & Liem, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

The amount and quality of administrative support can impact teachers' decisions to stay or leave. However, administrative support does not always impact their decision (Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, & Meisels, 2007; Scheopner, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). When Kersaint et al. (2007) examined reasons teachers chose to leave a job or stay, they found that administrative support was of medium importance to the teachers who left, but was of low importance to the teachers who stayed. This would imply that administrative support is important to some teachers, but it is not important to all teachers. Kukla-Acevedo (2009) described a similar occurrence in her study when examining teachers' decisions to leave a job or stay. She reported the one working condition that made a significant impact on teachers' decisions to leave or stay was administrative support. In fact, "The odds of a teacher leaving his or her current post were reduced by 16.9% for every standard deviation increase in perceived support from the school's administrative staff" (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009, p. 448). It would be important to note support from administrators needs only be perceived support, so if a teacher felt like an administrator was supportive; he/she was supportive (Fernet, Guay, Senecal, & Austin, 2012; Scheopner, 2010; Tickle, Chang, & Kim, 2011).

If teachers are going to maintain longevity in the school they are working, research shows support from administrators and colleagues can make a positive impact on their decision to stay and lower their stress levels (Castro et al., 2010; Dunlop & Macdonald, 2004; Ladd, 2011). The levels of stress felt by teachers can cause burnout;

and, in turn, cause teachers to not want to continue in the field or in a school (Parker et al., 2012; Pas et al., 2012).

As the literature showed, the support teachers receive from their colleague's impacts how they are able to work through stressful situations. The support that teachers receive from administrators is impactful for some teachers, but not all teachers. As stated earlier, support is given from different sources. Community support is the next level of support for teachers.

Community Support - Impact of Students, Parents, and Communities on Teacher Retention

The relationship teachers have with the families of their students and a community impacts the attitude of a teacher. When teachers have a good working relationship with parents and feel parents are involved in their child's education, teachers believe what they do is worth their time and effort. When parents are not involved, teachers believe what they do is not making a difference (Pas et al., 2012).

In addition, Hughes (2012) conducted a study of teachers from a southern state to determine how characteristics of a school, its teachers, and the school organization impacted whether or not teachers remained in the teaching profession and/or schools. When teachers are satisfied with the amount of involvement and cooperation of the parents and the students, they are 1.6 times more likely to keep teaching (Hughes, 2012). In addition, when the needs of students are great, teachers who connect with the students find satisfaction in their job. Teachers talked about their relationships with students, the pride they take in the success of students, and the love they feel for their students. This is

especially true for students who struggle academically and/or emotionally (Castro et al., 2010).

Students

Students attending high-poverty, high minority schools often impact the decision teachers make to remain working in those schools. Kraft et al. (2012) focused their study on how students impacted decisions of teachers who were deciding whether or not to continue teaching. In this particular study, teachers were committed to their students. They were there because of the challenges they knew they would face when educating students and some of the teachers even chose to be at that particular school rather than a different school. Teachers had the frame of mind that they were giving back to the world. One teacher said, “I wanted to be somewhere where maybe kids weren’t getting the support they needed. I feel like I’ve established a lot of things that the students weren’t [getting], a lot of services and a lot of experiences that the kids weren’t receiving before” (Kraft et al., 2012, p. 14). Other teachers felt the same as this teacher did. When they worked in schools where the population was more affluent, one teacher commented how she knew the kids were going to get what they needed without her. However, the kids in the schools where poverty and minority rates were higher might not get what they needed. There were also teachers who grew up in poverty and knew that in order to be successful, they needed teachers who were caring, committed, and willing to do what it would take to help students be successful (Torres, 2012; Kraft et al., 2012).

The relationship between students and teachers grows to a point that teachers feel like they cannot leave the students. One teacher said, “I love the kids I work with, and

that's what keeps me coming back." Another teacher said, "Once I got to know and had those relationships with these kids, you know, I needed to stay." Another teacher stated,

I felt committed to my students. They were 9th graders. I wanted to see them as 10th graders, and I wanted to see them as 11th graders and so I felt invested in the people-the students. And that's really why I wanted to stay.

(Kraft et al., 2012, p. 15)

The population of students who attend schools with high-poverty and/or high minority populations have many different struggles. Students who have difficulties with academics and qualify for special education require teachers' extra attention and support. Student behaviors that stem from high-poverty like not coming to school regularly cause teachers to be stressed. Teachers also feel burdened with the amount of emotional stress students feel due to what happens at home and in the community (Kraft et al., 2012).

Teachers realize students come to school with so much stress and lack of support or little support from home that learning is the last thing on their minds. Teachers genuinely care about students and are willing to do whatever it takes to help them be successful.

Teachers buy supplies for students, as well as clothing, to help them feel better about themselves when they are in school. Basically, teachers give students what they need, academically, socially, and materially, to be successful (Chenoweth, 2009; Kraft et al., 2012). Teachers who are not able to give students what they need or are not able to handle behavior problems find new positions (Torres, 2012; Stockard & Lehman, 2004).

In high-poverty areas, not only do students come to school dealing with crises they live with at home, but also teachers notice their students are also coming to school with low self-esteem. Students who struggle with academics and struggle with what

happens in their home lives are still expected to come to school and learn. However, these are the students who find it difficult to believe in themselves (Tsouloupas et al., 2010; Kraft et al., 2012). One teacher described a conversation with one of his/her students:

It kind of killed me when I heard this, but one of the students started telling me, “Don’t expect us to know this stuff.” The hardest part is that the kids don’t see their own potential and they don’t think that they themselves are worthy of the same education. So pushing them that extra step is even harder, because they don’t think it’s worth it. So I think there’s a lot of outside pressure that we have to deal with and it’s ingrained in their heads somehow. (Kraft et al., 2012, p. 18)

When students come to school already feeling like they are not worth “it” or that no matter what someone does to help, they are not going to get any better at “it,” then, the teachers are working with more than just a student who struggles academically.

Teachers noted school is probably the only safe and normal place for students of high-poverty and/or high minority schools. Students can come to school and follow a routine and a schedule they can count on as being the same day after day (Kraft et al., 2012). Some students have witnessed horrible things at home and come to school traumatized. Teachers know they have to help students feel safe before they will be ready to learn. When life is lived in crisis mode, it is difficult to think, process, and learn. One teacher said, “[Students] have a lot more on their minds or a lot more things to deal with than just academics” (Kraft et al., 2012, p. 17).

In essence, if teachers are going to get past the difficult lives of their students and begin moving them toward success and positive self-esteem, they need to build

relationships with their students. A student needs to know teachers care not only by what teachers say, but by what teachers do (Kraft et al., 2012). Once a relationship is built, a student will trust a teacher and work hard toward goals set by the teacher and begin setting goals for themselves. This relationship building should begin at the start of a school year and may take several weeks or months to develop. When students have walls built around themselves (when their defenses are up), it will take time for a teacher to break through. Students who have had trouble trusting adults or trusting “the system” will take longer to lower their defenses and connect to their teachers than other students (Kraft et al., 2012). The teachers see value in relationships and believe, “Reasons to teach are the immense pleasure you get from spending time with students and seeing them develop, learn and grow” (Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007 p. 1252) and for some teachers, this gives them the satisfaction they need to stay in the position they are in regardless of how tough it might be.

There are teachers who are willing and able to take on the challenges of working in high-poverty and high minority schools. There are teachers who prefer to work in more affluent schools. This is not anything other than the fact that people know what their limitations and strengths are and decide to work in schools where they can meet the needs of the students, but have their needs met, too. However, if administrators are able to provide support teachers need to remain in schools, students will benefit (Guarino, Brown, & Wyse, 2011; Jackson, 2009; Kraft et al., 2012; Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007 Stockard & Lehman, 2004).

Parents and Community

Parents, of the students who attend high-poverty and high minority schools, are also struggling. They have things going on in their lives that prevent them from being involved in their child's education. Things preventing them from being involved could be working more than one job or working shift work, being a single parent, suffering from addiction or mental illness, or discomfort because of childhood experiences at school (Kraft et al., 2012; Torres, 2012; Tsouloupas et al., 2010). Teachers realize that parents want to help, but sometimes they just are not able to help. When this is the case, a teacher can give parents tips on how to be involved in a way that makes the parent feel more comfortable with that involvement. This is also a benefit for the child. When children see their parents are involved in the students' school, they realize there is communication between home and school (Chenoweth, 2009; Kraft et al., 2012).

As the literature suggests, the amount of community support a teacher receives plays a vital role in the amount of stress or satisfaction a teacher may feel throughout the course of a school day (Erickson et al., 2008; Tsouloupas et al., 2010). When working with minority students who come from high-poverty areas, it makes a teacher's job less stressful when parents are involved in their children's education. When teachers have less stress, they are better able to focus on their teaching. If they are focusing on teaching, the students will benefit, and the teachers will find satisfaction with what they are doing (Hughes, 2012; Kraft et al., 2012).

There are many factors teachers must take into consideration when working with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators. The factors include the income of the family as well as the race and culture of the students and their family. The race and

culture of teacher's colleagues and administrators is also a factor teachers must take into consideration while at work. Knowing and understanding how a person's race and culture affects their decisions and relationships determines how to move forward in developing a working relationship.

Racial Impact

The race of students and the race of teachers, administrators, and other staff members is a factor impacting relationships and encounters in school. Most of the teachers who work with minority students are Caucasian. Seventy-seven percent of the teachers working in one Midwest state are Caucasian and .003% are American Indian. In comparison, in this same state, the percentage of minority students is 29.5%. Of this 29.5% of minority students, 2.4% of the students are American Indian (Minnesota Department of Education, 2015a; Minnesota Department of Education, 2015b).

Racial conversations need to happen for there to be an understanding of what people are thinking and what they are feeling. This is certain for both students and teachers. Since there is an obvious difference in race, it does need to be addressed (McIntosh, 2003; Brookfield, 2014). When this discussion does not happen, it makes things more uncomfortable for everyone involved. Teachers need to have opportunities to learn about multiculturalism. If it did not happen in their teacher education program, it will need to happen in the work place (Ruiz & Cantu, 2013; Liggett, 2008).

As people try to determine how race impacts different situations, the question of "is someone getting special treatment because of their race?" is asked or thought. If someone is asking this question, a conversation regarding race should follow. Other examples of situations where racial conversations should occur are when students and/or

teachers are making inappropriate comments or assumptions. When racial conversations are avoided, teachers and students lose the opportunity to educate and broaden the perspectives of those around them. These conversations must occur even when a comment was made in jest or there was thought to be no harm because of the comment (McIntosh, 2003; Ruiz & Cantu, 2013; Liggett, 2008). Having these conversations regarding race is not easy, but if the conversation does not happen, nothing changes (racial tension will continue). Nothing changes, if nothing changes. In other words, in order for change in racial tension to ease, people must change the way they interact with one another.

Since race is a factor in relationships between students and teachers (and teachers and teachers), choosing to ignore race is not an option. All people, regardless of race, are important. Believing that everyone is the same does not mean everyone is the same. Racial disparities exist because there are different races. Being a Caucasian allows a person privileges they have only because of the color of their skin. They may not want the privileges, and the thought of having the privileges because of skin color may make them angry, frustrated, or sick. Regardless of what they feel, the privilege exists, but not for a person of color (Liggett, 2008; Sherwood, 2001). Jensen (1998) stated that white people should, “not be afraid to admit that we have benefited from white privilege. It doesn’t mean we are frauds who have no claim to our success. It means we face a choice about what we do with our success” (para. 22). Similarly, Tim Wise (2013) described his realization of the advantage of being born into a white family regardless of his religious or economic status. He said, “We are, unlike people of color, born to belonging, and have rarely had to prove ourselves deserving of our presence here” (p. 3). Until a Caucasian

person accepts the privilege and learns how the privilege has helped them in ways they did not realize, moving forward in schools where students are predominantly American Indian or some other minority will be difficult (Liggett, 2008; Sherwood, 2001; Stewart, Latu, Branscombe, Phillips, & Denney, 2012).

The role race has in the experiences of teachers can be significant to how the teacher interacts with his/her students, families, colleagues, and administrators. There is the possibility that race will not impact the work environment. However, there is a possibility it will impact the work environment. Teachers should be educated in multicultural issues to realize the possible significance of racial connections. When teachers lack the knowledge, experience, and education of working in an environment where racial difference are evident, they could find it difficult to understand the dynamics of what is happening around them.

Summary

Chapter II presented a review of literature through an annotated bibliography that examines a history of education for American Indian people and how teacher retention is a concern and an area that requires consideration when determining how to keep teachers satisfied with their career choice and the schools where they work. It also discussed how support from school staff and a community can impact teacher satisfaction.

Chapter III will introduce the qualitative research method of this study. This chapter will discuss the design of the study, setting, sample of teachers to be interviewed, how the data will be analyzed, reflexivity, and validity.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to use phenomenological research methods to understand shared experiences of teachers who continue to work in American Indian schools for five years or more. Focusing on these teachers rather than focusing on teachers who leave, allows me to find characteristics teachers believe impact their working environments in a supportive manner. Since potential participants were currently working at American Indian schools at the time of this study, it was easier to contact them for interviews and to hear their stories than to focus on teachers who had left. By listening to their stories and analyzing their data, it was my intention to use what I learned to inform those with power how they might increase the number of teachers who remain working at American Indian schools, and thereby, reduce teacher turnover.

Researcher Background

As a novice Principal in 2005, I had many new tasks to complete and lessons to learn. To move from being a kindergarten teacher to the leader of a K-12 school was quite a jump. One of my first tasks was to learn the importance of the teacher and student relationship from a leader's perspective. As a teacher, I felt in my heart how important it was to have positive and long lasting relationships with students. I knew how those relationships impacted their successes. As a principal, my awareness of relationships

moved from being simple to complex because I now had to be aware of all the teachers' relationships with their students. The idea of relationships came to the forefront when a need to keep hiring teachers to replace teachers leaving was shown to be a yearly occurrence. How do teachers build relationships with their students when they are not in the building long enough to build a relationship?

This study examined the phenomena of teachers who remain teaching at American Indian schools for five years or more. Results of this study have the potential to help superintendents and principals of American Indian schools understand what is occurring in the experience of teachers who have remained teaching in their schools. In other words, what makes teachers who stay for five years or more in American Indian schools want to stay? It will also be determined if there are any common characteristics among perceptions of participants that made them decide to stay working in American Indian schools.

Research Question

My question to be answered was as follows: What are the shared experiences of teachers who work at American Indian schools for five years or longer? A sub-question to be answered was:

- How do relationships with students, parents, administrative personnel, and colleagues impact a teacher's decision to remain working at an American Indian school?

Constructivism

The number of teachers who choose to leave the profession of teaching or move from one school to another has been a well-studied phenomenon (Chapman & Green, 1986; Easley, 2008; Fernet, Guay, Senécal, & Austin, 2012; Guiarino et al., 2006). From personal experience as principal of an American Indian school, I know retaining teachers was an issue for my particular school. As a teacher in two other American Indian schools, I noticed a similar occurrence of teachers leaving the school after teaching one or two years. This study examined factors that contribute to teachers remaining as teachers at American Indian schools where poverty rates are high and a school filled with minority students is the norm.

Since constructivists believe that knowledge and meaning is constructed rather than discovered or acquired, a constructivist viewpoint appeared to resonate with this study (Crotty, 1998, Liu & Matthews, 2005). As the teachers work in an American Indian school, they build on each of their experiences with students, families, colleagues, and administrators as they figure out what is successful and what is not successful. The teacher's knowledge of the school increases along with length of their stay. According to Jean Piaget (2006), to understand an object, concept, or a person, one must not only know of its existence, but also interact with the object, concept, or person. A teacher who works at an American Indian school is going to a school that has high-poverty rates and, of course, a high minority rate. Another characteristic that must be noted is the perception that some American Indian people have a negative viewpoint of education. This perception dates back to the boarding school era, which began in 1879 when Carlisle Indian School opened (Szasz, 1999). Formal education of American Indian children

comes from the federal government in an attempt to assimilate American Indian people into the dominant culture. Through the federal government's efforts to educate American Indian children, children were taken from their homes and brought to institutions. It was at these institutions children were expected to gain a new way of living and leave their cultural upbringing and beliefs behind. Due to white privilege, leaders believed their ways were the right ways, the children suffered through the formal education process.

Teachers, who work at American Indian schools and remain there for five years or more, have constructed their knowledge of American Indian people, American Indian students, and American Indian culture. Through their experiences, teachers learn how to navigate their way through the situations they do not understand and the situations that cause them stress. Understanding the history of American Indian people and how their race, culture, and beliefs are the cornerstone to their way of life will keep teachers moving in the direction of developing lessons that strengthen the student.

American Indian culture has always existed; because, according to Crotty (1998), the world was always here. Objects that are part of the world have always been here, but they held no meaning until someone came along and constructed meaning for the objects and the world. If teachers at American Indian schools understand the population of students they are working with, the colleagues they work next to, and the administrators they work under, they have built a foundation from which to strengthen that understanding. Through the experiences with these groups of people, teachers are able to use what they learn to continue learning. According to Bruner (2004), the main purpose of a human mind is to build a world around that mind. Human beings are intentionally part of their world. The experiences human beings have are so intertwined with the

human being; they cannot be described as an experience separate from the human being (Crotty, 1998).

Teachers who work in American Indian schools have experiences unique to their schools and their students. This does not mean that teachers in other schools do not have experiences that are unique. However, the difference between a teacher's experience in a non-American Indian school and a teacher in an American Indian school is the teacher working in the American Indian school is dealing with one of the cultures that have historically viewed education in a negative context. This negativity is a result of American Indian children being forced to attend boarding schools beginning in 1879. (Szasz, 1999).

The dissatisfaction of how minority children were educated has been an issue throughout history. For example, formal education for the African American children in the late 1800's was not an ideal educational setting for children. The students' education was not to the same standard as the white children during this time period. It was difficult to find teachers, and once they were found, they were difficult to keep. Not all citizens of the United States believed African American children should be formally educated (Wilson, 2015). A constructionist view shows how the experiences of a teacher directly impacts experiences of students and a school. Teacher experiences, student experiences, and how they affect school environment are not able to be viewed separately, but must be viewed as a shared experience that is often shared across cultures.

It is my observation that teachers' experiences, both good and bad, while working at American Indian schools, play a vital role in decisions to remain working at an American Indian school or to leave. These experiences are woven through the construct

of their lives and decisions. As experiences are constructed, a teacher analyzes the meaning of the experiences and determines the impact of the experiences on their lives.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the research methodology chosen to complete this study. Husserl, who began his career in mathematics, and then changed his focus to philosophy, established the school of phenomenology. His introduction of phenomenology to the world was when he wrote and published *Logical Investigation* in 1900-1901 (Harman, 2007). “Phenomenology sets aside such theories, hypotheses, and explanations as refer to biology or environment and investigates what is experienced and how it is experienced” (Wertz et al., 2011, p. 125). By examining shared experiences of teachers who persist at American Indian schools, commonalities might be found among those teachers that contribute to their persistence and those commonalities might help administrators keep teachers satisfied in their teaching positions and avoid high turnover rates.

Another perspective of phenomenology comes from Martin Heidegger who was a student of Edmund Husserl. His belief of philosophy was that it was a science that allowed a person to study everything (Harman, 2007). By studying philosophy, a person had the ability to change society. However, this change could only occur when the philosopher experienced problem solving and thought process for themselves. Change did not happen by reading about experiences of previous philosophers (Harman, 2007).

Phenomenology is used to describe the human experience in a manner that looks specifically at the experience of a participant and how that experience impacts a participant (Wertz et al., 2011). Husserl (1983) founded phenomenology to study the “natural science” of experiences. In phenomenology, people begin to process what is

happening around them and to them, and then, begin to figure out how each occurrence impacts them. Their thoughts and processes begin with what they have experienced. Through these experiences, they can begin to define and explain their world (Husserl, 1983).

When a person has an experience, it is the same as having a perception of an experience. However, when we are observing another person's experiences, we are unable to view those experiences the same way they do. We use their outward appearance to help us understand their perception of the experience (Husserl, 1983). This could be an important aspect of a "persistent" teacher's experiences and how students and school staff interact with them.

Each philosopher has a different interpretation of an experience and how it is categorized. Heidegger's belief of an experience differs from others in that he says an experience is more than just an experience. It is something that cannot be relived or repeated no matter how closely we try. There are so many intricacies to a single experience that it would be impossible for someone to experience someone else's experience (Harman, 2007; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012).

Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) discussed perception in that a person's perception is based on how an object is intertwined in their life. The object is not just visible or there; the person is part of the object and because of that is able to perceive what the object is and its importance. Perception does not need to be focused on an object. It can also be focused on something that is valued and makes up the environment of a person. The perception of an object or something of value can be taken away without a person

actually realizing it is gone. They know something is different in their world, but they are not completely sure what is making it different (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012).

The researcher using phenomenological psychology examines the lived experiences of participants to the point of great understanding. The researcher has such an understanding; they can draw new meaning from the experiences (Moustakas, 1990). The researcher must have a self-awareness that allows them to know who they are, how they fit into their research, and what knowledge they will gain through their research.

Design

This study was designed to examine experiences of teachers who continue working at American Indian schools for five years or more. My goal was to find factors explaining the phenomenon of longevity in teaching careers of teachers who remain in their teaching positions at American Indian schools for five years or more. When trying to explain this complex phenomenon, my hope was that administrators and school board members might replicate conditions at their own schools to reduce teacher turnover rates. Using the lens of phenomenology to examine teacher's experiences would help in finding and describing factors explaining the phenomenon of why teachers stay at American Indian schools.

Setting

Schools in a Midwest state located on or near a federally-recognized American Indian reservation that have a student population of 90% or more American Indian would be setting for this study. These schools will be public schools and Bureau of Indian Education schools that are tribally operated and located on federally-recognized reservations.

The study was introduced to tribal governments and superintendents and/or principals of each school district or school via email with a follow up telephone call. I asked each tribal council for permission to attend the reservation tribal government meeting to explain my study and to get approval to conduct my study on their reservations. The tribal government either granted me permission or advised me to seek approval from the school board. When referred to the school board, the superintendent/principal of a potentially participating school was contacted to share the study with his/her teachers.

The sharing of my study occurred by sending an email to each principal or superintendent and having them forward the email to the teachers inviting them to participate in the study. Teachers who were interested in being interviewed were sent another email asking them to designate a time and place that would be convenient for them to be interviewed. This contact was also followed up by a phone call. Teachers were told the interview would take approximately 60 minutes, would be audio recorded, and would be transcribed by a transcription service. The place they chose to be interviewed would need to be a place conducive to conducting an interview.

Sample

Teachers participated in the study if they had worked at an American Indian school in this Midwest state for five years or more. Participating teachers did not need to be American Indian. They only needed to work in an American Indian school. This study was for certified teachers and not other school employees such as paraprofessionals, counselors, speech clinicians, etc. Interviews were granted to elementary and/or middle school teachers who had self-contained classrooms. Teachers eligible to participate were

male, female, white, American Indian, and other races, if possible, to help broaden the scope of experiences of participants.

The mix of teachers worked at BIE/tribally operated schools and public schools. This sample of teachers was selected based on responses to my email asking for participants, the criteria listed above, and their willingness to be interviewed. The seven selected participants were certified teachers and had worked at an American Indian school for five years or more. Of the seven teachers, two were male and five of the teachers were female. The range of experience for the teachers was 10 years to 22 years in an American Indian school. For the purpose of this study, an American Indian school is defined as a school with 90% of the student population being American Indian.

The criteria of five years or more is significant to this study because in this Midwest state, teachers are given tenure after three consecutive years of teaching in one school district. When they begin their fourth year of teaching, they are no longer considered probationary teachers. If a teacher chooses to stay at their school a fifth year, I am assuming they must find value in remaining where they are working.

Interview Process

I conducted teacher interviews using a semi-structured interview process. This process allowed me to ask the same questions of each participant. It also allowed me to ask questions that may have come up during an interview due to topics discussed by a participant (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Each interview began with a participant reading through their consent form and then signing it. Each interview began with the question, “What do you love about your job?” This question was chosen as the first question in hopes of putting the participant at ease.

Interviews took between 55 and 80 minutes depending the participant. When it seemed like there was more a participant could add to their answer, I would ask them another question. Examples of these probing questions would be: “Do you have another success? Is there another student you can think of? Can you tell me about another time where your colleagues helped you?” By asking these questions, I could get a participant to elaborate on their answers.

Interviews took place at a location chosen by the participant. Prior to each interview, a copy of the consent form was ready to read and sign. The consent form was also emailed to each of the participants as part of their introduction to the study. Prior to each interview, the audio recorder was checked to ensure it worked. I also looked at school websites to learn more about participating schools, teachers, and each school curriculum.

Once an interview was completed, I listened to the interview, and then sent it to Transcription Hub or to a local transcriptionist to transcribe. Once an interview was transcribed and emailed back to me, I listened to the interview a second time and reviewed the recording with the transcribed interview to ensure accuracy. The transcribed interviews were also sent to participants to review. This gave the participants an opportunity to make any adjustments or clarify what they said.

Analysis Techniques

After interviews were conducted, audio recordings were transcribed. The transcript of each interview was read through and broken down by text segments (Creswell, 2008). Direct quotes that described the phenomenon of working as a teacher in

an American Indian school were pulled from interviews. Moustakas (1994) used the term of “horizontalization” to describe this type of analysis.

Once text segments were analyzed, they were grouped together into Categories of Responses. From this point, each item within a Category of Response was coded. The coded items were synthesized into categories. Categories were analyzed and grouped by themes. The themes were used to develop assertions. A description of similar ideas explaining experiences of each participant was written (Moustakas, 1994). An example of this would be for the category of Desirable Characteristics of Administrators. The similar ideas of being comfortable with the administrator, strong leader who trusted, good leaders listen, administrator follows through, administrator shares expectations, etc. were grouped together and described as desirable characteristics of administrators. This category was then grouped into a theme of similar categories.

Specific to this study, the process for analysis was as follows (Creswell, 2008):

1. I read through the interviews, a pattern started to emerge. This pattern was everything the teacher said could be organized by who interacted and influenced the teachers.
2. Text segments were isolated from transcribed interviews. In each text segment, there was enough information within the segment to code the data.
3. Once text segments were isolated from an entire interview, they were placed in to an Excel document and categorized as to whether the segment pertained to who influenced the teacher: teacher, student, parent, administrator, or school structure. These influences were named the Category of Response. This helped with the organization of codes. This

process was followed with all seven interviews. An example code was:
teacher feeling belittled.

4. I considered using a software program like Atlas.ti but decided I wanted to manually sort the data. Using an Excel spreadsheet would allow me to manually sort. I am a visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learner who needs to look at what I am learning, say the material aloud, and move the material around to better understand it.
5. Once the data were in the Category of Response – colleagues/self, student, parent, administrator/school structure– an Excel spreadsheet was made for each of the responses and the corresponding codes. These codes were then categorized.
6. The categorized codes in the Excel spreadsheets were printed and cut out. After the categorized codes were cut out, they were organized under their Category of Response. As I read through the codes, I realized I would need to go through them another time to complete a more meticulous sort.
7. Since one of the Categories of Response had 881 pieces of data, I started re-sorting that category first. The data pieces were organized on a table to begin the sorting process. They were reassigned, if necessary, to another Category of Response and into themes.
8. Once I had completed the second sort of the Category of Response with the most pieces of data, some of the codes had been placed into other categories. This process was repeated with each Category of Response until all codes were categorized.

9. When the processes ended, there were four Categories of Response (Administrator/School Structure, Colleagues/Self, Parents, and Students) and 18 categories.

Reflexivity

This research is important to the success of American Indian students. During the 2010-2011 school year, there were 427,152 American Indian students in kindergarten through 12th grade attending public schools and Bureau of Indian Education schools in the United States (Bureau of Indian Education [BIE], n.d.). In 2008-2009, 40% of these students attended schools that did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (BIE, n.d.). It is my belief that teacher retention is a contributing factor to lack of success of American Indian students.

As an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, this research impacts a group of people important to me. The success of our children has a direct link to the success of American Indian people. Since this research is so important, not only to me, but I believe to all American Indian people and people who work with American Indians, it will be completed in an ethical and moral manner. No short cuts will be made, and the data will be critically analyzed. The accuracy of finding out what makes teachers stay at American Indian schools will ensure the data reflected experiences of participants.

My biases must be noted, as I am a former principal of two American Indian schools and a former teacher in three American Indian schools. This research is close to my heart and has caused me to be as emotional as the teachers I interviewed. As I listened to the pain, excitement, and anger in their voices, watched them wipe away tears from

their eyes, or saw their faces light up when they talked about their students or colleagues, I knew what they were feeling was real. It made them love what they do at the same time as it made them angry at the situations they had to deal with on a daily basis. I remember being in those same situations and feeling those feelings. I really wanted this study to be about the good things that were going on in the schools and to be about how those good things were what kept teachers there. However, only focusing on the positive was unrealistic. As there is positive, there is also negative. That being said, this paper will be an accurate representation of what was learned in the teacher interviews, positive and negative.

Validity

Validity ensures a study is trustworthy. To ensure validity and reliability of this study, I also followed verification strategies outlined in Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002). They state these strategies must be in place:

- *Methodological coherence* –the research question must be aligned with the method of research; data are analyzed in a manner that fits the research question, or the question may need to be changed. The analysis might not always be linear and may require going back and forth between categories to ensure data are analyzed in a manner that defines experiences of the teachers. For this study, I needed to be able to conduct semi-structured interviews face to face so I could read body language and facial expressions while teachers were interviewed.

- *Sample must be appropriate* – teachers interviewed represented the group from which I was hoping to gain insight into their experiences. Teachers who were interviewed in this study worked in both public and tribal schools, were both male and female, and were both American Indian and White. This gave a sample of teachers working in American Indian schools.
- *Collecting and analyzing data concurrently* – collecting data, analyzing data, learning, collecting more data, analyzing, learning, over and over, helped me balance what I knew with what I needed to know. Continuously getting to know the data better and better helped me analyze the data more accurately so that overall, when data were analyzed, an accurate analysis occurred. This process occurred again as I conducted an interview, listened to the interview, read the transcribed interview while listening to the interview, isolated significant statements from the transcript, coded significant statements, categorized them, and organized the categories into themes. Then, the whole process started over when I interviewed another participant until all participants were interviewed.
- *Thinking theoretically* – as data come together and ideas emerge, new ideas can be checked against data that has already been collected; there is a continuous checking between old and new data to ensure accuracy. As my data were analyzed, I went back to my research question more than once to ensure there was agreement between my research question and data collected.

- *Theory development* – compares results of data analysis and a theoretical framework in a way that moves research further. Data collected may or may not be supported by a theoretical framework but a theoretical framework does not drive analysis of data. Rather analysis of data results in the formation of a theory, and this can be compared to a previous theory from other research, such as the use of the social support theory as the theoretical framework described in Chapter I. Agreement of the two theories (or disagreement) will determine what further research may be needed.

Since interviews were a significant part of my study, audio recordings of interviews were transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were analyzed and the validity measured through triangulation of data. Data came from teacher interviews. When interviews were transcribed, a copy was given to each participant to check for accuracy. All analysis was recorded to ensure an accurate analysis was completed. The analysis was a step by step process beginning with isolating significant statements from interview transcripts; coding significant statements by the descriptors of teachers, students, parents, administrators, and schools, and then, with an individual code; grouping codes into categories; grouping categories into themes; and finally, building my assertions based on what my data reveals.

Microsoft Excel software was used to record all analytic procedures. Interviews were color coded so each participant had his/her own color. This way when codes from the interviews were sorted, I knew which teacher was associated with a code based on color of the code. This helped me to go back to transcripts to find a quote that generated a

particular code, if necessary. Data were coded consistently and grouped together based on similarities.

Ethical Considerations

I completed online training for the IRB. Throughout the process of interviewing, transcribing, and analyzing, strict confidentiality was maintained. Teachers were listed using the alphabet, i.e., Teacher A and names of schools were not mentioned. Everything was done to avoid harm to my participants and to my knowledge no harm came to any person or school who participated in the study. All parts of the research were completed by me and my bias was stated. The data were not modified in any manner to manipulate results. The results of the data analysis was shared with participants giving them a chance to challenge the interpretations I made. All viewpoints and results were considered whether they were negative or positive.

From my first thought of conducting this research, I felt a twinge of anxiety because the topic I was choosing to study had an impact on people's lives and their livelihoods. For this reason, it was imperative that the stories they told me freely and honestly be held in strict confidence. They could rely on me to keep their identities safe. Consequently, the results and conclusions reported were as generalized as I could make them without compromising the integrity of the study.

This anxiety I felt about conducting this research stemmed from my experience working in similar conditions. The possibility of retaliation because of one's thoughts, perceptions, and actions has been a reality in similar situations based on my experience. To say that I have been agonizing over how this study might negatively impact those who have volunteered to be part of the study would be an understatement. As I wrote their

stories and synthesized what I learned, it became more apparent the identity of participants should be protected. At one point, I had developed a chart outlining years of experience of study participants and whether they worked at a tribal school or a public school along with the number of years they had been working in the school, but I removed the chart. Another change I made while writing this report was to make all of respondents female even though I interviewed two male teachers. The only identifying characteristic I left was to the teacher who was American Indian.

The other factor to note is every story told and every comment made was the perception of the person telling the story and making the comment. It was my perceptions of what occurred in my situation that caused me to think and feel the way I do. I realize perceptions are different between individuals depending upon what people have experienced in their lives. Perceptions can only be validated as reality when everyone involved in a situation sees the situation the same way. To get a true picture of a situation, interviews of everyone involved in the situations would need to occur.

Summary

Chapter III included the purpose of this study as well as how the study was completed. The manner in which data were collected was outlined in detail. Samples of teachers to be interviewed, how they were selected to participate in the study, and how interviews were conducted were described in this chapter. An explanation of the analysis technique and how this study was conducted with validity and ethical considerations were also included.

Chapter IV includes a report of the findings categorized in themes from the interviews. Chapter V includes a discussion of findings, a summary of the study and results, concluding remarks, and recommendations for further studies.

CHAPTER IV
PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of teachers who have committed to working in American Indian schools for five years or more. Focusing on teachers who continue working at American Indian schools rather than focusing on teachers who leave allowed me to examine the characteristics of a school, administrators, and community that teachers find impact their teaching environment. I might also recognize characteristics that could be the reason teachers choose to leave. The experiences of seven teachers from tribal and public schools in a Midwest state were investigated through this qualitative study. This research might help administrators and school boards of American Indian schools have a better understanding of why some teachers remain in the schools over long periods of time as well as reveal actions administrators may take to retain teachers teaching in their schools.

Qualitative research was used to investigate the experiences of teachers in American Indian schools. Qualitative research gave me the opportunity to interview teachers face to face and observe their facial expressions and body language while they answered interview questions. In addition to participants' words, facial expressions and the movement of their bodies gave me insight into their thoughts. Using a qualitative method allowed me to gain additional information that was not spoken, but observed.

Participant Profile

The seven teachers who participated in this study worked in an American Indian school from 10 years to 22 years. One of the seven teachers interviewed was an American Indian. Fourteen percent of the respondents were American Indian. The number of American Indian teachers in this Midwest state was .04%. The number of American Indian teachers working in the schools where respondents work was 23% (Minnesota Department of Education, 2015a). Two of the seven teachers were male; however, to keep identities protected, all participants will be referred to as female. Through the presentation of data, the seven teachers will be referred to as Teacher A-G. Each letter of alphabet refers to a teacher. When a teacher who was not part of the study was mentioned that teacher was referred by a pseudonym. All of the students' names have been changed.

Table 1 outlines the process that was used to move the analysis from the initial sort of category of response to themes. There were many codes generated from the teachers' interviews. A sample of the codes was listed to show a range of the codes. At this point in the analysis, the codes remained in the category of response. However, once the codes were organized into similar categories, they were no longer attached to the category of response. It was from the categories that the themes were developed. The themes that emerged from the data were: (a) Communication, (b) Race, (c) Relationships.

Table 1. Process of Analysis.

Category of Response	Sample Codes	Category of Codes	Themes
Administrator/School Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Felt comfortable with administrator • Leader who listened • Leader who trusted • Lacks working together • Lacks leadership skills across grade levels • Opening/Closing ceremony • Cutting programming • Low pay • More specialist time • Previous two administrators were Indian • Does not come in to know what teacher does • No collaboration • Explain, communicate, be honest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Struggles/Success • Accountability/Structure • Behavior/Emotions • Chaos/Change • Collaboration • Community Involvement • Communication • Curriculum • Desirable/Undesirable Characteristics • Family/Life Struggles • Thoughts/Feelings • Leadership Roles • Public/Tribal Differences • Qualities/Characteristics in Teachers who Stay • Race • Relationships • Support of Colleagues • Thoughts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication—Making it Work • Race and the Workplace • Relationships with Stakeholders
Colleagues/Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racial issues between Indian and non-Indian teachers, afraid of Indian teacher • Humor, Fun, Laughter • Support each other 		
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not Indian, not accepted • Parent Communication • Share how to help them help their child • Listen 		
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Younger and younger spend more time alone • Travel far too school • Resilient • Raised by relatives • Tired from not sleeping in noisy house • Smart • Many behaviors • Students want to do well • Students want to give up • Kids need connection between home and school • Students using race to justify what they do or what others do 		

Theme: Communication—Making it Work

Teachers were asked to describe what they loved most in their job. Their answers included the students and the colleagues. Their answers were also filled with comments

of how they communicated with those who they interacted with on a daily basis. The people who interacted regularly with teachers were students, colleagues, parents, and administrators. It was through these interactions; teachers' communication skills were utilized and developed. The teachers discussed the difficulties with ineffective communication and the ease of understanding with effective communication.

Communicating Through Difficult Situations

All of the teachers interviewed reported how communicating with their colleagues helped them be better teachers and helped them through difficult times. Teachers discussed difficulties that resulted from their interactions with students, interactions with parents, and through their interactions with members of their administrative team. Some participants remarked on how sharing what was happening to them with their colleagues helped them to make sense of what was happening. Teacher D recalled, "You can vent with them and people kind of understand where you're coming from." Another teacher had a similar comment,

We do a lot of venting. We talk a lot, not only at school, but we call each other and vent. We don't complain, but we talk about "this could work" or "this is the way it should be." We all feel the same inconsistencies, and we all feel less valued than we ever have. I think our way of dealing with it is just talking amongst ourselves. Not that any of [us] wants to be "right" or say, "I told you so" but at least be heard.

The majority of teachers interviewed brought up how venting with their colleagues was an important part of them being able to make it through some of the days. The teachers

commented on how it helped to talk about what they were experiencing when they knew the person they were talking to was going through the same or similar experience.

If Teacher B has a problem, she can communicate with her colleagues without fear of backstabbing or gossip. Teacher B reported,

If I have a problem or an issue, I know that I can go talk to just about all of them and not have to be fearful that they will go back and stab me in the back, and go or broadcast it all over.

The teachers told of the need for reliable and trusted colleagues to help them deal with the things troubling them. Teacher D reported experiencing an issue with a student in the class and sought assistance from the student's previous teacher. Teacher D told me, "It's nice to be able to talk with them and ask them, 'What do you do?' Sometimes there isn't anything, but just knowing that they have the same issue and can kind of relate to that." Teacher D also said the conversations do not always result in making things better with the students, but it made Teacher D feel better knowing that someone had the same struggle so Teacher D did not feel alone. Teacher D described it as:

I'll go over to the previous teacher and find out why [what is going on], and they're like, "oh yeah, I've had the same issues. I didn't know what to do." I guess knowing that it's maybe not just me that is having the problem, but the other teacher also had that issue.

Teacher E reported, "We can all relate to the same problems, so it's easier to talk to them." Being able to talk to their fellow teachers about the things going on in their classrooms is something each of the teachers discussed in their interviews.

Respondents reported on a range of issues. Teachers listed difficulties with students, administrators, parents, curriculum, and a lack of consistency within their school and the school day. One of these difficulties would be a lot to deal with, but for all of the teachers interviewed, combinations of some of these difficulties or all of the difficulties was something they encountered on a daily basis.

The teachers interviewed discussed how discipline issues were not dealt with in a manner that helps students change their behavior. Teacher E recalled,

The principal said this year that if a kid is misbehaving, I do not take that kid. I only take [the students] if they're good. I will see them then. Right there that changes your whole perspective on what you're going to do now. I see where the principal is just trying to please the community. The principal doesn't want to have confrontation with any of the community members, and wants to build a better relationship with them. However, it's hurting the students; it's hurting the staff and everything."

When this type of thing happens and the teachers are left to figure out what to do, they use different strategies to work through it. While Teacher E was frustrated with how discipline was handled, there could be a possible explanation as to why the principal does not want to deal with student behaviors. The school could be trying a discipline framework where certain behaviors are handled in the classroom and others are handled in the office. However, if this type of discipline plan were to be in place, the teachers would have training on how to implement the framework. It must be noted there could be other reasons why the principal does not want to deal with negative student behavior.

Several of the teachers reported how they used humor to cope with situations. Teachers talked about how they vent, whether it be to a colleague or to a family member. Other teachers stated they just keep to themselves because they do not want to cause trouble or make a situation worse but will speak up if it means making situations better for students. A teacher might use one or all of these ways to cope in response to what is happening during the day. Teacher D discussed her thoughts on sharing her opinion:

I guess there's always stuff that happens and if its negative stuff, I try not to get involved with it. I can only take care of what I personally can take care of, and if somebody is affected by something, I can listen to him or her. I can hear what's going on with them, but ultimately the responsibility of how they are feeling has to go back to them. They have to take that responsibility on. I try not to give advice. I just listen, and sometimes, lots of people have opinions on things, and I try not to give my opinion. I just try to listen. I have my own opinions, but I try not to, sometimes depending on the situation.

Teacher B spoke about how teachers fear losing their job and for that reason choose to keep their thoughts to themselves:

A lot of them are very fearful of losing their job, and I guess I should have been, but I think I'm at that age where I know it's not right what she was trying to tell us. So, I basically had to [speak up] and most of them did listen. There were a few right there with me, but a lot of them would not talk, would not say anything to her. They wouldn't take that extra step to go, "No, no [the principal] this is not right" or "No, I'm not doing this."

Being a veteran teacher and the age she was, she felt like she could speak her mind without fear of losing her job. Another teacher, with job experience similar to Teacher B's experience, said that she also was okay with speaking her mind:

Depends on what the problem is . . . Most of the problems, I don't have a problem letting [the principal] know. Actually, there have been a few times where I have told [the principal], "Here is the problem," and I am still here. So somebody is agreeing with me. I am not going to cause any problems. I will just stay up in my room and do what I need to do.

Other teachers have made the same comment about just staying in their room and doing their job. It would appear the teachers are comfortable with doing their jobs; and by staying in their classrooms; they are in their comfort zone. They can focus on their classrooms where they have control over what they do.

Teacher A reported communicating through difficult times makes all the difference. She recalled,

I think it is just the open communication that we have with each other and humor is a huge part of it. We laugh a lot about things that should make us cry; and we have stories, we joke, and that is what gets us through the day. It is a very stressful environment and things don't always go the way we want. We have been faced with a lot of budget issues, so we have a lot more on our plate. We just help each other out so we don't feel overwhelmed all the time.

Teacher B makes a similar comment with:

I know that it will stay right with them; and also, I like the fact that we can joke about some of the bad things and yet try to work through and try to make things better. . . . It's been the toughest year, but yet we've tried to be able to joke about it, kind of make fun of it, and just stick together, just stick together, and we all did.

Teacher B knew that if she said something to one of her colleagues, she could trust them to keep what she says confidential.

All of the teachers discussed how communicating with their colleagues helped them to feel better about situations they were trying to manage. Teachers described how they would be sure to find the humor in what was happening and by laughing about them.

Communicating to Improve Working Environment

Teacher C said how they communicated was what made their relationship strong. She explained,

There is a sense of being a family and that's probably the biggest part and that is really what it is, the friends, the people I work with, the students, just how we communicate with each other, most of us.

Teacher D described how the staff was key to making what teachers do easier. She explained, "The staff is a key part of it. Just the things that happen sometimes, you can vent with them, and people kind of understand where you're coming from."

Teacher E told of her frustration from not having the support she and her students need. She reported how teachers complain together to develop a shared understanding of what they are all going through. She described this shared understanding by saying,

By not getting the support that we need or just not understanding. Some of these students may be pulled for a time being. We need more support. My group has two days of gym. Their energy is up so we exercise every day in class just to get them some movement. There is no music. I will bring in my own music. The students will learn recorders or play the guitar. There is no library. There is no technology or anything. So, the students are in the classroom, I don't think it's healthy. I don't think it's healthy for the teacher. I don't think it's healthy for the students, and it puts frustration with wanting to do it this way. It puts frustration on everyone as a whole. You can see teachers start more – and I caught myself this year complaining of more things. My co-teachers, and they're good, because they understand or they will complain. But that's been a disappointment for me. Why am I complaining so much? That's not my personality.

Teacher E described how a program to improve student behavior that had previously been in place for students was no longer available. However, the students were given periodic support. Teacher E was also frustrated because students do not have the experiences in school she feels they need.

Teacher E found value in her colleagues and explained how they were part of the reason why she stays. In her words, “It is the staff; we get along. We understand what we're going through. It really is important to have fun coworkers or coworkers you can get along with. It really does make a difference.”

Teacher F told how her colleagues are also her social group. She talked about a group of teachers from work who would get together to play games. She said,

There are a couple friends outside of school, but that is mostly my social group. You need 12 players, so there are 12 of us. We have been doing it every month for about 6 years. Some of the members change, as people come and go and retirements. Some people come back. When I moved to town, I didn't know anyone. Then, I started having children and didn't have time to know anyone outside of the school, and then as my children started growing up. Those are the people that you see all day and talk with. We started getting together more often, golfing and tubing or whatever you want to do. We have get-togethers with spouses because that who your friends are.

When Teacher G was asked about her relationship with her colleagues, she talked about how the high turnover played a part in the development of relationships. She said, "We had a rather large turnaround in the last couple of years, which is unfortunate. They chose to leave, but I built new relationships with newer people coming in." Teacher G's comments about her colleagues did not have the tone or excitement as the other teachers did when they talked about their colleagues.

THEME: Race and the Workplace

Teachers were asked about a success they experienced and advice they would offer to new teachers to their schools. Teachers discussed their successes, and most of them had to do with students' academic growth and/or emotional growth. Some of the successes also had to do with what the teachers had accomplished. Along with the successes were reports of frustration and misunderstanding. The frustrations and misunderstandings stemmed from racial comments from and/or the actions of students,

parents, and colleagues. This theme emerged as surprise. While racial comments were not the only source of frustration and misunderstanding, it was apparent that it was an issue that required further examining.

Teachers' View of Race

Race was discussed throughout the interviews with teacher participants. Respondents discussed how their race was brought into conversations with students and with parents. Respondents reflected on interactions between themselves and staff members of a different race. The respondent who was American Indian explained how her race did not seem to impact the things she did, but it did influence what her colleagues thought about her. Race was a topic of discussion for students in the classroom and shaped how students felt about some situations. The respondents discussed race in regard to special treatment for some. At the same time, they recognized their race could impact how people interacted with them. Each of the seven teachers interviewed discussed race and their thoughts on how it impacted what they think and feel.

Teacher B related how an American Indian teacher was hired at her school after being let go from another school. Based on the respondent's comments, the teacher was hired at her school because she was American Indian. In the American Indian teacher's previous school, she worked as an elementary teacher. She then moved to a position in Indian education. When this position did not work, she left that school and moved to her current position. According to Teacher B, the American Indian teacher is not held to the same expectations as the other teachers in their wing. She explained,

We were told that we had to do the AIMSweb. I do it, faithfully. She has not been doing that. She was saying she was using some other way to test her students. She was taking Social Studies and using her Social Studies, which everybody knows that it's so many grade levels ahead of what the students really can do. She was using that for their fluency. Also, I see one day she didn't even do her report cards. She waits for the last moment.

Teacher B also reported unequal treatment of teachers, "I don't know why [the principal] just picks on some and let's some people slide." This incident is similar to an incident that is described by Teacher G.

As far as racial differences in staff are concerned, Teacher G tells the story of how one of the American Indian staff members was going to college. Teacher G said, Well, there is this staff [member] that was going to college, and I don't know how she could pull this off, go to college and still get paid. But you take your class down for specialists, and you find out from the women across the way that she is off at college. You didn't get an email or any heads up, no note on the door or anything like that.

This incident caused the respondent to wonder why a staff member who was American Indian was not in class and ready to teach their class when Teacher G brought her students down to that specialist. According to Teacher G, the staff member was taking college classes and still getting paid. When she talked about this, she was not upset as shown in her facial expression or tone of voice, but was questioning how a person could be in two places at one time by taking college classes at the same time they were supposed to be teaching a class.

Teacher G further explained how sometimes she would call the Ojibwe teacher who was American Indian to say they were going to be late or miss because of something her class was doing. The Ojibwe teacher did not have objections to the Teacher G's class not attending. However, there were times when Teacher G followed the schedule and brought her class to Ojibwe. When Teacher G would get there, the Ojibwe teacher was not in the classroom, so Teacher G would not have preparation time. She said,

They have Ojibwe every day, and my language arts lessons were kind of fluid, and I don't like to interrupt, so I call the Ojibwe teacher say, "Hey, can we miss Ojibwe?" She said, "Oh, yeah." Then, there have been some days where I was really tired.

According to Teacher G, most of the time, she did not care if the Ojibwe teacher was not there even though it was her preparation time. In fact, there were times when Teacher G would call the Ojibwe teacher to ask her if she minded if Teacher G did not bring her class down because the students were working on another assignment. However, there were times when Teacher G wanted the Ojibwe teacher to be there so she could take her preparation time.

Teacher G felt some frustration with the Ojibwe teacher when she was not in the classroom for the scheduled Ojibwe class. Teacher G described how there seemed to be a difference between what American Indian teachers and Caucasian teachers could do. She explained,

But I do have to admit, not to over generalize, but some of the native staff at the school do stuff that white staff couldn't do like some of the culture staff run into town and be like 15, 20 minutes late for a drum and dance class or something like

that. And I just imagine if I did that with them. They're going to bring my students down, and Teacher G always has been at the store. I couldn't do that. I don't know if it's a white thing, or it's a class. I should say it's a classroom teacher thing.

Also, Teacher G was not sure what the difference was and why certain teachers got to do things other teachers could not do. According to her, there was a difference between what some staff members were able to do, and what other staff members were not able to do. She was not sure if the difference between what people have been able to do was because they were classroom teachers or because she was Caucasian. Teacher G's perception of the different standards for accountability as described in her comment has her wondering about the reason for these different standards and if they actually exist.

One of the teachers who participated in this study was an American Indian. When asked about the importance of students and staff knowing that she is American Indian, she responded that it was not important for anyone to know she was American Indian. She did not seem to be hiding the fact she was American Indian because eventually, it did come out. However, her race was not something she readily shared. Teacher E, an American Indian teacher, did not start a school year by letting her students know she was American Indian. She said,

I don't know so much about parents, I don't know if they know, some might not think I'm Ojibwe; I have a little bit lighter skin than what you would call the standard. But, I think once they know, they're not so defensive.

Teacher E had not told her students she was Ojibwe because she wanted them to form their opinions based on non-racial factors. She did not think the students knowing her race mattered. However, she also said,

Once they find out I'm part Ojibwe. I grew up like them. When I was a kid, I was one of the only Indians in the school, and so I could get teased with the free cheese and stuff like that. And there were friends just razzing on me, but -- harassing me.

She said students do not always say anything about it, but "You could read on their faces. They were like 'yeah.'" Being American Indian has impacted her relationship with staff. She does not see herself as different, but some staff members do. Teacher E explained, "Through the years a couple of staff found out I was Ojibwe, they said, 'Oh, they will never let you go because you're Ojibwe.' I don't take many things personally. I felt, oh yeah, whatever." Teacher E did not believe she was given special treatment because she is American Indian. She felt there was more to the special treatment than just being American Indian. She said, "The way I see things, it's a certain person who has certain connections who could say something (without repercussions). So yeah, I don't think I'm safe every time. I'm just going to do what I can do while I'm here." According to what Teacher E said, she did not think she was one of the staff members who had been receiving special treatment. Being an American Indian was not the reason someone received special treatment. She felt that it was being American Indian with a connection to the right person that afforded a person special treatment. Teacher E's comments could also be interpreted as she did not want special treatment and expected to do her job. Since she had not sought special treatment or expected special treatment, she did not

acknowledge that special treatment for her would be a possibility. However, she did acknowledge that special treatment of some teachers existed.

Teacher E discussed how she felt about her being American Indian and how it impacted her thoughts and actions. For her, being American Indian did not impact the job she had or how she did her job. Her race also did not impact her decision to stay or leave her school. She explained,

I'm Ojibwe and everybody will say you want to give back to your heritage, but I don't really see people as black, Ojibwe, or Irish, French-Canadian. I just try to see people as people. Now, that puts me in a naive position. It really does, but I always want to believe there is a good in people, and being Ojibwe, I will go anywhere, I don't care. But knowing what I know now, how things are run, how things have been dealt with in the past, how things are looking like they're going. It's not good.

She also said she is fine with staying in her current position, with moving to another school, or leaving the teaching profession. She is not opposed to leaving the teaching profession, but loves working with children. She explained:

I still see myself teaching; and if I'm here, I'm here. If other opportunities arise, I will take them. Honestly, I've looked at other places; I've even looked at custodial jobs because I used to be a custodian when I was in high school, and I loved it. But I do like working with students. I really enjoy working with students, and I can look back working with the tough students and say, "You know what? There was an accomplishment there." There was a little bit of growth. I still see myself teaching, whether I'm at

this school, I don't know. If I see another opening in another reservation school, I probably won't bother. Knowing what goes on within the community, within the administration, it's not worth the headache.

Teacher E struggled with how she felt her school was being run. She reported being unwilling to apply to another American Indian school even if she chose to leave her current position. The decision to remain in her current position is influenced by trying to do the best she can for the students, thinking how her race does not influence her job choice or location, and realizing she does not want to work at another reservation school.

There appeared to be several factors in Teacher E's perception of what had been happening at her school. First, Teacher E did not find it important to share that she was American Indian. This might be because she grew up in a home where what you were in terms of race was not as important as who you were. This concept makes sense considering the things Teacher E talked about as far as expectations for herself, for her students, and for their parents. Race also might not be important because as she said in an earlier comment she sees people as people. It could be some other reason. Second, a lack of effective leadership whether at the Bureau of Indian Education level, tribal government level, or district level has caused issues with scheduling, curriculum, and discipline that have caused Teacher E to complain. Her complaints are in response to the frustration she feels from the lack of support from administrators, at the local and federal levels.

Teacher E also talked about race and the disconnect between and/or discrimination among the students. She believed the students did not value their education at the time of this study because of ideas they had been taught at home. She

also believed families were struggling with addictions and were not in a place in their lives to provide the support and guidance students need. Because of that, students had a negative attitude toward education. She responded,

This is just assumption [based on the many years she was at the school]. I think more and more, the parents are having children at a younger age. There is no family connection. There is no family structure. It's more or less the grandparents or the uncles and aunts raising them or social workers or guardians. I hear more and more, its just hearsay though, that maybe some sort of drug is involved with families. The meth clinic, you hear a lot about. I think that plays a part, too. And, I just think their importance of education is going down, and they're more like I'm not going to follow the white man's way of doing things.

Since Teacher E was from the community in which the school was located; therefore, she had the opportunity to get to know students and families. Through her knowledge of her community and of the families, she believed that parents were younger than they were when she first started working at her school. The community was small. Consequently, everyone would hear stories of what was going on in the community. Due to issues with drugs and alcohol, children were often not raised by their parents but by other family members like grandparents or aunts and uncles.

When adults other than their parents are raising children, many issues arise as discussed in the story of Teacher C and the little boy in her classroom living with his grandma. Grandparents could still harbor negative feelings because of their educational experiences. They could intentionally or unintentionally pass these feelings on to their

grandchildren. Teacher E recalled students' negative attitudes toward Caucasian people. In addition to their negative attitude toward "white" people, there was a romanticizing of the hip-hop culture. Teacher E explained,

I wanted the students to speak up what they felt, because we could get into bigger issues, deeper issues, and you can just see the prejudice towards whites. And it's coming from the older generations; I know it is, and it's coming from the media. You see a lot of the hip-hop culture really ingrained in the native culture, and the natives are always saying, long gone traditions, with traditions you learn culture. But then you see them quickly jump on to the hip-hop culture. Nothing is wrong with that. But if one culture is right and the other one is wrong, you say the white man's culture is wrong, I know there were problems many generations ago.

Teacher E perceived that while the students did not want anything to do with white culture, they seemingly identified with the hip-hop culture. Frustrating as it seemed to be for Teacher E, this identifying with another minority culture does make sense. It would be hard for an American Indian child to relate to a group of people who put their ancestors on reservations, forced them to go to boarding schools, and made it their mission to change their way of life. It would be easier for an American Indian child to relate to a group of people who suffered similarly as they did at the hands of Caucasians. Teacher E acknowledged struggles that happened in the past, but she could benefit (even as an American Indian) from learning more about historical trauma and poverty, and how the two concepts cause people to think and act differently because of their circumstances.

Since Teacher E was working with middle school students at the time, she wanted to have student discussions regarding race considering how the students were feeling.

Race was thought to impact several different aspects of what occurs in schools. Teacher G noted that teachers who are at her school are either American Indian or married to an American Indian. Teacher G also talked about how at her school the American Indian people were subject to stereotypical beliefs. She explained,

I know sometimes native people might get a bad wrap at the school. New staff think that native people might be unapproachable or snobbish. And the longer I'm there; I'm realizing it's not that. It's that they feel uncomfortable around white staff in a school, and that you kind of have to approach them, and that's kind of your job anyways, because you are the professional, you're the teacher. So, you need to make the move. And I see people not doing that either by being intimidated or not taking the time or whatever. As I built those relationships with those people, then they'll seek me out.

Respondents believed relationships are built when people see themselves as equal or having something to offer. Teacher G believed that because teachers are professionals, it is up to them to initiate communication that will begin a relationship building process. A teacher is expected to be an expert and have the most knowledge compared to non-certified staff in a school. In the hierarchy of school staff, a teacher would be above noncertified staff members. In the researcher's experience from working in American Indian schools, teachers tend to be Caucasian and noncertified staff members are American Indian. If this was the case in Teacher G's school, the teachers would be

viewed as persons with authority. However, while a teacher might be the person with authority, because they are new to a school, or do not feel like they belong at a school, they are less likely to have the confidence to approach American Indian staff members.

Teacher G described how the more she worked at her school, the more she saw how race impacted students. She explained, “The more I’m around native people, native students, and how they have these different resentments and adamancy towards white people . . . this town has still a lot of racism going on here.” She also noticed how much racism there was and how racism manifested itself in student behavior, and their self-defeating actions. She also noticed how race had been brought up in situations where it might not actually be an issue, but the students identify race as a causative factor. Since race can be used as a reason to explain why something happens or does not happen, and they have experienced the effects of racism, students will say an incident was racist to explain an outcome. Teacher G said,

I see it manifesting in a lot of different ways, and it’s very self-defeating. I see it come out sometimes, but like a lot of situations that have nothing to do with race or discrimination. They go to it right away, and it gets kind of irritating. It’s hard to lecture a fourth or fifth grader to get them to see what they’re doing when it’s learned behavior.

Talking to elementary children about race and racial discrimination was perceived to be uncomfortable, especially when it is learned from home. Teacher G said,

They learn it from home or older siblings or older students. But I see it a lot, and I understand it, but it’s still frustrating. Like I said it’s hard to deal with it without sounding like being a blowhard lecturing. But I try to deal

with it when I hear it. I see that a lot now that we're talking about it or hear it an awful lot. I think it's kind of self-defeating. Even when you go out in public, a lot of the students respond to things as— it's a race thing. And I know that that happens, so it's hard to differentiate what's going on, and how it's said, how it's setup for bad self-image. We're always talking about how they have to be in two different cultures and dealing with the mainstream culture itself is defeating sometimes.

The students often brought race into discussions. Teacher G reported talking to students about how to deal with what they are thinking and feeling and how to live in two cultures and be successful in both of them.

Teacher F told a story about an American Indian teacher who was discriminatory against a teaching staff. "This is the gal who at the beginning of the year, stood up in front of the entire district together, and said she wouldn't put her students in any of our classrooms." Teacher F also said, "I think that people are afraid because she is native and think that they will get in trouble with Local Indian Education Committee, or it would be too much of a headache." According to Teacher F, "The native teacher made it an issue." When Teacher F was asked to give her perspective of the teacher, she said, "I think she is very racist because she says things like 'you white teachers,' which is kind of a clue. She says that they are her children, not our children." Teacher F also had to deal with racial comments from parents. In one instance, when talking with a parent who was upset with her, Teacher F said, "You can't come in and say, 'Hey blue eyes! What the hell are you doing to my kid?' I am sorry, but I love the students, and you will get that eventually."

To Teacher F, race did not factor into how much she cared about her students. However, until teachers have had equity training and have had the opportunity to learn how white privilege impacts their lives, they might not be able to understand that race impacts everything, even when people do not want it to impact anything. What has happened in the American Indian teacher's life for her to say the things she said is not known. What caused her to think of the students in terms of my children, not your children, is not known. While Teacher F felt strongly about her students this might not be the case with all teachers. When people feel threatened, they tend to go into defensive mode. The American Indian teacher showing racist tendencies might have been defending what she felt was hers because she could have been from the community and felt like someone was not taking care of her students.

Racism and discrimination would be hard for anyone to cope with; and for Caucasian teachers, it would appear they sometimes feel the discrimination because they are different than the students and their parents. While they may not deserve it, and nobody does, the discrimination they may feel is a manifestation of years of prejudice felt by American Indian people. The only way prejudice, discrimination, and racism end is through education.

Race can impact relationships. There may be tension among American Indian employees as much as there may be tension between American Indian employees and white employees. Teachers do seem to stay if they are either married to an American Indian or American Indian themselves. However, this is not a guarantee a teacher will stay.

Teachers deal with racial disparities daily. Discussions around race occur when students make racial comments. One teacher felt to improve racial relationships between employees; the white teacher should initiate that. Another teacher felt that it would take a dynamic native to implement needed change, but dynamic natives tend to work elsewhere. There have been differences in expectations between American Indian teachers and white teachers.

Teacher C told how she was chosen to be the leader of their grade level meetings and how an American Indian teacher thought “she” should be the team leader. Teacher C said, “There were [a] couple of women in our group who didn't like that I was the team leader. They didn't like it because the one thought because she was the Native of the wing, she should be running the group.” The principal had told Teacher C she was chosen because she was the most senior teacher. If the principal would have explained to all the teachers the process for deciding group leadership, much of the discord described by Teacher C might have been avoided. Sharing with teachers why decisions are made gives them the opportunity to accept a decision process, and if not accept, at least the opportunity to ask questions.

Teachers discussed differences in conversations, interactions, and expectations when race was involved. The perceived differences were mentioned when teachers recalled instances where they believed staff members were held accountable to different standards. The teachers discussed students who brought race into classroom discussions. Based on the teachers' remarks, they weren't experienced in how to handle these conversation. It appeared the teachers didn't know how to have conversations regarding the perceived differences in treatment between staff members of different races.

THEME: Relationships with Stakeholders

Teachers were asked if there had ever been a time they thought about leaving their current position what kept them from leaving. Their answers were filled with comments about the students, their colleagues, parents, and administrators. Teachers discussed the positives and negatives in their interactions with those they were in contact with daily. When teachers were asked about successes, these same stakeholders were mentioned. Based on the teacher's comments, it would appear the stakeholder interaction was a major part of their job.

Teachers who participated in this study stayed in their jobs because of strong relationships they had built with people they worked with and with students in their classrooms. When teachers were asked what they loved about their jobs, the top two answers were loving the students and loving their coworkers. This determination was based on how teachers answered the question. For example, Teacher A responded, "What I love is ultimately seeing the light bulb go off with the students." An example in regard to their coworkers comes from Teacher B, "First of all, I really love my co-workers." For all but one of the teachers, students were included in their first response. The teachers did not hesitate when answering the question. It was an immediate response. Their feelings of love and dedication to their students were evident in their words, "The way our students are . . . I wouldn't be able to leave" and "I found myself really loving the students . . . caring about them . . . wanting the best for each and every one" and "the students, I love the students." These phrases and sentences were spoken with eyes bright, smiles, and faces lighting up.

This same evidence of dedication was shown when teachers described how much their colleagues meant to them and how having that relationship had (and has) been part of what kept them in their school. The struggles the teachers go through are real, raw, and filled with emotion. Teacher B described a situation during a teacher team meeting where the principal did not want the teachers asking another teacher for help in planning a celebration.

[The principal] said, ‘Well (Ms. Smith) is just too busy. She doesn’t have time to do the teachers work. I said, “[the principal] that’s not the point, she’s in the meeting with us, and she has her phone. You were so rude. You put your phone away and told me that you were done helping us. Ms. Smith took her phone out. I said she was being a team player. That’s what a team player does. We all work together, and you were so rude. You’re supposed to be the leader. You should have just done it for me or figured something else out. [The principal] said, “Well, she’s so busy. I don’t want you to bother her. You teachers just ask too much of her.” I said, “Well, she’s experienced. She’s a seasoned teacher, and she’s been in education for 30 years. Of course, we’re going to ask her opinion. She’s a leading teacher.” So we [the principal and Teacher B] met, and I said, “No, I’m not venting.” I said, “[the principal], you hurt my feelings.” Then she [the principal] comes back, “Well, you know, what Teacher B, . . . it’s time that you and Ms. Jackson just stop doing everybody else’s job. The reason I [the principal] put away my phone is because I thought everybody else should pick up the slack, you know, instead of you and Ms. Jackson doing

it. You have seven other people that should have been [helping]. I said,
“You really hurt my feelings.”

A couple of days after this situation happened, Teacher B talked to the principal again after meeting the principal in the workroom. Teacher B told the principal:

I said, “That is the meanest thing that anybody could do. I cried. I said,
“[the principal], you’re not a team player. How rude of you to do that!”
Luckily, Mr. Olson walked in, and he heard everything. I kept my cool.
So, I said, “Okay, I’m done” because [the principal] wouldn’t say
anything. I said, “You hurt my feelings.” I was crying. Mr. Olson took me
and grabbed me in the old bear hug and, “Don’t give into her. Just chill
down. Let’s go to your room, and then I walked out of the hall, and I got
back to [my room] and every person from the elementary was just
zooming into my room. They are all trying to support me, and they wanted
to know what happened, and I told them everything.

As Teacher B described this encounter with the principal, the pain of the experience was still in her voice and in her body language. One of the ways teachers reported getting through days, good ones and bad ones, was by talking to their colleagues.

Teacher/Administrator Relationships

Teachers have expressed feeling defeated, frustrated, overwhelmed, competitive (not in a good way), confused, dumb, belittled, and disrespected when they describe their working experience. These feelings occurred when they felt their administrator did not possess desired leadership qualities such as being a good listener, being supportive, voicing expectations and following through with expectations. Teachers wondered if

they were doing the right thing. Teacher A recalled, “It has been a struggle working where I work just because we have had some changes in administration, and we are all struggling with making that work and making that fit.” She went on to say, “I feel emotional because I think I am a good teacher; but this year, I have been made to feel that I am not. Then, I wonder, maybe I am not a good teacher anymore.”

The range of emotions that were expressed by respondents when trying to work with district leaders ranged from confusion to frustration. Building a working relationship with administrators is necessary, but trying to figure out how to develop the relationship is difficult when there is miscommunication. Teacher A explained,

“I really can’t figure our administrator out to this day, even though I have tried. I leave there every day with a lot of mixed messages. Some days, I feel like we are kind of on the same page, have the same thoughts, and the same direction going forward is the same. Then, most days I leave there very confused, not understanding what our administrator is talking about on many levels. I leave frustrated with the fact that I think I know a lot about reading instruction, and I don’t think that our administrator thinks I do. Or, I think . . . she doesn’t take the time to listen to teachers who know their stuff.”

As explained by Teacher A, communication works only when both parties understand what is being said and heard.

When an administrator possessed desired qualities of being a good listener, being supportive, voicing expectations and following through with expectations, teachers felt valued, proud, respected, comfortable, happy, even when they were frustrated. Crying,

tears, and emotional behaviors were said to be a daily part of the routine. Teachers found they complained more as their frustration with administrators increased. This increase in complaining was atypical behavior for the teachers. Teachers reported a love of teaching regardless of administrative shortcomings.

Since administration by district leaders can be highly influential in a teacher's life, the type of relationship they have with district leaders is going to impact what happens in their classroom. It also impacts how they feel about what is going on in the school. Turnover of administration does not seem to be as great as the teacher turnover rate, but turnover in administrators definitely plays a part in the difficulties that teachers encounter. Teacher G responded,

There is always a new agenda with the new administration that come in. They always have something that's different for better or worse. When there is so much change in administration then for me, [the reason] I don't like teaching at public schools is because it's very structured and strict and there is a lot of accountability, which I think is a good thing. I don't see that as much at my school. So, I've kind of been able to figure out my way of what I think works with the students academically and over the last few years I've been fairly successful relative to other staff. And, I haven't been as beholden as other staff like at a public school might be to doing curriculum with fidelity. So, it's sort of a negative thing for the school, but it's been a positive thing for me to be honest with you.

Expectations and accountability for meeting those expectations are also different with each administrator. With so many changes within district leadership and the expectations

differing with each change, Teacher G found it better for herself when change was occurring because she was able to teach the way she wanted to teach. She realized this was not probably the best thing for the school, but it worked for her.

The success of administration is not necessarily about the amount of time they stay in a school, but in what they do in the time they are at the school. Teacher F talked about how the first principal she worked with at the school where she works was a “my way or the highway” leader who was intelligent and always looked out for the teachers, but was not easy to work with. The second principal she worked with had no rules and was an “anything goes” sort of person, which started out great. Then things got worse and everything “deteriorated.” The principal could not fix it because he did not like conflict and did not stand up for anything. As for the principal Teacher F worked with at the time of this study, Teacher F recalled,

She is a real professional and does a good job. If you think that this is what you should be doing then go ahead but if she thinks something she will let you know. One day, I did one of those stupid things that I tend to do with my mouth, and I said something not knowing who was standing behind me; she talked to me about it, and I knew, and I beat myself up about it all night telling myself to shut my mouth. She can talk to you and tell you to be careful. I know that she has caused feathers to be ruffled when she has told people that they are taking too much time. . . . It might be in their contract, but telling them to watch their time . . . and they get upset. She is telling them how to be a professional. She is very supportive.

The principal at Teacher F's school was someone who helped teachers to move toward being better teachers.

The supportive principal described by one respondent was atypical. Several teachers who talked about their principal not only felt unsupported but also undermined causing them to question what they did and how they did it. Teacher A said,

I have almost felt, in the past couple of years, that I am like a new teacher, like I walk out of there most days thinking if I am really doing what I am supposed to be doing. I feel I am unworthy. I feel belittled. I feel like I don't know what the heck I am doing anymore. I know in the back of my mind, I know what I am doing, and I know it is working because I see my students' progress, and I see their test scores, but I . . . what I know and what I feel are two different things right now.

Teacher A had to stop while telling this account. With tears in her eyes and emotion in her voice told of the sadness and heartbreak she felt because she felt like she did not know what she was doing anymore. Furthermore, Teacher A was not the only teacher who talked about feeling this way. Teacher B reported,

We walk out of there every day, and we just totally feel like dumb-shits. We feel like we don't know anything and all of the education that we have under our belts, you know, there's hundreds of years between all of us; it doesn't even matter. It's all just thrown out of the door, and I did tell her, I said, "When I walk out of here at the end of the day, I feel like I'm a dumb asshole." I cry because of everything I've learned. So, the rest of us, we're there for each other, and we held onto what we learned because we know

what we learn is true and right and that's what we have to do with the students.

Teacher B's sadness at feeling this way was shown in her eyes and in her voice. The teacher's voice was also filled with emotion as she described the encounter. However, she was angry and frustrated.

When Teacher E talked about struggling with a lack of administrative support, she explained,

It was the board; or maybe, it's the administration not understanding exactly what goes in on a classroom. And you're trying to explain to them we need support. We need help for some of these students where it's not benefiting them, but they keep forcing us to do stuff. Teach it this way; do it this way; here is your curriculum; and no, keep the students in there.

In regard to struggles, Teacher E also recalled,

This year has been one a hell of an administration not understanding the elementary students or watching the high school students, watching the students you had before drift off or not being disciplined, not following through with structure and discipline. I know our discipline record. It's frustrating. The Behavior Specialist can only go so far with it. It comes down to who's in the top of line. The principal wants to stay friends with the community. That's how I see it. That's how others who I talked to see it. It goes back to that moment I said earlier, the principal doesn't take the bad students. It's like you're a principal, you had to be there for the good and bad.

There was a feeling of hopelessness when teachers feel unsupported by their administrators. Six of the seven teachers reported they lacked administrator support but continued doing their job. They also continued to work in their schools despite the perceived lack of support from their administrator. For the one respondent who liked working with her administrator, she was able to describe how she was supported and disciplined simultaneously.

Teacher/Teacher Relationships

The teachers reported significant relationships with their colleagues. Building these strong relationships with colleagues was perceived a necessity for teachers to remain at American Indian schools because without colleague support, the teachers would be without a necessary support system. Colleagues are viewed as friends and people that can work well together. The respondents valued the bond between teachers. For example, Teacher F described her relationship with her colleagues as:

Three of us have been together forever, and the two new ones replaced ones that retired. The three of us are more of the core, but the others have come in, and we share everything. We share every idea, every success, every failure, and I think that without that group of people, it would be miserable. We have had people on our team who stay to them and don't share ideas or the good or the bad, and they don't last. I really think that having a team that you bond with makes a huge difference. We talk at lunch every single day. I think that is probably how it started. We are all kind of the same age, sometimes that matters and sometimes it doesn't. The three of us that are there right now are the same age and both genders.

We have just been together for so long that we know our families and gone through deaths, marriages, divorces, births, and miscarriages, and I think you just build that long-term friendship.

It is through this relationship Teacher F believed she received the support she needed to be successful in her job.

Teacher A explained that she could not imagine not working with the people she works with because they are a close-knit family. As part of her explanation, she said,

It is kind of like being in the army or something. You encounter crazy things, and you get through it. They keep me sane, and we have developed really good relationships. Some of my closest friends are the people that I work with now. I don't know if it is just because we have encountered such crazy things, and we just get each other, and understand each other.

We just have a close-knit family there.

The teachers understand one another and because they have encountered so many different things together and have one another, they stick together.

Teacher F and Teacher A are not the only teachers who described their relationship with their colleagues as being family-like. Teacher B described her colleagues with these words,

We're just like a little happy family, most of us. There are a few exceptions when people haven't really fit in to our little neighborhood kind of gathering. I really love my co-workers and they're very good friends, and in fact in the summer time, I miss them.

Teacher C described her relationship with her colleagues as consistent and after they get to know one another, the relationship becomes comfortable and easy to maintain. Teacher C said,

I think we share the same kind of feelings about the students. I look at the ones that have been there as long as me and even, couple of them, who had been there for maybe three or four years now, they have fallen into the same thing, and for the most part being very comfortable with each other. It surprises me that we can get even a new group of people to feel the same way we do pretty fast. The ones that don't stay are the ones that really aren't treated well by the students. We are okay when they leave. That was me waving at the people as they walk out the door, good riddance.

These relationships are formed and fostered through the time teachers spend together and through the conversations they have while figuring out how to deal with situations they are faced with on a daily basis. They are loyal to one another, but if a teacher does not fit in, because of choice or personality, they are not missed when they leave. After some time, the teachers begin to handle situations similarly and feel the same way about one another and their students.

It is difficult for teachers to form cohesive bonds when administrators and teachers frequently change. Teacher G, who works in a school where administrators have changed each year, did not discuss her relationship with teachers the same way as teachers who reported a lower turnover rate. Her discussion focused on her relationships with her students. This could mean relationships she built with students were something she could count on. She could not count on relationships with colleagues because of

teacher turnover. Teacher G explained she did not have trouble building relationships with newer staff, but focused her answers on the students.

The staff at Teacher G's school lacked the cohesiveness described in other schools. In one comment, Teacher G replied,

Some years, it seems like a lot of staff cut each other down behind their back. A lot of people make themselves do what looks good for them and then talk about other people behind their backs. And especially, last couple of years we haven't had a lot of people beating down the door to work here. I constantly think to myself, this is who we have to work with. We had these coaches and Special Education staff who are critical. That's not going to help anyone. It's November, December, January, this is who we have. Let's make the best of what we have because this is for the students anyway.

The teachers at Teacher G's school as reported by her did not have the relationships described by other respondents. She seemed to want to make the best out of the situation in spite of the criticism and negativity that surrounded her. Teacher G went on to say, "I feel like there isn't support at my school with different staff and people making themselves look good rather than caring about what kind of program we could come up with for taking care of a kid's needs." She went on further to say, "Most of the time, I see that they're just taking care of themselves." The lack of relationships in this particular school could be the result of yearly administrator turnover. Teacher G's comments reflect the teachers in her building do not go to one another for support as they do in the other schools.

Part of building relationships was reported to be helping new colleagues develop a sense of belonging. Teachers saw themselves as a team. Teachers learned to share everything from their thoughts and feelings to what was going on in their personal lives to how to improve what was going on in their classrooms or in their school. Teachers got to know one another on a personal and professional level. Due to the nature of their work, teachers often become friends outside of work as well as inside work. The teachers also bonded through the students.

Teacher/Parent Relationships

Communicating with parents to share good things going on with their child(ren) or to discuss concerns they have regarding their child or children was not considered an easy task for teachers. Respondents struggled with building relationships with parents because they were often difficult to contact either because they did not answer their phone or did not have a consistent phone number. Respondents believed relationships with parents developed over the course of time. Teacher G explained it was up to her to build relationships with parents because it does not just happen. It is easier if a teacher made themselves available and sought out a parent rather than expecting a parent to seek out the teacher. Respondents discussed making frequent contacts when students were not coming to school and working with parents to teach them how to help their children at home. Teacher initiated contacts helped to develop relationships. One respondent believed being book smart did not make you people smart and because a person had a degree did not mean they knew how get along with people.

Teacher A stated she built rapport with parents by being completely honest with them, but honest in a way that was unlikely to result in a negative reaction. She explained,

I never want to sugar coat anything. I just want to be upfront but in a non-condescending way. I want to let them know that if they have a child that is struggling in this area, just give them as many suggestions as to what they can do in terms that they can understand.

Teacher A also understood that parents are not always comfortable with coming into a school. She said that if parents were comfortable in the school, they would probably have more of them coming to school for conferences and meetings. To further explain how she built relationships with parents, Teacher A said,

One thing that I learned from a previous administrator is to communicate with the parents frequently. I was taught it is so much easier to contact a parent with something negative when you have already contacted them with something positive. Once you have already established that you are the child's teacher and told them about all the great things their child has done and you have to call them in a couple of weeks with something that needs to be worked on, then it is a lot easier for them to take a negative thing or event that has happened when you have already established that positive rapport with them first.

According to respondents, building a relationship took time and effort. It requires teachers to do more than they might normally do to get the parents to communicate with them and possibly initiate communication.

Teacher G reported a relationship with parents that engendered trust because she would take the time to engage them in conversation. She said,

I go out of my way. We have family fun days at the school, and I go up to parents, and if I don't know them, I introduce myself. I continue to talk to them after I don't have their students. We just sit and talk or if there is something specifically going on, we'll talk. But usually, they'll end up talking to me about their lives that has nothing to do with a particular student. It might have something to do with the older children or about their life. I've had moms crying during conferences.

Being able to connect with parents helped teachers feel like they belong and helped a parent trust what a teacher is doing.

Teacher D contacted parents through phone calls and newsletters to keep them informed. She explained,

I just try to reach out and make phone calls and send newsletters trying to keep them informed. I think parents want to have that communication. Sometimes, they don't, and they avoid you, but just to keep reaching out, so that the students know that we're all kind of on the same page. This is nice to be able to have that parent say, "You call me, if they start acting up, let me know."

She also believed since she was not from the community and did not know the families; it was a little harder to connect. She stated,

I didn't have any of the family connections. So, then after being there, you start to have siblings of those students who've already made that initial

parent contact with the older one. So, it makes a little bit easier to, to be able to connect; and sometimes, I think that helps just in the whole process for this education of the student. I get the feeling that sometimes parents don't want to have that contact, but until you have that contact, it just makes it a little bit easier to have a conversation. So, over time, I think you build that connection with families. You keep calling, leaving messages; and then finally, they call back, and it's not so bad. It's not like you're always trying to, report on behaviors and things.

Respondents believed that family connections made communicating easier for a teacher and a family. Once teachers have had siblings or cousins, it makes it easier for them to contact parents of a student. According to respondents, parents are more willing to communicate with a teacher when they know that teacher and have communicated previously with that teacher.

Mostly, parents tended to come to school when they were not happy with something a teacher was doing. Teacher F described an interaction with a parent:

I had one mom get so mad at me because she had just bought him a Gameboy; and now, all he wanted to do was look at books and color and read; and he won't even play with that game, and so she took him out of my room.

Teacher F also spoke about how some parents get dependent on a teacher and that eventually boundaries need to be set because they are calling every day. Teacher F recalled,

She [a parent] wanted a ride to town one night, and I was young, so I thought “sure.” Then, I got to thinking, “If I get pulled over, and she has drugs in her pocket, what do I do?” I went to the principal right away and told her that I said I would give her a ride, “What am I supposed to do?” When I went to her house, she had laundry bags, and I told her, “No drugs allowed in the car, no smoking in the car. These are the rules, are you okay with that?” She was kind of taken aback, but was okay with it. It was hard to do that.

Teachers want to have good relationships with parents, but also want there to be a professional distance in the relationship.

Teacher C believed parents fit into her classroom through their willingness to talk with her. She explained,

Any parent that is willing to talk to me, communicate with me, call me up, ask me things, legitimately care about what's going on in class, [I] talk to them anytime they want me to. I might have a few parents, maybe each year, that I get [a] little closer to, but for the most part not really. I am not even sure that in my classroom that parents even have a big role, and that's not a good thing to say. The lack of parental role in my class might be the grade. They need to be responsible for themselves. We talk about that a lot. Part of it probably is me. Let's deal with what we need to deal with ourselves. It doesn't necessarily have to involve a parent, not always. I mean, if it's something the student's having a problem with, violence or

drugs or something like that, absolutely. For the most part, the day to day, I like to handle it, and I like to let the students handle themselves.

Sometimes, the amount of contact with parents was determined by the age of the students and the needs of the teacher and parent. If a teacher had been teaching the same grade for many years, and a relationship had been built, parents trusted those teachers through reputation.

Teacher B said she listened to parents. She explained, Maybe because I don't get defensive, I listen to their problems, and if they have an issue, and it's something that's really bothering them, and they might call me kind of a little bit irate. I'll listen to them. I take the time to listen to them instead of jumping the gun, and I think that helps a lot, and then we kind of work through it. I make suggestions on how we can fix this or if it is my fault, I have been honest I'll admit that I messed up. I apologize. I don't even think that I've ever had the principal ever come to me and say that there's ever been an issue with a parent and myself.

She described an incident where a student was hurt and a parent was upset.

One of the little boys ran into the bathroom. He was running in the bathroom, he slid, and he hit his forehead on the toilet or something on the sink. He had to have like six stitches. I think it was like gym time or something. He said he had to go potty and then he ran into the bathroom and fell. The father, the next day, had called me, and he was questioning me. I was telling him I'm sorry that this happened, but your child did run into the bathroom. He's been constantly reminded "no running," and I

apologized for it happening. That was one time that I can remember when a parent did call and was pretty aggravated about it. He did seem to calm down. I think I was calm. I apologized even though it wasn't my fault. I said, "I'm sorry it happened," so, like I said, I've been pretty lucky in that respect.

Parents seemed to just want someone to listen to them when they have a concern and know the teacher cares about what happens to their child. According to what Teacher B explained, even if parents call and are upset, it is a good time to build the relationship. She did not get defensive because of the parent's anger, and listened to what he had to say. By doing this, the parent got to say what he needed to say and was no longer upset when he left the conversation.

Teacher E contacted parents and guardians weekly, but found they did not understand the importance of them being involved in their child's education. She recalled,

I never had too much problem with parents for anything, or I should say grandparents or uncles and aunts. But it's frustrating when they don't understand when you explain to them, here is what my expectations for your child is [*sic*]. If you can just provide even five or ten minutes of reading a night, you'll see a difference, you will see progress in your kid, and it doesn't happen. Planners don't come back, folders don't come back; sometimes, homework doesn't come back. Even when you use incentives for students like here is an extra star or reward point to earn rewards— it's not instilled in them. I'm with them more than they [parents] are, but

they're at home at that time, that's when they're at a loss it seems like. It's so dysfunctional.

When Teacher E contacted a parent for the first time, it was not anything formal.

However, she explained what they could expect. She told parents:

Hi, my name is Teacher E. Look for a folder every week or look for this or that. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me, you can email me, or you can come in. The other thing, as long as I'm on the subject, the other thing is phone numbers change constantly, so we can't get a hold of them. It really is difficult and a struggle.

Teachers try to connect, but it is not always easy for them to get in touch with parents.

Once a teacher does connect, the teacher may be frustrated with the lack of support parents seem to give. The teacher knows how important it is for parents to be involved and tries to explain to them that only a few minutes a day could make a difference in their child's skills. Using incentives does not seem to work to motivate the students to do their homework. However, sometimes because of poverty, chaos, and crises occurring at home, homework is the last thing on a parent or child's mind.

Teacher E also contacted parents at least once a quarter to let them know about good things going on and encouraged them to stop in the classroom. She said,

I make sure, though, at least once a quarter to contact home regarding a child. If the child is always good, always on time, his grades are fine, I like to at least, keep once a quarter, to say your child has been fine. I send letters on everything. There is always an invite to come into the classroom; I have no problem with that because I know the students really

appreciate when an adult comes in, especially if it's related to them, and they share a story or share anything. I didn't get too much of them to respond, and I don't know if they're comfortable or if they just don't want to do it.

Finding ways to involve parents and get them to come into a school is not an easy task for teachers. But for respondents, they continue to try involving parents in their child's education and what has been happening in the classroom. For whatever reason, parents have not been involved. Possibly, they were not comfortable coming to school; were dealing with issues in their lives that did not allow them to focus on their child's education; or they did not know how to help and so did not help. In spite of the lack of response from the parents, teachers have still tried to keep the lines of communication open. They know students need a relationship between teachers and parents for the students to be successful.

Teachers reported they were relentless when it came to communicating with parents. They believed it was important for parents to be involved and gave them suggestions on how they could be involved. It was a process not only to communicate with parents but also to engage them in their child's learning. Parents wanted to be involved as perceived by the teachers. However, it was difficult for teachers to connect with parents when parents did not know them. This lack of connection resulted in not being able to reach parents to share information and feelings of frustration for the teacher. This frustration resulted in the teacher persevering and continuing to communicate until there was a connection.

Teacher/Student Relationships

The students were the number one reason why teachers stay at American Indian schools according to teachers interviewed. Teachers, who stay at a job long-term, work hard to build relationships with their students. They feel obligated to stay at a school because of the students. Students begin to count on the teachers being there and learn teacher personalities and teaching styles. Students are sensitive to teachers' attitudes and beliefs. Respondents agreed students could make things more difficult for a teacher depending upon the teacher's attitudes and beliefs. Students are respectful when they are respected.

As much as the students brought joy to their worlds and they loved working with them, the teachers' jobs were not easy, and often, challenging. This was demonstrated by Teacher F saying she thinks about the students at the start of the year and how they change by Christmas. She described it as:

There are those ones that after the first month you are like, "Oh, boy"; and then, after Christmas, you are like, "Oh wow!" It is just like they have been ready to learn for so long and nobody has ever taught them or exposed them. When they do get it, they just absorb it.

When students enter a classroom and are low academically, the teacher is often worried about them making adequate progress. However, once they have been exposed to the material or maybe the structure in the classroom, and students are able to grasp the concepts, a teacher may be pleasantly surprised by how well they do by Christmas. This low academic start could be attributed to not attending a preschool program, not being exposed to academic concepts at home or daycare, living in poverty, or not being ready

for school. While teachers worry about academic progress of their students, there are no worries for teachers in regard to how they feel about their students. The love and devotion for the students was evident in the words and tone teachers used to describe anything to do with their students.

When talking about the students in her classroom, Teacher E said, I like the students. The personalities some students have are just happy go lucky students. Some students are passive. Some students go along with the flow, with the jokes. Some students are just angry or upset. You can find something good in all the students, even the ones that are angry, the ones that have EBD. There are moments where you can get them to crack a smile or you can see their light bulb turning on. I like joking with students, but I like having a structure. If I have a whole class, I like keeping it structured. But I do like to joke around with the students.

This comment was similar to what another teacher said about the students she worked with, “I teach in an at-risk environment with a lot of very needy students, and when I see them being successful, that is what I love most.”

Respondents described the feeling of joy they felt when a student understood a new concept or a new lesson. The look of self-satisfaction on students’ faces when they are successful is what makes it all worthwhile. Teacher C not only talked about how much she enjoyed her students but how much she had learned from them when she said,

I am there because I like the students. I figured I would last maybe a year and then move on. I guess they get to you right away, which is my first class, I wanted to have them until they graduated. There were 12 of them;

and I remember being really nervous, but they were mostly boys and three girls; and the neat thing about them, I think even to this day, was that every one of them was really into their culture. They were really into their drumming and their dancing and their singing, and they were doing it constantly. I think that's what it made it so cool for me because I was just learning about it. I grew up in it, so I knew reservation and some parts of the culture and stuff, but not in that way, and so that was pretty neat, just the way they were.

Teacher G also commented on the culture of her students when she said, "I like the students. I had a kid that really grew socially and academically. I enjoyed seeing that. I see that every year. I enjoy native humor. I really enjoy that."

In this story told by Teacher C, she described a situation where the students were able to teach her about American Indian culture and Ojibwe language and how much she enjoyed and appreciated the students and what they taught her. Teacher G spoke of a similar appreciation for her students and their American Indian humor. The respondents learned from their students and appreciated them for who they were. They also enjoyed watching their students grow socially and academically, and according to the teachers, they (as teachers) also grew socially and academically.

Teacher D told about the students' motivation to do better and watching them grow from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. She said,

I think of students coming in at the beginning of the school year and saying that they can't do something. That was always the big thing or IDK. They'll write IDK, I don't know or I can't. That was attitude that

was shown at the beginning; and then, what I saw at the end. To me it's success because I started the year, and I have this idea of this growth mindset. I try to explain to the students if you have a fixed mindset or a growth mindset and just to get them into the motivation kind of mindset and to see them change that from the beginning to the end of the year to me is success.

Teacher D explained by teaching the students to have a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset, they could help themselves be successful learners. She could see their growth through their motivation to try to do assignments they might not have tried before the growth mindset conversation.

When Teacher A described her devotion and dedication to her students, she talked about a time when she first started teaching at her school. She went on a home visit and when she got to the house, the police were there with guns drawn. Teacher A explained what she witnessed:

I went on a home visit and there was a police standoff in the house. There were guns drawn. Where else does that happen? But, that happened to me. People don't even believe that story. When I was in that filthy home environment with that little girl, I couldn't imagine that someone could live like that. Something happened, the mother had a warrant out for her arrest, and so the police came in, and they were going to arrest her. The little girl sat there and played on the floor like that was a daily occurrence in her life, and that got me. So maybe that is why I stay, because I don't

want to be another one turning my back on those students. I am really emotional, and I don't know why.

While telling this story, Teacher A stood up to get tissue to wipe her eyes. She apologized several times for getting so emotional. She said that no matter how hard it gets and how crazy things become, leaving would be something very hard to do.

There were not only stories about tough situations with students but also good situations. Teacher A told a "Joe" story. She explained everyone in the school had one or more stories they could tell about Joe. Teacher A recalled,

Joe is a student that we all had and he cracked us up all the time. One time, it was the cook who was crabby and burnt the tomato soup. Joe was eating it, and he said that the soup tasted like matches. That might not be funny to anyone else, but those of us that knew Joe, it was the funniest thing ever. Or he would say that our color change chart looked like a Christmas tree because the students were being naughty that day. I think developing those relationships with all of the students is important.

That story was about a student who was still in school, but Teacher A talked about how those relationships had lasted even when students were not in school anymore. She ran into a former student in Target. She recalled,

I was checking out, and this Indian young man came up to me, and he was in really rough shape. He came up to me and said, "Teacher A." I said, "Hi," but, I had no clue who he was. I studied his face, and he asked how I was. I told him I was good and asked him the same. He asked me if I was still teaching at the school and asked how many years. I told him 20 years.

He replied with a WOW! I know he was a former student, but I could not picture him. In my mind, I know who it is, but I could not picture him. He has changed drastically and lost a lot of weight. When I went back and talked with some coworkers, I was right; and I guess he is struggling with drugs. This is why he is half the size he was. I knew who he was but didn't want to say in case I was wrong, but I feel that it was a general impact that I have had on students. I see former students that I had a long time ago, and now I have some of their students in my classroom, and I think it is just them knowing like I will be there forever.

It is through these relationships that Teacher A felt she had to stay where she was. She said,

I kind of feel like there is an obligation to the students as well because I see some teachers that have left, and they just left. I just feel like I am walking out on them, and that just isn't me. It would be very hard for me to leave even though some things drive me crazy most days.

The dedication to building relationships and being part of their lives is shown in Teacher A's stories.

Teacher B talked about a student she had taught many years previous who came to her class one day to visit with her. The student was coming to ask the teacher if she (the student) could work in her classroom and to thank her for being a kind and helpful teacher. Teacher B told this story,

I had a student who just graduated this year, and when I had her in first grade, loved her. Then her family lost their apartment. She just became

really special. I bought her a lot of things, and she was always so very thankful for all of it. While I was starting my special education licensure when she was in my class, her mother let me use her to do some testing that I had to do for my class. I got a lot closer to her. Anyway, she still kept in touch with me all through the years, always came and visited with me. As she got older, I didn't see quite as much of her. Then about three years ago, she came down, and she said, Teacher B, can I be your class helper, and I thought, "Wow." That was really an honor that she would pick me above all. Then she said, "Because I remember when I was in your class, I always had such good successes. You treated me so kindly and so nicely. You were always good to me." I said sure. On the last day of school, she made it a point to come in and give me a hug and say goodbye to all the students. She came back about two weeks after to get her cap and gown, and she brought her little boy so that I could meet him. She said thank you for all the things that I had done for her. That was a good thing. I felt success right there.

Students remember what their teachers do for them and how they make them feel.

Teacher G said she figured out that her students enjoyed reading more and were successful when the curriculum was specific to American Indian topics and American Indian stories. When she found things that interested her students and piqued their curiosity, she knew the students would read more. She was also enthusiastic about what she taught and what her students were excited to learn. She said the students needed to be invested in what they were learning.

Teacher D realized over time her students needed to learn they could not fool around in her classroom. She established routines and expectations that were taught and reinforced. They had to take her expectations seriously. They needed to know they could rely on her to be there for them and support them emotionally and academically. She tended to come down hard at the start of a year and eventually eased back. She felt like she was not always nice, but the students still knew she cared about them.

Respondents perceived there was a definite connection between having a relationship with a student and getting them do the things you wanted them to do. Having a connection with a sibling or another family member was thought to make it easier to build a relationship with a younger sibling. Teacher D discussed how students would ask her if she knew their grandma, their grandpa, their auntie, their uncle or some other family member. She said she did not always know the person the student was asking about, but she would get to know them. Teacher D described how important it was to students to have a common connector between her as their teacher and the students' families. The connections were very important to students.

Connecting with students is important but can be difficult. Whether a teacher has built connections with students or has not built connections, a teacher can tell by the behavior of the child if they have made a connection. Teacher C remembered a student that she had difficulty connecting with. She recalled how trying to sing songs or doing something silly to help build a connection, but could not make it happen. She said she could get him to smile a little and knew he thought it was funny, but that he was not going to do more than that. She could not get him to do the work he needed to do. Because the teacher and the student did not have a relationship built to a point where the

student trusted the teacher, the teacher did not have leverage with the student to get him to work to his potential. He would only do enough to get an assignment completed but not do his best work.

The lack of a stable home life for some students caused behavior issues and problems with academics. Students would move from house to house depending on which family member was able to take care of them. The instability in their lives in addition to dealing with emotional stress stemming from the instability would make life tougher and lessened the importance of school. One boy lived with his great grandma because his grandma and his mom both had things going on in their lives that made it impossible for them to take care of him. Here is Teacher C's story of one of her students,

He is a real sweet kid, but his mom had drug problems and his grandma had some different issues, too. Then, he had a great grandma, who he eventually ended up staying with. She was too old to even be really taking care of them. She spoiled him, and so he grew up being able to do whatever he wanted. He had a pretty tough time. His grandma died first, and two or three months later his mom died. He has already been with his great grandma and she got sick, and ended up in the hospital for a while. They were back and forth to some other people in the family, and he had gotten into a lot of trouble before that, but got into even some more struggling. The first couple of months he was in my class was really rough for him. I kept talking to him about his family, and who I knew he grew up with, his uncle. I just kept talking to him about his family, talking to him about his grandma, and he started coming around. I had to be really hard

on him. You are not going to whine. You are going to write, . . . and he did. When we looked at his test scores, his behavior got better and better. I think he got suspended only twice and just better and better, and his test scores improved by more than a grade level, every single one of them. We were very, very happy with, so that's the kind of kid that I actually stay for.

Teacher C had high expectations for the boy both in his behavior and his schoolwork. She was tough and held him accountable while at the same time connecting with him through people they both knew. According to Teacher C, students understood and knew why she was strict and had certain rules. Respondents believed there needed to be a trust between a teacher and a student, and have shared parts of themselves with their students to help build those relationships. Teachers interviewed discussed difficulties in seeing the students they had in their classrooms struggle with making good life choices, as they grew older.

Respondents believed students needed to be accepted for who they are and should be made to feel important because they are who they are. Because of the relationships participants had built with their students, the students would often come back to teachers to thank them for all they did for them. When building a relationship, respondents believed students should have some choices in the activities they do, the books they read, and in other areas where it would be appropriate for them to make choices. In order to be successful, students need to know teachers care about them and know they are expected to succeed.

Respondents discussed the importance of keeping students in their classrooms even when their behavior would reach a point where they (the teachers) wanted to send them out. Respondents also believed by providing activities that make students curious about and interested in their world, they could keep students engaged in their work. Throughout the interviews, it was apparent teachers had often given up preparation time to devote extra time for relationship building.

Through the building of relationships, respondents learned students often needed to watch and learn before trying something. They also learned to never give up when trying to build relationships. Teachers discussed how doing fun activities with students gave them happy positive memories, which made students want to be in school every day. Teacher G described her lessons as being developed with her students in mind. In her morning meetings, she incorporated comics. She said using comics gave students a starting point for discussion. She also made sure that what she did was fun. Teacher G said that her students had a difficult time with hopes and dreams. By hopes and dreams, Teacher G meant that the students did not think about the future and did not develop hopes of where they would be as an adult. Students seemed to have trouble with dreaming big. She explained as a white, middle class woman, her hope and dream as a white, middle class child, was to be an astronaut or the center fielder for a baseball team. Her students' hopes and dreams consisted of being a casino worker, teacher, cop, and sometimes even a drug dealer. She believed that because her students had few positive memories from which to draw, thinking about the future was difficult for them. Teacher G hoped that by doing fun activities in school and giving the students more positive

memories, it would increase their self-esteem and increase their chance at a successful productive future.

Teacher G believed that other teachers noticed her ability to build relationships with students. She said,

I used to have a friend that worked here, a gym teacher, and he always brought it out to me that there was always a student or two that was shy, but by the time they came out of my class, they were more outgoing. This is because I have a lot of interactive participation. I'd even had teachers say what did you do with this child. I couldn't get a word out of him, and now you've got him. So, I enjoy seeing that students growing socially, being more outgoing.

Since Teacher G would spend time with students before they were in her classroom, she had a head start on building relationships. Because of the head start, students trusted her sooner. Therefore, she was able to expect students to achieve more and work harder as well as reveal a side of the students that other teachers did not see.

Teacher E described her relationship with several different students and how each was different, but at the same time, she would find a common denominator where they could connect. She said,

He was a kid that struggled a little bit, but I could do a different sense of humor with him, and he will be one of the students that are able to pop up. He would get it, and he will go with the flow. So that always stuck out with me. I had a kid named Jonathan and he lived with his grandma, one of his other siblings was with his parents. He was always quiet but he is so

well behaved. He was a kid I would love to take home. I want him to be part of my family, just a very good kid, very polite. And he had a lot of things against him already in life, but he just stuck in there. He was just a good kid. He rolled with the punches. Amy was an excellent student. Amy was very good. She was another one who you could joke around. At first, she wasn't there getting it, but she stuck with it and she would get it. I think she kind of got my sense of humor after a while...very bright, did what you're told, just another one of those good students. Sean has actually been to my house a little bit with permission from his mom and stuff. I don't see him much this year, because he is in high school now. I'm in elementary. But I knew there was a major connection last year, almost brought tears in my eyes. They were going to the basketball championship, and they had a big get-together, the community get-together for the students. They wanted to thank people, and Sean right away thanked me for pushing him. And right then I'm there just kind of boom, okay, something didn't make an effect on him and stuff. So he sticks out a lot with me.

Learning and appreciating the students' personalities was helpful when building relationships. Finding a common bond, in many cases it has been humor and jokes, can help to build a stronger relationship. Being able to joke around and play with the students was helpful. When teachers do not take time to get to know their students, they (students and teachers) will struggle. Students' personalities might not mesh with a teacher's personality; but together, they can work it out.

The teachers participating in this study were honest and showed emotions ranging from happiness to sadness to anger to frustration. The teachers shared stories describing their experiences, both good experiences and stressful experiences. Teachers spoke highly of their students and their colleagues. They also spoke of their administrators, but depending upon how effective they thought their administrators were as leaders, comments were positive or negative. Much depended on the perceptions of administrator effectiveness. Respondents were frustrated by lack of involvement of parents but also realized there were reasons why parents might not be involved. However, teachers never gave up trying to get parents involved. Respondents also discussed how their race had the potential to impact their relationships with students, parents, and colleagues.

Organization of Study

Chapter IV presented findings from teacher interviews. Chapter V will contain a conclusion and summary of the data described in Chapter IV as well as recommendations.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to use phenomenological research methods to understand shared experiences of teachers who continue to work in American Indian schools for five years or more. Focusing on these teachers rather than focusing on teachers who leave, allows me to find characteristics teachers believe impact their working environments in a supportive manner. Since potential participants were currently working at American Indian schools at the time of this study, it was easier to contact them for interviews and to hear their stories than to focus on teachers who had left. By listening to their stories and analyzing their data, it was my intention to use what I learned to inform those with power how they might increase the number of teachers who remain working at American Indian schools, and thereby, reduce teacher turnover.

This study was completed using qualitative methods to give teachers an opportunity to share their stories and experiences through thick, rich descriptions (Creswell, 2008; Creswell, 2014). By interviewing teachers, I was able to not only hear their words, but watch their facial expressions and body language as they described their experiences working in American Indian schools. This research was based on the theoretical framework of perceived social support (LaRocco, House, and French, 1980). Teachers who have support during stressful times on the job have an easier time of

coping with the difficult times. According to LaRocco, House, and French, when employees have support during stressful times, they are able to manage the stress and continue working in spite of the stress. In this study, support came mostly from teachers' colleagues. It would appear that while the students were not there to support teachers, because of the relationship between teachers and students, and their dedication to the students, the teachers were able to navigate their way through the stress.

Data were collected and analyzed using a process called "horizontalization" (Moustakas, 1994). Specifically, the process of analyzing the data began with chunking the interview data into text segments. These text segments were based on what a teacher being interviewed was saying and how words from an interview might later be categorized. Each chunk of data (or text segment) was coded so that each text segment could be organized, yet still be traced back to its origins. As I read through the interviews and isolated text segments, a pattern started to emerge pertaining to who or what the text segments were describing. I looked at the text segments and coded them based on whom the text segment was about or whom it was in regard to as well as what the text segment was saying. The coded data were placed together based on similarities of content. From this point, I identified one descriptor for each piece of data and began to put the categories into themes based on similar characteristics. Once all the categories were placed into themes, assertions were derived from the data.

Chapter V will begin with a summary of the data collected from the research of teachers who worked in American Indian schools for five years or more. After the summary, I will discuss the conclusions I reached based on the data collected through interviewing the seven teachers. It is through the respondents' perceptions and stories of

their experiences that I was able to develop assertions. The assertions were derived from themes that developed from teacher interviews. The discussion of the findings will be organized by the three themes of Communication—Making it Work; Race and Workplace: and Relationships with Stakeholders. The next part of Chapter V will include recommendations for teachers, administrators and schools boards, leadership programs, and for further research.

Research Question

My research question was: What are the shared experiences of teachers who work at American Indian schools for five years or more? A sub-question to be answered was:

- How do relationships with students, parents, administrative personnel, and colleagues impact a teacher's decision to remain working at an American Indian school?

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings in this study could be categorized texturally and structurally. The textural pieces of the study include how teachers felt about their students; how they felt about the job they were doing; how they felt about their colleagues; how they felt about administrative personnel; and how they felt about the parents and communities where they worked. The structural pieces of this study included how schools were run by someone who was perceived to be an effective or ineffective leader; how chaos and unexplained changes impacted how teachers perceived they were able to do their jobs; how curriculum and discipline were not based on best practices; and how expectations were not always clearly defined. These textural and structural pieces are part of each theme and assertion and are described in detail throughout the discussion in Chapter V.

Each of the headings will be used to structure answers to the research question: What are the shared experiences of teachers who work at American Indian schools for five years or more? And, the sub-question of: How do relationships with students, parents, administrative personnel, and colleagues impact a teacher's decision to remain working at an American Indian school? These shared experiences exposed common experiences, which helped to explain why respondents remained working at their American Indian schools.

THEME: Communication—Making it Work

Communication between teachers and their colleagues was key to their being able to remain working at an American Indian school. Communication with colleagues helped teachers get through some difficult times. It was through communication that the teachers were able to develop and strengthen their relationships. Without communication and without their relationships with colleagues, teacher respondents would not have been able to make it through some days.

The teachers knew their relationships with colleagues were built on trust. Relationships were developed from a bond that deepened through situations that made the teachers feel inadequate and caused them to second guess themselves. These trusting relationships allowed teachers to vent without fear of having their comments shared inappropriately. The colleagues perceived themselves to be a family unit. However, not everyone was considered part of the family. According to respondents, it seemed not all teachers chose to join the family. However, they were always welcome to join the family. Fellow teachers worked to get people to fit in and belong. However, they felt it was the choice of the individual teacher to engage.

When student issues caused difficult times, the teacher respondents knew they could rely on one another to help find solutions, interventions, and “tricks” that had been tried and/or worked in a previous class. When teachers became frustrated because situations were not handled in a manner that was perceived best practice, they reported having a colleague to share their frustration with and/or a shared perspective. The shared frustration came from believing an administrator did not listen to them or respect them; from parents who were not involved in their children’s education whatever that reason might be; from colleagues who received what respondents perceived to be special treatment; from chaos in the school because of changes, having no preparation time, and receiving no support; and from students who were struggling behaviorally, academically, and emotionally.

When they talked about their colleagues, the teachers’ faces were bright, excited, glowing, smiling, and their eyes were shining. They described the laughter they shared whether it was from laughing at a situation to laughing at their reaction to the situation or laughing at each other. They felt the need to find humor in what was happening to be able to make it through a day. Teachers felt like they were a family and likened communication with one another to that experienced with or between family members rather than just people who work together. A quote from Teacher A sums up communication between colleagues: “We laugh a lot about things that should make us cry. We have stories, we joke, and that is what gets us through the day.” It is growing together through tough times that bring them together.

Teacher respondents noticed how they had changed over time because of the difficulties they experienced in the course of doing their job. Teachers who used to love

coming to work but felt they were not respected and were put down when they were at work had a harder time coming to work. However, they felt they had to because their students needed them. Teachers who did not used to complain found themselves complaining. Teachers discussed how jobs they once loved had changed their attitudes, changed their personalities into the teachers they were at the time of this study and how their jobs had affected their reactions to situations.

THEME: Race and the Workplace

While this research revolved around race, racial comments and disparities among and between staff was not something I expected to learn. However, it was definitely a part of the teachers' experiences. One of the seven teachers interviewed was an American Indian which would mean 14% of the respondents were American Indian with the state average being .04% and the average within the schools where teachers worked was 23%. Due to her beliefs and the way she grew up, she did not believe that her being an American Indian was an advantage at her school. She believed it was not just being American Indian that gave a person an advantage. The advantages came from being American Indian and having a connection with a particular person or family. She never shared that she was American Indian, but eventually the staff and students learned she was. She did not want judgments made about her because she was American Indian.

Teachers shared their experiences of American Indian teachers and staff members not being held to the same standard. Examples of this included not being in the classroom for scheduled classes; not being held accountable for tasks that were scheduled for completion; being late to work; and getting paid when they were not at work. Respondents believed they would be terminated for saying or doing something that was

disagreeable. They believed if you were American Indian, this was not the case. There was also the thought only American Indian teachers could be hired. Teachers were called white, and one of the teachers was referred to by the color of her eyes.

Race was part of student conversations. They would talk about not wanting to follow the white man's ways. According to respondents, students remarked on how the comments and actions of certain people were racist. The teachers believed the students learned this from family members, and noted the trauma and racial tension brought forward through the boarding school era, when children were sent away from their families to attend schools. While there were times teachers felt students were justified in feeling the way they did. Other times, teachers felt the students were using race as an excuse; a self-defeating behavior that sometimes was used to resolve an issue that was not about race. It would appear as though the students were unsure what racist behavior was and what was not. Since students did not have another explanation for a person's behavior, their explanation for a particular unexplainable behavior automatically became the person was being racist.

Racial discussions caused discomfort. People were worried about offending and making others mad. At the same time, if the racial discussions did not happen, nothing would get resolved. According to one respondent, people she worked with tended to believe the stereotypes of American Indian people. Because the racial discussions would not happen, a disconnect between staff members would often occur.

THEME: Relationships with Stakeholders

The theme of Relationships with Stakeholders had so much content; the discussion of it was organized by whom the teacher had a relationship with and how these relationships impacted their decision to remain in their current positions.

Teacher/Administrator Relationships

Relationships with administrators played a part in teachers wanting to remain at an American Indian school, but were not necessarily a deciding factor in whether or not they stayed. In fact, based on this research, teachers stayed on the job in spite of difficult relationships with administrators. Each of the teachers had experiences with an administrator they considered an effective administrator as well as experience with an administrator they considered ineffective.

When respondents deemed administrators to be lacking in leadership, the teachers relied on each other to get them through the ineffective leadership era. According to respondents, administrators did not listen to them, did not take advantage of the knowledge and strengths they possessed, and made them feel inadequate for the task of teaching in this challenging environment. A quote taken from one of the teachers that described her feelings based on interactions with an administrator was,

I feel belittled. I feel like I don't know what the heck I am doing anymore.

I know in the back of my mind, I know what I am doing, and I know it is working because I see my kids' progress, and I see their test scores, but I [know] what I know and what I feel are two different things right now.

This teacher had been working at an American Indian school for over five years. There was a definite disconnect between what the teacher was doing and what the teacher was

feeling along with what was happening within the school and administration that caused teachers to feel this way. Since the respondents were teachers and no administrators were interviewed, these perceptions could not be verified. They were based on perceptions of teachers. There was a possibility administrators felt like they were effective leaders, and it was the teachers who were not effective. However, because the teachers felt the way they did, whatever the perception was, it was real to them.

When an administrator had the characteristics teacher participants deemed were necessary for the administrator to be an effective leader, their jobs still were not easy, but they were easier. The teachers felt supported. They felt as though someone was listening to them, accepted what they had to say and considered their opinions when making decisions. They also felt they were part of the decision-making process. An effective administrator was thought to guide and lead staff and was not afraid to have tough conversations. An effective administrator did not show favoritism and did not have standards for people based on who they were and whom they knew. When the teachers felt they had an effective administrator, they believed they could accomplish what needed to be accomplished.

Teacher/Teacher Relationships

Relationships with colleagues as a factor in retention were the second most significant finding in the research. The necessity of having someone to talk with, commiserate with, vent to, cry with, laugh with, or laugh at, were crucial parts to the daily lives of teachers. Teachers used their relationships with one another as a way to cope with what was going on in their work lives. The need to cope came from the following: Difficulties of working with at-risk students; difficulties of working with

parents who struggled with coming to school or with meeting the needs of their children because they were not in a place in their life to be able to meet those needs; and difficulties with working with administrators who did not understand, did not have the needed experience to do their jobs, or had to follow directives given by their supervisor.

Teacher/Parent Relationships

Relationships with students' families were built over a length of time and through honest communication. If teachers described one area as an area of frustration and uncertainty, it was the area of building relationships with students' families. There were several reasons for this frustration. Frustration resulted when parents were difficult to contact. This might be because parents had no phone or their number changed and the teacher was not notified of the change. Frustration occurred when parents seemed to avoid communication with the school unless they were unhappy about something. Only then would come in to the school. Lastly, teachers were frustrated with the lack of involvement parents had in their children's education.

However, it must also be noted that once a relationship with parents had been built, there was often a strong connection. This connection did not come easy and took a long time. The relationship was built through consistent and continuous communication, i.e. letters, phone calls, emails, text messages, face to face visits. Teachers found if they contacted first with positive messages, when they had to contact because the student did not make a good choice, parents were more receptive to them. Teachers also found that when they gave suggestions to parents on how to help their child, parents were more willing to do so. Another note from the teachers was the importance of talking to parents as an equal partner in their child's education.

Teacher/Student Relationship

The first major finding of this study was how much relationships with students impacted the teachers' desire to work at an American Indian school. When teachers were asked why they loved their jobs, for most of the teachers, the response was they loved the kids. For those who did not answer with "kids" as their first response, it was the second response. They loved the kids for several different reasons. The teachers talked about the difficult lives of the students. The difficulties in the students' lives stem from parents and their inability to care for their children because they are struggling with personal issues or lack parenting skills. The difficulties in students' lives also stem from uncertainty at home as far as who will take care of them, whose house do they go to, will someone be home, or will there be fighting or substance abuse. The difficulties stem from academic and emotional struggles. Finally, difficulties for students may stem from school and a lack of structure in the schedule and routines. These difficulties all caused the teachers to want to take care of their students. One teacher went as far as saying she felt obligated to stay. Another teacher said the students needed her to stay.

Respondents appeared to have felt a moral obligation to remain at their school to ensure students were taken care of and getting what they needed to be successful. Respondents discussed giving up their preparation time so they could spend it with students who needed extra support. When giving up their preparation time for students, they were actually giving up more than preparation time. Since respondents were not always sure they were going to get preparation time, the preparation time they were given was precious. Another supporting detail was teachers who would keep the students in

their classrooms no matter what behavior was exhibited by the students. Respondents felt they could take care of the situation better than someone else and the student would get the support they needed to make better choices. The moral obligation felt by respondents was an important factor in their decisions to remain working in their schools.

Relationships with students appeared to result from appreciation of their culture, getting to know their personalities, and being empathetic to students because of the struggles students encountered. Students became the focus of a teacher's desire to want to provide their students with an education and with life experiences that would help them to be ready and successful for the next grade. They also wanted this success to carry forward into their future lives. The teachers told stories of students who struggled and of those who were successful. The stories ranged from a child sitting in the middle of the floor while police approached the house with guns drawn, to a student that each teacher had in their classroom and could tell a story about him because of who that child was and the personality he had, to students who thanked their teachers for being there and taking care of them. It is through these student relationships, with these student relationships, and for these student relationships that teachers are willing to endure the toughest of working conditions to remain working in American Indian schools.

Implications of Study

There is a need for equity conversations to take place. However, before these conversations can occur, teachers and administrators need to understand the role of race and how it impacts the teaching and learning in a school. Since equity conversations appear to have not taken place, the idea of social justice can be difficult to embrace. The

impact race has on the daily life of American Indians or any other person of color must be understood to begin to understand why some people struggle to move forward.

The sense of family felt by respondents was built through constant communication and support between teachers. Like a family, not everyone gets along and family members leave and do not come back. However, when a familial bond was present, respondents went out of their way to support and help one another. Respondents discussed being able to get their jobs done in spite of what leadership did. Leaders can help to facilitate close relationships by formalizing a mentoring program for new teachers as well as creating common preparation times for teachers to connect and collaborate.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations for teachers, administrators, and school board/tribal councils of American Indian schools. The list is not an exhaustive list, but outlines some of the key components that were commonly noted in the interviews and data analysis.

Recommendations for Teachers

It takes a special teacher to work at American Indian schools according to the teachers who participated in this study. One teacher said it was not that you had to love “kids” because teachers love “kids”; you had to have something extra. This extra could be something you already have within you, like resiliency, grit, perseverance, and/or a strong feeling of moral obligation, or it could be gained from seeking help from and helping your colleagues. My formal recommendations for teachers are:

1. Seek schools with formal mentoring programs and embrace opportunities for professional networking.

2. Be flexible and open to change. Teachers should have tolerance for a lack of structure and unclear expectations.
3. Get to know the families of students. Build understanding relationships between you (the teacher) and parents/guardians. When students know their teachers know their families and are in contact with their families, the student/teacher relationship will be stronger.
4. Be involved in the community. Not only is it important for the community to see teachers at events; but also, it is important for the students to see teachers there. Students need to know that they are important enough that teachers are willing to spend time with them outside the workday.
5. Be strong and be self-aware. Having these attributes will increase the chance of being successful. With many uncertainties, it can become a habit to look at others rather than at oneself when determining a cause for problems. Look at all perspectives. Knowing who you are and what you believe will help you to be successful in a school where the guidance you have comes from what you know and believe or what your colleagues know and believe.
6. Increase your classroom management skills. Have expectations and teach them to your students and then continue to teach them. Using a program like Responsive Classroom will help you to learn personalities and build relationships.

Recommendations for Administrators

The teachers, who have been in your schools for five years or more, want to be in your schools. They invariably have a strong connection to their students and to their

colleagues. They struggle to understand how or why decisions that impact them are made; why schedules are not followed; and why there are so many changes. If you want your teachers to stay, not only because of their students and colleagues, but because your school is a great place to work, here are some suggestions:

1. Use a collaborative leadership style when leading teachers. Value what they have to say and show them you support their efforts. Have a dialogue with the teachers and take advantage of their knowledge and expertise. Showing the teachers you trust them to do their jobs will empower them to be an effective teacher.
2. Teachers want to grow in their teaching ability. Using coaching methods will assist in the process of increasing teachers' confidence and ability. A framework, like Marzano's Taxonomy and Instructional Strategies (Marzano, Simms, Roy, Heflebower, & Warrick, 2013), can help strengthen teachers' instructional practices and develop their capacity to coach one another in those instructional practices.
3. Keep teachers involved in decision-making when possible. When administrators encourage and support teachers with opportunities to practice decisional capital (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012), the decision-making process will build teacher capacity by developing their leadership skills. When teachers are part of decision-making, they will know why they are doing a task, understand the purpose of what they are doing, and work harder to make it happen.

4. Add programs to help students learn how to cope with the struggles they have outside their school life. Programs like Responsive Classroom assist in teaching students self-management skills, empathy, builds self-esteem, and strengthens a classroom community. Our students are living with trauma, with abuse, with neglect, with sadness, and things that most of us cannot even imagine. If we want students to be able to learn, we need to give them the skills to be able to focus on their learning while learning how to cope with things over which they have no control. Teachers have a tough job with all the requirements they must meet. When they are trying to meet the state, federal, tribal, and Bureau of Indian Education requirements and teach children how to cope, something will have to give.
5. Celebrate teachers. They do not look for recognition, but everyone needs to know they are appreciated.

These recommendations are similar to recommendations I found while rereading an article written by Tickle et al. (2011) to find other recommendations for how administrators could support their teachers. This article mentioned the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards. These standards were developed to help school leadership programs set requirements for students as they go through graduate programs, in an effort to provide guidance towards developing effective leadership skills.

Another framework for administrators to consider would be Bolman and Deal's (2011) Reframing Organizations and the Four-Frame Model. The four frames are structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. When administrators are looking at the structural frame of the school, policies and procedures along with the vision and

mission of the district should be developed and shared. Administrators could use the structural frame to see if something could be changed to better support their teachers and students.

If administrators were to use the human resource frame as a guide, they might find value in learning how their teachers are feeling about their job and colleagues. Then, they might offer support and professional development to build a teacher's capacity. If teachers are already feeling like they are a family unit, they already have a support system in place.

Looking at the political frame, administrators should be looking at how politics impacts what is happening in their school and how politics actually impacts what is happening in a school. Stakeholders might be working toward the same goal, but due to a lack of communication or differences in beliefs, stakeholders may not always be working toward the same goal with the same mindsets, ideals, or vision as administrators.

Lastly, when administrators are looking at the symbolic frame, they might realize the importance of recognizing the culture of a school both in terms of American Indian culture and school culture. Teachers appreciate and celebrate American Indian culture, but a school culture often needs work. According to Bolman and Deal (2011), teachers are "actors," and if the actors do not know their lines and how they are supposed to act in a scene, the performance will be lacking. When teachers do not know what they are supposed to be doing or how to do it, students may get what they need, but the teachers are going to feel ineffective.

Recommendations for School Boards/Tribal Councils

Teachers, who have been at your schools and have been there for five years or longer, really want to be there. They have built caring relationships with their students. These relationships are strong enough that students come back once they are no longer in a teacher's classroom to show appreciation and to reconnect. These relationships are so strong that teachers will stay in a difficult working environment to ensure students are not only taken care of but also are provided with an education they deserve. If a school district is fortunate enough to have these teachers in their schools, here are some recommendations on how to provide them with more support:

1. Hire effective administrators to lead the school. Effective administrators know best practices and are able to give examples of what they have done to lead a school or classroom to success.
2. Provide equity and diversity training for all employees. As a new teacher comes into an environment they are unsure of, they might find it difficult to understand how American Indian culture impacts what they teach and how their students learn. Race relations and equity conversations are difficult to have when people are afraid of offending someone.
3. Provide conflict resolution training for all employees. Giving employees the skills to be able to work through situations that cause misunderstanding as well as frustration will help improve the work environment.
4. Talk to them. Spend some time getting to know your teachers. Let them know you want them in your schools, and you are grateful for them being there.

5. Recognizing their efforts will let teachers know what they do is important and does not go unnoticed.
6. Ensure there is enough support for them and for the students. While budgets sometimes do not allow sufficient time for physical education, art, or music, ask them how they might be better supported with what the budget does allow. The teachers who stay in the schools want to be there. Since they have been there for many years, they will have ideas and know how to make things better.
7. Tenure for tribal schools is not an option. Is there a way to give teachers job security?
8. Establish a vision and mission for your school. Regardless of who the leader is your school should continue to work toward your vision. Teachers need direction that keeps them moving forward.

Recommendations for Teacher and Administrative Programs

1. Knowledge of diversity and equity issues is an essential component of working in American Indian schools. This knowledge should be developed in a manner that allows it to be a part of each of the classes within their program of study.
2. Give administrators background and skills in what is best practice for mentoring programs and peer coaching. There is not always time to learn this on the job. Having the necessary skills and knowledge when an administrator takes a position will increase the likelihood of success for the administrator and his/her teachers.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. Conduct research solely on the relationship between a teacher and a student to determine if students find teacher-student relationships as important as teachers do.
2. Conduct a similar research study as this one only on a larger scale or in different parts of the country to determine if similar results are found.
3. Follow up this research with research that would include the administrators' perspective.
4. The moral obligation felt by teachers toward students was a concept I had not considered a factor. I did not realize this was a factor until deep into the writing of the findings. However, it appeared to be an important factor to participants and should be considered in future studies. Studying the moral obligation that teachers feel toward students might be an area for further research. This research could reveal why teachers who feel this moral obligation keep themselves in stressful situations rather than seeking employment elsewhere.

Reflection

Being a teacher in an American Indian school is rewarding. These teachers are fortunate enough to be an integral part of an American Indian child's life. These teachers are given the opportunity to guide learning toward growth and success for each child they encounter. They also have the opportunity to see them grow through struggles they encounter in life because they are an American Indian child. Even without the academic, social, and life struggles an American Indian child may face, one struggle they will

always face is the fact they are American Indian. For better or for worse, this will impact who they are.

As an American Indian, I realize what a gift it is to have teachers who are strong enough, smart enough, and relentless enough to remain working in our schools. They have a difficult job to do. In a time where accountability is at its highest, whether it be federal, state, or tribal accountability, instead of being supported like they deserve to be, teachers are fighting within themselves to be satisfied in their jobs so they can continue to work with the children to who they are so desperately devoted.

Conclusion

The purpose behind this research was to learn the shared experiences as perceived by teachers who worked in American Indian schools for five years or longer and how the relationships with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators impact their experiences. While examining their shared experiences and relationships, the social support theory was used in the background to determine if when teachers felt supported, they felt less stress (LaRocco, House, and French, 1980).

It would appear that support from teachers' colleagues and devotion to their students impacted teachers' desires and abilities to remain working at their schools. Support came from relationships with colleagues and having that support gave teachers a desire to remain in their positions. I do not know that I could say teachers felt supported by students and that support of students helped them remain in their positions. However, relationships with their students were the backbone of teachers' desires to remain in their positions. Respondents did not seek relationships with their students as support for themselves; relationships with the students were to support the students. However, by

providing support, they were also getting what they needed to make it through stressful situations.

Students need their teachers. If students are going to possess what they need to be successful, then teachers need to possess they need to help students be successful. What teachers need is to be respected, supported, encouraged, appreciated, and celebrated. Most of what teachers need does not cost money. What teachers need is a school board/tribal council creating and following a mission and a vision along with hiring administrators who value the people working in their school.

The three themes developed in the study were communication, race, and relationships. However, the theme of communication and race are a part of relationships or relationships are a part of communication and race. The three themes are connected to each other. It is through these themes, the answer to my research question was answered. The teachers are connected through communication that develops into the relationships that keeps the teachers bound to the stakeholders who influence their decision to remain in their current positions. Race is a factor in the relationships through developing an understanding and celebrating of differences, but at the same time, realizing that discussions regarding racial disparities and misunderstandings need to happen for there to be acceptance.

APPENDICES

Appendix A
Letter to Teacher

Date:

Dear Teacher:

I am following up on our phone conversation regarding your participation in a research study that I will conduct under the direction of Dr. Pauline Stonehouse, advisor, at the University of North Dakota. The purpose of this study will be to use qualitative research methods to understand the roles, responsibilities, and experiences of rural superintendent/principals in North Dakota.

I will be interviewing six to ten teachers, and I would like to interview you. If you agree, I would like to conduct this interview at a time and a place that is convenient for you and conducive to being audio recorded for approximately 45-60 minutes. Your name and school district will not be disclosed in this research. I have enclosed an Informed Consent Form and possible interview questions. If you agree to participate in this research, please sign the bottom of this letter. Please return the Informed Consent Form and signature at the bottom of this page to me in the enclosed stamped, self-addressed envelope.

If you have any questions regarding this research project, please contact my advisor, Dr. Pauline Stonehouse, or me at the phone numbers or email addresses listed below. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Rae Villebrun
UND Doctoral Candidate
(701) 278-1599
rae.villebrun@my.und.edu

Pauline Stonehouse
UND Associate Professor
(701) 777-4163
pauline.stonehouse@und.edu

Signature Indicating Approval of Research

Date

**Appendix B
Informed Consent**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

TITLE: **How Shared Experiences Impact Teachers Who Remain in American Indian Elementary Schools More Than Five Years**

PROJECT DIRECTOR: Rae Villebrun

PHONE #: 701-278-1599

DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH

A person who is to participate in the research must give his or her informed consent to such participation. This consent must be based on an understanding of the nature and risks of the research. This document provides information that is important for this understanding. Research projects include only subjects who choose to take part. Please take your time in making your decision as to whether to participate. If you have questions at any time, please ask.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

You are invited to be in a research study about teacher retention at American Indian schools.

The purpose of this research study is to discover shared experiences that factor into teachers who continue to work at American Indian schools.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL PARTICIPATE?

Approximately six to ten people will take part in this study across a state in the Midwest.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?

Your participation in the study will last approximately one to two months to collect the data from teachers. Your participating in the interview will last 45 to 60 minutes. If you consent to participate the researcher will come to a place convenient for you to conduct the interview. Any follow-up questions will be completed over the phone.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?

1. The researcher will contact Superintendents or Principals to introduce the study to them and ask if they are interested in forwarding information to their teachers who fit the criteria.

2. The researcher will email each teacher who fits the criteria to gain consent from them to participate in the study.
3. The researcher will establish an interview time with the teacher at a place that is convenient for them.
4. The researcher will interview the teacher for 45 to 60 minutes. The researcher will use an audio recorder to record the interview.
5. The interview will be transcribed and pseudonyms will be used.
6. The subject will be given an opportunity to correct errors and challenges that are perceived as wrong interpretations.
7. Subjects will be provided the opportunity to volunteer additional information.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

You will not benefit personally from being in this study. However, administrators and school board members might gain knowledge on what teachers need to keep them teaching at their schools.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY

There are no alternatives to participating in this study.

WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

You will not have any costs for being in this research study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?

You will not be paid for being in this research study.

WHO IS FUNDING THE STUDY?

The University of North Dakota and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The records of this study will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. In any report about this study that might be published, you will not be identified. Your study record may be reviewed by Government agencies, the UND Research Development and Compliance office, and the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board.

Any information that is obtained in this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

No identifiable information will be used in this study.

The researcher will keep the recordings for three years at his/her home office and will destroy them after three years. Consent forms and personal data will be kept for three years and will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's home office. The researcher, researcher's advisor, and UND IRB will have access to the recordings, consent forms, and personal data for that period of time. No name or identifying factors will be used in any publication or presentation.

PRIOR TO INTERVIEW:

Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed for this research on faculty success. My name is Rae Villebrun and I am a doctoral student at UND in the Department of Educational Leadership. The following interview is designed to understand the factors that contribute to your continued employment at (name of school). Today I am hoping to hear about your experiences (name of school)—there are no right or wrong answers, so please feel you can be open and candid in your responses.

The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. This interview is semi-structured, so I have a number of questions for you, but new questions may also arise based on your responses.

Please take a moment to read and complete the consent form.

As stated in the consent form, the session will be audio recorded for transcription purposes. The interview is confidential; however, if you would feel more comfortable selecting a pseudonym for yourself, you can do so now. I will refer to you by this selected other name during the interview and in any research reports based on this data. I will also refer to your home institution (name of school) by name during the interview; however, this will also be given a pseudonym in any research report.

Do you have any questions? I will now turn on the recorder.

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

What do you love about your job?

If there has ever been a time where you thought about leaving, what kept you here? If there hasn't been a time, what keeps you here?

Tell me about a success you have had in your in your teaching here?

What advice do you have for first year teachers or teachers who are new to this school?

Do you have any questions for me?

In the future, I will be sending you a summary of my findings. I hope that you will take a moment to review what I have found and provide feedback.

This has been great. Thank you.

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