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The purposes of this study were to determine why teachers chose to leave the traditional public school to teach in a charter school and also how teachers understand the role of schooling in a democracy. In this qualitative study, I interviewed ten teachers from five different charter schools. Teachers first addressed their reasons for leaving the traditional public school in order to teach in a charter school. Teachers then shared their understanding of the purposes of education and the democratic implications of those purposes.

After interviewing the teachers and analyzing the data from the charter school websites where they worked, I answered two research questions. First, in determining why teachers leave the traditional public-school system to teach in charter schools, the reasons are both personal and professional. Personal values and needs help guide the decision-making process for the teachers as well as the need to be viewed as a professional who is able to make sound pedagogical decisions in their classroom and also in the school.

Second, I studied teacher's perception of democracy, especially in relation to the purposes of schooling and their choice to work in a charter school. In most cases, teachers were unable to demonstrate a sound understanding of democratic principles and their implications for the classroom learning or the school choices movement. Teachers were sometimes able to explain how they promote citizenship, empathy, and social justice, but they rarely invoked specific democratic principles.

Teacher's decisions, although personal and value based, have implications for society as a whole, even as they are often made for personal reasons and without much thought about how charter schools effect the democratic potential of public education. The implications from this study will influence how traditional public schools, charter schools, and teacher education programs approach educating their respective clienteles, especially if we hope to strengthen and sustain the democratic purposes for public education.

INVESTIGATING TEACHER PREFERENCES FOR TEACHING IN CHARTER SCHOOLS AND THE DEMOCRATIC IMPLICATIONS OF THOSE DECISIONS

by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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To my boys, remember that if you are willing to put in the work you can accomplish anything. Thank you for letting me work on this when I could have been playing with you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As a rule, I believe in freedom. This includes the freedom of speech, the freedom for or from religious practice, and the freedom to choose. Being on this side of the freedom of choice is not always a popular place to be when you work in the public schooling arena. People tend to have very strong feelings about the purpose of school and the need for a strong unified public-school system. While I share these views on the need for a strong educational system, I can see the necessity of choice in education and understand the desire for people to exercise that choice.

While speaking with a trusted colleague about the role of public education in our society, and the increasing role that charter schools play in educating our children, she made a comment that changed the way I think about public school. She said, "If charter schools, private schools, vouchers and school choice continue to go unchecked, traditional public schools will become a thing of the past and likened to the public health system." That comment resonated with me. I could see a bigger picture forming inside of my head, particularly around the implications and unintended consequences of school choice. Public health is often considered a last resort. In many situations, public health is only considered if there are no other options. Is this the direction we are going towards with public education? If so, what role do teachers play in this move away from quality public goods? Should teachers be concerned about their choices about where to teach?

And, if they decide to teach in a charter setting, how that choice might impact the traditional public-school systems that are tasked with educating all of our youth.

Statement of Problem

Since the founding of our country, there has been ongoing discussion about the purpose education should seek to fulfill. Among the many stated purposes, one of the most commonly held beliefs is that schools should assist those who are less fortunate and give them a chance to make a better life. Similarly, a parallel purpose to produce citizens who are interested in continuing the democratic ideals on which this country was founded. Depending on whom you ask, you are likely to get many different answers to questions about the fundamental purposes of universal public schooling, even within the education community. For this reason, it has been difficult to prescribe a "one size fits all" model of education that equally benefits all who are served. In fact, one of the first debates surrounding education concerned who should be educated. During this founding period of our nation, wealth, race, and gender determined largely if a person was afforded the luxury of an education (Boyle & Burns, 2012). While the debate surrounding who deserves an education has been settled through various court cases, a disparity still exists when it comes to the types and strengths of the institutions that educate our youth. Concerns about equality of educational opportunity, especially influenced by gender, social status, race, and ethnicity, continue to drive conversations about the quality and authority of the institutions that are currently available to educate our children.

There are many stakeholders in the decision-making process for establishing an education system. Children are counting on all of the adults in their lives to make the

best decision possible for their future. Parents want to make sure that their child has the best opportunity to be successful. The community and government alike have a desire to produce good citizens who are capable of taking care of themselves, sustaining our public institutions and goods, and contributing to the economy. For many years, parents could choose between sending their children to a public, government-supported school or a private school. The private school choice may have been a religious institution or a secular private school. In either case, the ability to pay tuition was and still is a limiting force when contemplating a private institution. Still freedom implies choice, even if that choice is sometimes constrained. Freedom to have choice in the educational decision-making process when selecting a school for their child is a concept that is deeply engrained in American culture (Berends, Cannata, & Goldring, 2011). Until recently, this freedom of choice was reserved only for the wealthy. Yet in a free society, it makes sense that the citizens would desire to have a choice in their child's education. The concept of a free market of education offers "an alternate route to education, between the inherent inequalities of local district control and the coercive constraints of centralized bureaucracies" (Feinberg & Lubienski, 2008, p. 3). Currently, with options such as magnet and charter schools, parents are no longer constrained to the traditional zoned public-school close to where they reside, nor are they compelled to spend large amounts of tuition money to educate their child.

While charter schools offer the promise of choice to parents, they continue to be a part of, and funded by, the public education system. While they are free from some regulations and policies, charter schools are still public schools. The growth of publicly

funded charter schools has reignited concerns about how public funds should be used to educate children. Proponents of charter schools argue that they provide a stronger education for their students because they are typically student centered and more likely to succeed because they are responsive to market demands. Unlike tradition public schools, charter schools must be result and reward driven in order to survive (Berends, Springer, Ballou & Walberg, 2009). Traditional school supporters argue that money is being funneled to the charter schools to use with only a subsection of the population, while other students suffer. These claims give ammunition for both sides of the education choice debate, those who agree that public money should be used to fund competition and others who feel that it should be reserved for traditional public schools to meet the needs of their students.

With both of these options increasingly present in many communities, parents and guardians are given a choice to decide what is best for their children. Parents are not the only decision maker here, however. Teachers must also decide what side of the debate they are on. Do they believe a charter school is an important option, even perhaps the best option for many children? Do they feel any allegiance to a traditional public-school system? Do they subscribe to a view of educating to further democratic ideals, or do they simply need a job? What compels teachers who have taught in the traditional public-school system to move to charter schools?

While there has been a vast amount of research on parental choice in education and the reasons that parents pick charter schools for their children (Bast & Walberg, 2004; Cuchiarra & Horvat, 2014; Lubienski, 2003; Miron & Nelson, 2002; Renzulli &

Evans, 2005; Wilson 2015, 2016), the viewpoint of the teacher has been largely ignored by researchers. In understanding the larger context of charter schools and the impact they may have on commitments to, and sustenance of, traditional public education, it is important to understand why teachers make the decision to leave traditional public schools to teach in charter schools. We need to understand this choice in order to retain quality teachers when other educational opportunities arise. While there is current research about teacher satisfaction and attrition in charter schools, I could not find any research on to why teachers choose charter schools to begin with, or how they make sense of this decision.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if there are common themes among teachers as to why they leave traditional public schools and choose to work in charter schools. Working with a small sample of current charter school teachers in the piedmont area of North Carolina, I first investigated the initial reasons that they chose to leave the traditional public-school setting. After determining the preliminary reasons they gave for this choice, I then studied whether these decisions produced any unintended consequences, for example, inconsistencies with their expressed views on the purposes and goals of public education, particularly within a democratic society.

My hope is that this study will provide some information as to why teachers choose to teach in a charter school and what thought they give to the impact of their decision, particularly on the role of schools in democracy. Does the choice to teach in a charter school implicitly promote a certain view or perspective on the purpose of public

education, or might teachers in these settings inadvertently create conflicts with their belief systems? While I do not expect to be able to generalize the results from this small-scale qualitative study, it will provide valuable information by investigating individual teachers' choices and how they understand the relationship between these choices and the role for schooling in a democratic society.

Research Questions

I designed this study to answer two research questions:

1. Why do teachers choose to leave traditional public schools to work in a charter school?
2. How do charter school teachers understand the role of schooling in a democracy?

Background Context

Education is a highly political environment (Labaree, 1997). Nearly every citizen has an opinion about and a stake in the education system. Every child is directly involved in the education process. Parents want the best for their children and make decisions based on their desire for their children to have the best opportunities in life. Business owners need a highly educated workforce to staff their companies. Even members of the community at large, with no direct connections to public schools, pay their tax money to support the education system. Each one of these groups has a valid concern about the purposes of education and the direction in which public education is heading.

There have been many studies that seek to determine why students attend charter schools (Bast & Walberg, 2004; Cuchiarra & Horvat, 2014; Lubienski, 2003; Miron &

Nelson, 2002; Renzulli & Evans, 2005; Wilson 2015, 2016). The dimensions of these studies are varied. For example, researchers have studied that conditions that are conducive to students enrolling in a charter school. They have also researched the impacts and perhaps unintended outcomes that occur when students leave traditional public schools. These outcomes include racial segregation, "creaming" students away from traditional public schools (the idea of attracting the brightest and most intelligent students), and an underserving of poorer students and students with learning disabilities. These consequences, typically unintended, are a byproduct of the decisions that students and parents make to attend charter schools. Before these unintended consequences were realized, there had to be a conscious decision that was made by the founders of the charter school as well as the teachers who staff the school as to what type of students the charter will seek to enroll and the placement of the school. Each of these decisions is a factor on enrollment.

Overview of Methods

I conducted a basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to explore the reasons why teachers chose to leave traditional public schools to teach in charter schools and how these reasons intersect with their understandings of the democratic purposes of public education. I recruited and interviewed ten teachers who taught in traditional public schools for at least two years and who then moved and had taught at a charter school for at least one year. I based my interview guide off of my review of the literature and the questions I used in a pilot study that I conducted on this topic. I gathered basic demographic and descriptive information about participants, and then asked them

questions about their decision-making processes, their experiences with charter school teaching, and their vision for the role of education in a democracy.

Following standard qualitative research protocol, I had the interviews transcribed, listened to them to ensure accuracy, shared the results with the participants, asked follow up questions when I needed clarification, and then began the data analysis process. I coded the transcripts, looked for patterns and broad topics and categories, and then developed themes. I used member checks to clarify data and peer reviews to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. I described these methods in detail in the third chapter of this dissertation.

Concept of Democracy in Schools

A common understanding of the purpose of public schools is that they should exist to create good citizens and provide the ability to form and maintain a democracy so that all people can benefit equally. This once common belief has recently been drowned out by other competing purposes of public education. Rothstein and Jacobsen (2006) list nine different goals of public education, ranked from highest to lowest in perceived public opinion. Citizenship and community responsibility are listed as fourth place in this survey, with the development of basic academic skills, critical thinking, and social skills ranking higher. The remaining four purposes listed came within two percentage points of tying with citizenship, which means that respondents to this poll thought all purposes listed were important on some level. These goals are preparation for skilled work, physical health, emotional health, and teaching the arts and literature.

A Carnegie report on The Civic Mission of Schools (2003) notes several reasons for the decline of civic education. Among those reasons are teacher fears about bringing up controversial subject matter that may be offensive to the parents of their students, high stakes testing, and budget cuts. Highly charged political arguments are often not debated in schools because teachers fear that they will be either charged in the actual court system or in the court of public opinion. High stakes testing and accountability of basic subject areas have caused teachers to focus all of their energy and time on making sure that what has to be tested is taught. As there are typically no standardized tests on social studies and civics content, these topics are increasingly marginalized in the curriculum. Lastly, clubs that used to promote citizenship or civic engagement have been cut due to lack of funding.

Many questions surround the civic responsibilities of public schools and who should control decisions within these schools. What should be the purpose of public schools? As background context to this study, it is useful to understand the debate that surrounds the role of public schools in creating and sustaining a public, as well as the beliefs and perspectives that people hold about the American public education system. These beliefs, and how parents and teachers alike understand the democratic commitments of public schools, no doubt shape the choices that they make in terms of where to teach and where to send their children to school.

Labaree (1997) argues that the majority of the problems central to educational goals are political and that the tensions surrounding the goals of public schools are centered on the debate between public rights and private rights. Whose ideals should the

schools serve? Should the schools serve the individual public citizen who needs education to provide for a better life and a brighter future? Should the schools serve the marketplace and provide willing and subservient members of the workforce to be employed? Or in a true democratic sense, should the public school be a place where students are taught to function and live in a democratic society, where they learn to balance their individual goals with commitments to public goals and goods? Labaree states that these questions and the educational goals that arise from these questions set education up on a spectrum from a public to a private good (p. 41). If education is a private good, then it should serve the mobility and advancement of the consumer, the individual. If education is a public good, then it should serve the public as a whole and students should be taught to interact in society and the public-school system should benefit the public. This benefit could take many forms, including civic vitality or economic gains. Where the economic gains are easy to see, it is more difficult to determine what broad civic, democratic gains would look like because each person has a different interpretation of what society should look like. This creates a difficult tension when educating for democracy.

Public education began as a way to promote citizenship and prepare citizens to participate in a democracy. Horace Mann (1957) wrote in 1848 "it may be an easy thing to make a Republic, but it is a very laborious thing to make Republicans; and woe to the republic that rests upon no better foundations than ignorance, selfishness, and passion" (p. 92). This was an early warning of the importance of civic education and the needs of a government to prepare their citizens to operate in a way that would promote democracy

and increase the possibility of people living together with common and mutually beneficial goals. A Nation at Risk, a landmark report on the state of the US system of education that focused mainly on the need to increase rigor and accountability also noted, "a high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society and to the fostering of a common culture" (Gardner, 1983, p. 7). While this report focused mainly on the economic aspects of education and the need to provide the basics of education so that American citizens could compete globally, there was still a sense among framers of this report that education is something that involves more than academic results. This publication helped to pave the way for accountability practices and high stakes testing, but the authors still felt that it was important to validate the need for shared educational experiences that create and nurture a democratic society.

However, despite a stated commitment to education for democratic goods, Neumann (2008) argues the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation acted as a catalyst in the ongoing erosion of civic education, although the push to abandon began many decades ago with "the media fabricated 'literacy crisis' and back to the basics movement of the mid-1970s" (p. 33). Each of these publications and the political fallout that accompanied them helped to create a sense that schools should be focusing on academic learning in a narrowly defined set of subjects and to quit wasting their time on social and societal problems. This was in direct conflict with what John Dewey (1916) warned in *Democracy and Education*. Dewey believed that if academic subject matter were the only things taught in schools then society's needs would increasingly be lost from public view.

Dewey's warning about the consequences of ignoring democratic purposes for schooling seems almost prophetic in today's society where we seem to have less and less in common with our fellow citizens and political differences are painfully evident in our increasingly polarized world. Mapp and Gabel (2018) reference the Economist Intelligence Unit's report that downgrades the United States from a full to a flawed democracy. The United States was once regarded as the flagship of democracy in the world, yet this is changing as schools pay less and less attention to nurturing the habits and dispositions necessary to sustain democratic values and social arrangements. Hytten (2017) argues that schools:

> often teach, explicitly and implicitly, that democracy is merely the political system that we use to make decisions by in our country. We rarely discuss deeper visions for democracy or tensions and paradoxes within democracy or even reflect on the meaning of democracy at all (p. 8).

For most people, the public school is the primary, if not only, place that members of society learn explicitly about democracy and are asked to think about their roles and responsibilities in a democratic society.

Often, democratic principles are reduced to character education and producing good citizens. While these ideals are important, Westheimer (2015) argues that teaching students to be good citizens or responsible citizens generally does not further the ideals of democracy. In fact, he argues that the traits that are associated with personal responsibility would be welcomed in any form of government, including a totalitarian one. If the citizens are not able to stand up for their rights and form their own opinions, then they are not able to make any real changes to their lives or society. In a real sense,

without teaching students how to engage in a democracy and challenge the norms that are present in our society, we have done little to ensure that democracy will continue for future generations.

If schools do not give a clear picture of what that discussion should entail, the individual has to determine what democracy is on their own, if they give it any thought at all. With no consistent view of democracy being presented in society, what should be the course of action for the public-school system to ensure that future generations are able to function as a society? Democratic processes require a commitment to certain values and goals that must be cultivated and taught. It is difficult for public school leaders across the country, and in some cases in the same county, to come to a consensus about what a democratic education should entail, and how choice, seemingly an unassailable democratic good, fits into visions for democracy. Moreover, there is much debate as to whether charter schools represent a promising or troubling development for democracy.

Charter schools present a unique challenge when trying to come to a consensus about the meaning of democracy and the role of schools in shaping citizens. At the heart of this movement, individuals or groups of individuals with the same beliefs are empowered to open charter schools that can be based on those beliefs and that are free from some of the traditional public-school regulations. Participating in the opening of a charter school can be seen as a form of social activism where those individuals can determine what is important to the population that they are attempting to reach. They are no longer beholden to the traditional public school operated by the government; they can impact and cater to the views of the population that they serve. By creating schools that

tend to attract like-minded participants, what might be lost is the dialogue across lines of difference and the exchange of ideas that are necessary to compromise and collaboration. While charter schools may open to foster democratic principles, the continued fragmentation and separation of society may in fact cause less democratic interaction and exchange of ideas. This is one of the reasons why the democratic potential of charter schools is often debated and why some scholars and activists argue for a stronger and more transparent commitment to democratic goals in schools.

Hytten (2017) argues,

> democracy is an ethical ideal that must be deliberately fostered and nourished in order for it to survive. It is a work in progress, and the fundamental role of schools in democratic societies is to cultivate the habits, values, dispositions, and practices necessary to sustain a democratic way of life (p. 2).

In order to address the issue of the decline of democratic ideals, the public-school leaders and curriculum developers must first decide that they will broach the subject of democracy directly. Jenlink and Jenlink (2008) propose that the creation of democratic learning communities would help to foster democratic ideals in schools. The suggest that creating spaces where teachers can get together and discuss common issues and propose solutions which would benefit the school as a whole and offer a forum to exercise democracy. This free exchange of ideas and respect for different positions is important in the training of educators who ought to pass these characteristics on to their students. By practicing the ideals of a democratic society and participating in the discussions and compromises associated with being in a democratic group, the expectation is that democratic principles will be learned and exercised.

Others feel that the specifics of democracy must be more explicitly taught. This explicit instruction should include the "cultivation of virtues, knowledge, and skills necessary for political participation" (Neumann, 2008, p. 337). Neumann further states that teaching the habits and values of democracy should be the primary goal of public K-12 education. He argues that this instruction should trump the other goals of charter schools related to a narrow focus on student achievement and the creation of a competent workforce. Neumann's justification for this stance for strengthening social education is based "on a conviction that public schools serve the public interest and the primary interest of a democratic society is to maintain itself" (p. 333). He believes that if there is not a free society where people can participate in with economic incentives and the potential for social mobility, then there is little reason to prepare for those goals; democratic goals must come first. Labaree (1997) questions whether schools should primarily support the individual dreams of the student or should they support the needs of society, as well as how we might mesh these legitimate goals. Implicitly, Neumann argues that in order for students to realize their hopes and dreams through education, there must be a form of free government and democratic arrangements that allow students to fulfill their goals and pursue their dreams. If a segment of the population is not recognized as having importance or granted the rights necessary to succeed, it will not matter how much education has been afforded to them. They must also have the freedoms associated with democracy in addition to the academic learning that takes place in school.

These debates about the role of education in a democracy are closely tied up with the charter school movement, as questions about the degree to which charter school represent a good or problematic development for democracy are up for debate. As part of this study, I intend to look at how charter school teachers understand the meaning of democracy and if and how it influences their choices about where to work. In doing so, it is important to situate myself in this study as well, particularly as someone who has taught social studies and now leads a traditional public school.

Positionality

I work as a principal in a traditional public school. Every day I work with kids from all walks of life. Each of the students have their different struggles, some students have distinct advantages over the others, but they are all together and in the same space for nearly seven hours every day. In traditional public schools, I see a fairly level playing field for all students to have access to educational goods. From my role, I do not see the same level playing field in the charter school arena. I see families who are more likely to enroll in a charter school as having some advantages, particularly the knowledge and resources available to access sufficient information, to provide additional resources for their children (often in the form of transportation and lunch), and to make the transition away from their zoned school. I see charter schools that recruit a certain type of student (even though this is often more implicit than explicit): a student of a particular race, a student from a particular socio-economic level, or a student that will produce high achievement. In any of these situations, it is worth exploring if we are furthering societal gaps and potentially eroding the democratic promise of schools.

I have had the opportunity to interview for positions in charter schools and have been offered these positions. Yet each time I get an offer, I have never been able to "pull the trigger" and accept a position at a charter school. There always seems to be a little voice in the back of my head that tells me that I would not be working for all children if I took a charter school position. This reticence to leave the traditional public schools' system has persisted inside of me, but it also has caused me to wonder about the considerations of those who do make that choice and leave traditional public schools. I have colleagues who I respect and admire who have left the traditional public-school system to work in charter schools. These are people who I know have a strong personal commitment to students, but I sometimes wonder about their motivations and if they struggle with their decisions at all. I want to use the interactions I have with the teachers in this study and the information that I collect to inform my understandings of why teachers choose charters and what compelled them to "pull the trigger." I also want to gain insight into each participants value system and understanding of the purposes of public schooling and to learn if and how a commitment to democracy or their understanding of democracy influences their decisions.

Significance of this Study

The backbone of the American education system is the teacher. Historically, school systems and entire state education systems are crippled when teachers decide to strike, as they have done more frequently in numerous states across the country over the past couple of years. In many cases they are seeking adequate compensation and better

working conditions. Without strong teachers who are committed to their jobs, public schools will not succeed in providing a solid education for all students.

When looking at the current literature, there is a significant gap in relation to why teachers decide to teach in a charter school as opposed to the traditional public-school system – which historically has been the backbone of democracy. There is some information as to why teachers choose to teach in a specific school, but none of that research deals with charter school employment. In my study I hope to expose the power that teachers have in deciding where to teach, and how this decision might shape the opportunities available to all children.

I am also interested in learning and sharing insight about the values that charter school teachers possess and how they feel that those values further the mission of public education. If charter schools are to support broader democratic goals, then the teachers working in them must to be able to talk about those goals and how they are addressed in the current context of educating all students.

The insights I gain from this study may inform decision makers in recruiting teachers back to traditional public schools and marketing towards teachers who might otherwise choose a charter school. This information will also be useful for a teacher who is considering leaving a traditional public school to teach in a charter school. The study will provide some insights about the values and beliefs that charter school teachers possess and espouse, as well as help us to understand why some teachers find charter schools a more attractive option as compared to their other options. Information from

this study will be useful to support efforts to retain high quality teachers in both traditional and charter schools.

This study will also provide colleges of education with information to ensure that current education students have a firm knowledge of the values and dispositions that are needed in order to prepare our future teachers to teach all students. Providing this information to our teachers will secure a foundation of democracy for our public-school students regardless of their setting.

Overview of Chapters

In this first chapter, I provided a brief overview and rationale for my study. I then summarized some of the current reasons that public education exists in all of its forms. I specifically discussed the need for schools to further the goals of academics as well as the transmission of democratic thought and action. This foundation is important to understanding issues surrounding charter schools and if and how they are fulfilling democratic educational purposes.

In the second chapter, the literature review, I discuss the purposes and the beginnings of the charter school movement as well as the promises of charter school reform. Next, I discuss the research on charter schools and the criticisms that surround the movement, related to such issues as segregation, enrollment disparities, uneven achievement, and a questionable record related to innovation. This is followed by a thorough discussion of parent's choices that are involved in choosing a charter school for their children and the thought process and implications of that decision. It is important to understand this process in order to provide some context for how those concerns and

dilemmas with the decision-making process are also encountered by the teacher. Finally, I explore the research about current teacher job satisfaction and attrition in charter schools. This may offer insight into the values of charter school teachers and what they feel are important factors in their decision- making.

In the third chapter, I describe the methodology that I used to conduct my basic qualitative study. I interviewed 10 charter school teachers from five different charter schools. I then had their interviews transcribed. I looked for patterns in answers from those interviews using a template that I created to divide information into different categories that I developed from coding interview responses. I describe the different charter schools where the teachers work and also provided an overview of the demographics of each school in that chapter as well.

I explore the findings from my study in the fourth and fifth chapters. The fourth chapter deals with the reasons the teachers gave as to why they left the traditional public schools and pursued a job in the charter school. The responses that the teachers gave reveal what they value and the trends in the information from across the different charter schools. Regardless of the mission of each of the charter schools, there are varying answers as to why the teacher left the traditional public school and how they see charter school growth as influencing or limiting democracy in public school systems.

In the fifth chapter, I examine the teacher's understandings of democracy and how those understandings relate to schooling. As part of my interviews, I asked teachers what they thought the purpose of schooling should be and how they promote democracy in their classes. They also described how their school seeks to promote democracy. In

addition to these things, I address the ways that their schools limit democratic activity and access to their school through specific practices (e.g., lack of transportation or free and reduced lunch programs, expectations for parent involvement in schools, early release days) as well as the teachers understanding of those practices.

In the sixth and final chapter, I summarize and analyze my findings. I also examine my research questions in light of the data I collected, make suggestions in order to help reduce negative consequences of charter enrollment, and provide information on individual teacher's decision-making processes and the effects that they have on students and society.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much has been written about charter schools and the goals that they hope to achieve for student success. There are many purposes for which charter schools are opened and there are equally as many reasons that parents choose to send their children to charter schools. While there are many well documented motives that parents have for placing their children in charter schools, there has not been much research conducted on why teachers choose to teach in charter schools. I suspect that it is likely that teachers choose charter schools for many of the same reasons that parents choose charter schools for their children. These decisions by teachers create consequences to society and students, much like parent and student choices create. As a precursor to understanding these potential consequences, it is important to understand the history and philosophy of charter school reform.

In my review of literature, I describe the goals of the charter school movement and also the present concerns that are articulated by charter school critics. This background information will help inform the reader about issues and concerns that teachers presumably reflect on when choosing to teach at a charter school. This review of literature also helps to set the stage for understanding the unintended consequences of charter school enrollment and operation policies. In the first section of this review, I

discuss the history and purposes behind the charter school movement. In this section, I detailed the intended audience and legislative purposes for charter school operation. In the second section, I discuss the research on charter schools and the criticisms that surround the charter school movement, such as segregation, enrollment disparities, uneven achievement, and a questionable record related to innovation. Third, I review research on parental choices and the considerations involved in choosing a charter school. It is important to understand this process in part because these decisions, concerns, and hesitations may be similar to those that teachers navigate. In the fourth section, I explore the research about current teacher job satisfaction and attrition in charter schools. This may offer insight into the values of charter school teachers and what they feel are important factors in their decision-making. I end with a summary of the research on this topic and discuss gaps in the literature surrounding charter schools.

Purposes of Charter Schools

Charter school laws in different states are enacted ostensibly to better serve student populations by increasing the number of schools in a specific area, increasing the quality of the schools, or by increasing educational innovation to best meet the needs of all students. Charter school advocates argue that charter schools do a better job of growing student achievement as compared to traditional public schools, and that competition for students will force all schools to improve. As there is very little research focused on why charter school teachers choose to leave traditional public schools, I will describe the purposes that charter school seek to serve, so that I can later examine

teacher's decision-making processes and values in relation to the actual purposes of charter schools.

Educating Underserved Populations

School choice is a concept that predates our nation (Kafer, 2009). Prior to the establishment of the United States public education system, school choice was realized through numerous channels such as home schools and private academies. During this founding period of our nation, wealth, race, and gender significantly influenced if a person was afforded the luxury of an education (Boyle & Burns, 2012). Historically, only the most privileged were able to educate their children outside of the home. Public schools arose as an answer for the common citizen to be educated. Over time, public schools were created to provide an education for people who could not afford a private education or for families who did not have the ability to teach their children at home.

In the same way that public schools were created to serve an underserved population, charter schools were proposed to ensure that all students' needs are met by a public system of schooling. The idea for charter schools originated in the 1980's as a brainchild of Albert Shanker and the American Federation of Teachers (Fabricant & Fine, 2012). Charter schools were created as "small, engaging educational settings within low-income communities, where children of poverty, of color, and immigrants could be educated well, cared for, and nurtured academically, with intent" (p. 2). In districts where the public schools were not providing adequate educational benefits for all students, a charter school could be established and provide targeted support for underserved populations. Functioning in this way, charter schools would give an option

for parents who did not feel like their children were achieving to their fullest potential in their current schools.

Prior to the development of charter schools, the quality of a school that a child could attend was determined primarily on their ability to buy a home in the district of the well performing school, as Kafer (2009) notes, "a family needed to buy a home in a neighborhood with a good school or pay independent tuition" (p. 415). Jack Coons, a noted school choice proponent and civil rights leader, began proposing reform to this system that essentially rewarded families for living in more affluent areas and punished the children of families who could not make these arrangements. Coons' idea for reform was based on the belief that "the quality of education a child receives should not be a function of the wealth of the school district in which the child happens to live" (Sugarman, 2010, p. 191). The ability to move to a more affluent area is often an unattainable option for families who would like to provide a better education for their children.

Minnesota was the first state to authorize charter schools in 1991. In their original legislation, Minnesota cites three specific purposes of charter schools. These purposes were improving student learning, increasing opportunities for student learning, and using innovative teaching methods (Lubienski, 2003). Each of these purposes clearly relate to the desire to provide a high-quality education for each individual student. The purposes of improving student learning, providing more opportunities for students, and innovating teaching are also highlighted in North Carolina legislation, where this dissertation study takes place. The remaining purposes for charter schools in North

Carolina include creating professional opportunities for teachers, and helping to hold schools accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results, with special emphasis on at-risk and gifted students (NC Statute 115C-218).

Charter school laws vary by state. A common theme of charter school laws deals with the topic of innovation in schools. In fact, innovation is present as a policy goal in nearly three-quarters of charter school laws across the nation (Lubienski, 2003). Lubienski states that nearly all of the goals of charter schools are associated with innovation in instructional practices. Innovation that is accomplished through giving the teachers "the latitude to abandon things that do not work and to create a structure that more closely reflects what we know about how students engage and learn" is attributed to the vision of charter schools as set forth by Albert Shanker as the original concept of charter schools were beginning to form (Oberfield, 2017, p. 2). I will return to this topic of innovation in relation to teacher choices later in the review of literature.

Student Achievement

Charter school laws also state improved student achievement an intended outcome. In fact, charter school proponents argue that charter schools will provide a better education for students because the students have selected that school based on their needs, and because they believe it provides a better fit, and ostensibly this will translate to greater achievement (Berends, 2015). Wohlstetter, as cited in Berends (2015), states, "the focus on raising student achievement is written into the vast majority of state charter school laws" (p. 168). Although individual state laws do not prescribe specific means of reaching increased achievement, the assumption is that market forces will result in

schools becoming more efficient due to increased competition, choice, and accountability (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Alluding to the importance of competition, Chubb and Moe assert, "Democratic control normally produces ineffective schools" (p. 227). What they allude to in this statement is that without competition, there is no incentive for schools to improve. Lubienski (2003) echoes these concerns, describing "bureaucratically administered education as moribund, inflexible and inefficient" (p. 398). If this is the case, then the converse of that statement would seemingly be true, that schools with fewer regulations and fewer restrictions would show increases in student achievement.

One of the key features of most charter schools is that they are free from many of the regulations that face traditional public schools, for example, in areas such as curriculum, scheduling, teacher credentials, and school focus and organization. Given a governance structure that is flexible and responsive, charter proponents argue that the charter school is more likely to provide individualized education rather than a one-size-fits-all model (Sugarman, 2010; Wilson, 2016). The more individualized attention that is promised to students increases the perception that the charter school will provide a higher quality of instruction, which is a major factor in the decision parents make to choose a charter school for their children (Miron & Nelson, 2002).

Accordingly, Article 14A of the North Carolina Statutes states the primary purpose of charter schools is to improve student learning. Charter schools have long been championed as a means to fulfill the goal of increased student achievement; however, thus far they have failed to produce vastly superior results on a national scale (Ravitch, 2013). The results in North Carolina are mirror national statistics. A report to

the North Carolina General Assembly on January 1, 2014, related to charter school performance statistics indicated that nearly 60% of charter schools performed at or above the Local Education Agency (LEA, or traditional public schools) in regards to performance composite. When looking at these numbers, it must be noted that means that students in 40% of the charter schools performed at a lower level than students in the traditional public schools in their home district. Further, these numbers do not account for the level of learning that was present prior to the transfer to a charter school. While these numbers only offer a comparison of the charter school to the home LEA, there is a possibility that the students in question were already performing at a high level and now their test scores count for the charter school instead of the home school.

Charter schools in North Carolina have traditionally lagged behind performance of schools within the broader public-school system. This trend began to change by 2012 when Ladd, Clotfelter, and Holbein (2015) note that charter schools began outperforming traditional schools by significant amounts. They suggest that this trend could be fueled by the growing number of white students who have applied to charter schools as well as the number of students who are applying from families with college degrees and other forms of privilege. Another hypothesis posited by Ladd, Clotfelter, and Holbein is that the charter schools are successful in attracting high quality, well-motivated students (p. 18). To be fair, Ladd et al., also suggest the possibility that academic achievement was enhanced during this time as a direct result of improved instruction in the charter schools. Ultimately, however, the data are difficult to interpret, especially the specific reasons for greater achievement at some charter schools.

As a general rule, there is no guarantee that attending a charter school will increase student test scores. While traditional schools must work with all of the students who live in their districts, there are ways that charter schools can stack the deck in favor of higher test scores. Ravitch (2013) points out that while there are many high-quality charter schools, some have high achievement test scores because of their selective admission strategies, or because of their low numbers of students with disabilities (p. 174). While it is a noble claim to provide an environment where student learning is improved, it is difficult to compare groups that are not similar in nature.

Miron et al. (2010) claim that when analyzing test scores, charter school students as a whole do not perform better than their traditional school counterparts. This finding is echoed in a study of the Texas Charter School system. In the Texas study, researchers found that overall, charter school students perform worse than traditional public-school students on standardized tests (Hanushek, Kain, Rivkin & Branch, 2007). While overall achievement was found to be worse, the researchers did find that students who attended the charter school improved their performance more rapidly than the students who attended traditional public schools. Overall, however, the achievement data is inconsistent. In certain cities, students in charter schools outpace those in traditional public schools in achievement results. These results are typically in larger cities with under-resourced public-school systems (Berends, 2015). When reviewing the practices of these higher achieving charter schools, Berends showed that they provided "longer school days, a school-wide focus on achievement, school behavior policies, coaching and teacher feedback and data-based decision-making" (p. 171). The charter schools that

succeeded academically were expressly concerned with achievement as their school-wide mission.

Charter School Critiques

Charter school critics argue that charter schools do not live up to their claims of providing a higher quality of education than their traditional public-school counterparts, nor do they reach the populations they originally sought to benefit. Charter schools claim to foster innovation, produce higher achievement among their students, and provide better opportunities for their clientele than the traditional public-school system. A look at research reveals that the claims that are made by charter school proponents are often not substantiated by facts. When they can be substantiated, they cannot be generalized across the charter school environment because of the different factors that exist in the make-up and mission of the different charter providers.

Looking at the oft-touted claim of innovation, for example, Berends (2015) explains that innovation is a difficult practice to prove, as things that may seem innovative to some, are traditional practice to others. Other researchers have found that charter schools do not tend to be more innovative than their traditional counterparts (Lubienski, 2003; Cannata & Penaloza, 2012; Miron et. al, 2010; Preston et. al 2012). The reasons for this lack of genuine and transformative innovation can vary, but commonly the pressure to achieve high test scores to remain accountable to state standards is a factor that leads to charter school practices that mirror those of traditional public schools.

Similarly, when exploring the issue of student achievement, there has been little credible evidence to suggest that charter schools as a whole perform better than traditional public schools (Hanushek, Kain, Rivkin, & Branch, 2007). As a general rule, there is no guarantee that attending a charter school will increase student test scores.

In addition to these critiques of charter schools that may be unintentional or could be categorized as misunderstandings, there are also critiques that involve specific practices that charter schools use in order to manipulate enrollment. In *The Dirty Dozen: How Charter Schools Influence Student Enrollment*, Kevin Welner (2013) describes many of the practices that charter school leaders engage in to influence enrollment. He states, "these practices impact the likelihood of students enrolling with a given set of characteristics, be it higher (or lower) test scores, students with 'expensive' disabilities, English learners, students of color, or students in poverty" (p. 1). Once again, it is important to understand that not all charter schools use mechanisms to influence enrollment, but there are mechanisms that exist. I discuss some of these ways in which charter schools influence enrollment, as elaborated on by Welner, more in the final chapter of this study.

Concerns of Segregation of Students in Charter Schools

Increased segregation is a common concern among charter school critics. Original legislation sought to help limit the abilities of the charter schools to neglect or segregate underserved populations. In fact, the first legislated goal of charter schools in North Carolina is to create increased learning opportunities for all students (NC Statute 115C-218). This goal is stated with the understanding that these opportunities should be

afforded to all students, but specifically to students who are currently underserved in public schools, including non-White and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The original charter school law in North Carolina also states that these opportunities should be provided specifically for students who are at-risk of failure or for students who are academically gifted. Similarly, the fifth goal of the General Assembly is to provide parents with academic choices that are not available in their current school in the traditional public-school system. Other states have similar provisions, for example, charter schools in Connecticut are required to recruit from all populations in a district and South Carolina requires that the composition of the charter school cannot differ by more than 20% of the traditional public school (Miron, Urschel, Mathis, & Tornquist, 2010), In order for these goals to be accomplished, it seems that there should be some mechanism in place to ensure that all students, regardless of race or wealth, are represented equally in charter school enrollment. However, this does not often happen.

Critics of charter schools argue that the populations of charter schools are often segregated. This segregation can be based on race, socioeconomic status, or inclusion in a special population such as exceptional children or English as a second language students. Understanding these criticisms will help to frame the teacher's responses to interview questions that are discussed later.

Racial Segregation

Charter school law in North Carolina offers the following requirements in regard to equality in admissions.

> Within one year after the charter school begins operation, the charter school shall make efforts for the population of the school to reasonably reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the general population residing within the local school administrative unit in which the school is located or the racial and ethnic composition of the special population that the school seeks to serve residing within the local school administrative unit in which the school is located. (115C-218.45.e)

This vague requirement to "make an effort" to "reasonably reflect" a population does not seem to give any teeth to this mandate. It seems to only offer a suggestion. This section of law does go on to state that where there are court-ordered mandates for desegregation, they must be enforced. While the Report to the General Assembly 2014 makes the case that the overall demographics of traditional schools are mirrored in the enrollment of charter schools (p. 17), individual schools are often disproportionately segregated (Ladd et. al, 2015; Miron et. al, 2010; Siegel-Hawley & Frankenburg, 2010). One explanation for this may come from the fact that while black students may go to charter schools across the nation in the same proportions as other students, charter schools themselves are often more segregated than the traditional schools, with thirty-seven percent being predominantly white (Renzulli & Evans, 2005). Even if it were the case that the demographics were equally distributed statewide, there are nonetheless pockets of high concentrations of minority students in some districts, and a predominately white population in the charter schools in those same districts.

In the early years of charter schools in North Carolina, a disproportionate number of black students were served. Between 1998 when charters were first opened in North Carolina and 2012, the white population in charter schools grew from 58.6 percent to 62.2 percent. During this same period of time, the white population in traditional schools

has dropped from 64.1 percent to 53 percent (Ladd, Clotfelter & Holbein, 2015). While the overall percentage of white students in the state has declined, a higher number of white students are enrolled in charter schools. At the same time, black and Hispanic students account for 31.8 percent of charter school students while they represent 39.2 percent of traditional schools (Ladd, Clotfelter & Holbein, 2015). What has occurred in many districts seems to be a form of 'white flight' into charter schools (Renzulli & Evans, 2005). Renzulli and Evans draw on research to show that most families who have the ability to transfer schools without moving seem to be wealthy and white. Having the means to change schools, as well as the ability to avoid private school fees, seems to favor charter school selection by the white sector of the population (p. 400). This segregation seems to be accepted socially because of the fact that all parents are ostensibly equally given free choice to choose the environment in which they would like to have their child educated. This segregation is described as "de facto" segregation. This is not legally forced or even consciously desired segregation, but it does occur based on the choices that are made in society, whether it is housing choices or what is offered as school choice (Erickson, 2011).

Special Population Segregation

Students are also segregated by factors other than race in relationship to charter schools. Howe and Welner (2005) note that charter schools typically enroll a lower percentage of special needs students than traditional public schools. With provisions in many charter laws that state that the population of exceptional children should mirror the district in which they are located, this should not the case, but there are ways that charters

manipulate the population of children who attend their schools. Charter schools are required to educate any student who is accepted to their program, but the system is stacked against students who come from families that may have special needs.

The lottery system that has been used contributes to the population differences because prospective students' families may struggle to successfully navigate the application process and the lottery specifications, automatically weeding out the lowest performing of the students (Ravitch, 2013). Ravitch further contends that the school's best interest is served by not enrolling the lower level students, or students with special needs, as it compromises their ability to keep the doors open when there is a risk of low overall achievement. In *A Smarter Charter*, Kahlenburg and Potter (2014) suggest that the lottery system should be weighted to adjust for socioeconomic factors and that schools should be able to monitor for socioeconomic and racial factors when dealing with the lottery pool (p. 171). Some would argue that not only should this be permitted, but it should be required in order to ensure that charter school student population reflects the racial, socioeconomic, and special needs populations of the surrounding area.

Socio-Economic Segregation

According to The Report to the General Assembly 2014, students with economic disadvantages are largely underrepresented in charter schools. The population of low-income families in traditional schools in North Carolina averages fifty percent. Conversely, charter school low-income populations average at around 39.5 percent. One factor that contributes to this statistic is that some schools do not serve lunch and therefore, do not have to participate in the national child nutrition program by offering

free and reduced lunch. Further possibilities are hypothesized in relation to underrepresentation of lower income students such as under reporting of economically disadvantaged students by the charter schools themselves, due to no regulatory expectation of the report, and human error (p. 19). The most compelling explanation of the reported low number of economically disadvantaged students is the reality that fewer economically disadvantaged students are served by charter schools. This is highlighted in the findings of research by Ladd, Clotfelter, and Holbein (2015), who state that over time charter schools seem to be structured to "serve the interests of middle-class white families" (p. 28).

Charter School Enrollment Barriers

Charter schools are often criticized for marketing towards a specific group of students creating schools with homogeneous populations (Welner, 2013). The Report to the General Assembly 2014 addresses this concern and states that even though a school can market to specific populations, [the school has] no way of determining who will apply or who will be selected [in the lottery] (2014, p. 18). With this being the case, schools are in some ways absolved from taking ownership for composition of the school that they are left with.

Even with a strict interpretation of the law, there are ways that charter schools manipulate enrollment for a specific population. Practices such as requiring parents to volunteer in the school skew the populations of charter schools toward the enrollment of white and wealthy students (Minow, 2010). These families more often have the time and the schedules that allow the ability for a parent to volunteer. Minow (2010) suggests that

in some cases, parents choose charter schools because of a perceived fit with other members of their cultural group as opposed to the actual quality of education that their child will receive. This leads to a kind of voluntary segregation, as only certain families apply for charter school lotteries.

There are other mechanisms that charter schools use that either actively or passively drive segregation. There have been some cases, especially in the South, where vouchers and choice plans have been used to "resist desegregation" (Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2010, p. 332). Siegel-Hawley and Frankenburg (2010) describe how transportation policies are very different in charter schools than they are in traditional public schools. The fact that in many states charter schools are not required to offer transportation is a deterrent to providing a path to a truly integrated school. Without transportation options, only certain families can take advantage of charter schools.

In order for school choice to be an effective equalizer, mechanisms must be designed to enable families who are working class and disadvantaged financially to take advantage of these options (Sugarman, 2010). This includes providing information to low-income families about the benefits and rights to enroll in charter schools. Marketing materials should present accurate information about the performance of those schools with specific populations in mind. Currently, most states do not have policies and practices in place that help all parents to make informed decisions about choice options. Consequently, the people who have the knowledge, access, and ability to seek out information benefit more often than those who do not.

Why Do Parents Choose Certain Schools?

The claims made by charter school advocates are that these schools are innovative settings where students participate in a diverse learning environment and achieve at higher rates than their traditional public-school counterparts. The evidence to support these claims is inconsistent and the successes of charter schools tend to be exaggerated. In spite of conflicting evidence, there seem to be specific reasons why parents choose charter schools for their child. Many reasons are examined in a review of the current literature (Wilson, 2014) regarding parental preferences and choices. These reasons range from parents wanting their child to succeed academically to wanting them to be with students who celebrate the same culture and values. Wilson (2014) suggests that "these 'choice-sets' vary by socio-economic level and help to explain how parents choose seemingly less desirable schools, even when making what, for them, is an active, informed choice" (p. 183). While there is a great deal of information surrounding parent choices for charter schools, there is a lack of information on why teachers choose charter schools. I explore the information about parent and student decisions here because it the choices that teachers make to work in charter schools are likely similar.

One assumed aspect of decision making with regards to school choice is the expectation that parents are making informed decisions about where their student would best perform. Bast and Walberg (2004) use economic principles to conclude parents likely have the tools necessary to make quality decisions for their children regarding education. In other situations, parents are already trusted to make informed decisions. They contend that parents are allowed and encouraged to make decisions about doctors,

cars, food and other difficult choices dealing with goods and services. Education should be no different. They further contend that the problem with education is that "what constitutes the best school for a child is fraught with complications starting with the implication that there exists a single best learning environment for every student and a uniform agreement on the purpose of schooling and most valuable outcomes" (p. 432). Although criticisms can arise about a parent's choice in any of these arenas, it is important to note that parents' generally have their child's best interest at heart and want to make the best decision that they possibly can, given their own personal values and priorities and the information that they have available about options.

While some parents have the information to make sound decisions, there are others who lack the ability to access appropriate information when making the decision to send their children to charter schools, as indicated in research conducted by Hanushek, Kain, Rivkin and Branch (2007). These researchers state that in many cases "parents, and particularly low-income parents are likely to be poor consumers of quality—perhaps because of informational problems, lack of attention, lack of experience, or the complexity of the problem" (p. 839). Often the sheer number of choices for the parent to sort through is daunting, especially in urban areas where there is growing number of schools to choose from. In regards to vouchers and the parent's ability to choose, Ladner and Smith (2016) acknowledge that parents need assistance in determining the quality of what is being offered and "sifting through vendor claims" (p. 67). These claims often confuse the parent and influence their decision. Alexander (2012) argues that the decision to attend a school other than the traditional school as one that is usually based on

"racial bias, religious intolerance, ignorance, convenience and a host of other perceptions unrelated to education" (p. 172). If a charter school can feed into these preconceived notions, then they can influence a parent to make their decision based on their feelings rather than facts.

However, using achievement data as the singular marker of quality schooling leads to a critical view of parent's decision-making skills. Ladd, Clotfelter, and Holbein (2015) explain that parental choice should drive schools to flourish and propel them to distinction in a Darwinian model based on a vote by enrollment and withdrawal. In this model, schools would conform to the needs of the individual and the schools that do a good job of that will be successful and expand and the other schools will disappear. This presumption is only accurate if the decision to attend the school is based solely on academics. In a time when parents are commonly hearing that their current school and the traditional public education system is broken, they are more likely to choose to attend a charter school, even though there is no clear evidence that academic results will be any better (Schneider, 2015). This type of decision-making could cause the overall system of charter schools to produce schools that are less likely to yield positive academic results, particularly as parents are choosing school with little information on their quality (Alexander, 2012). While the hope may be that the child has a better academic opportunity, sometimes the parents are content with deciding on what will seemingly benefit the student's well-being in lieu of a stronger academic performance. In other words, parents sometimes choose a charter school that does no better, or even worse, than the area public schools in promoting student achievement. While this may seem illogical,

the parent's choice may have more to do with considerations other than academic performance on standardized tests, for example, a sense of fit, or shared cultural values. In the same way, I anticipate that teachers might choose a charter school because of underlying values and feelings about that school more than the actual quality of the school.

Increasingly, scholarship shows that the decision-making process for parents when selecting schools includes complex negotiations between competing goals (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2014). According to Cucchiara and Horvat (2014), the process for deciding on a school has a great deal to do with identity construction. In many ways, choices that parents make are based on a desire to allow or help their child to become a certain type of person and these choices essentially reveal who the parent is and what they value (Wilson, 2015). While some choices may seem irrational, for example when parents choose schools where the standardized measures of performance are lower than their local school, the parent often has made an informed decision to put their child in a situation that highlights their values as a parent. Wilson (2015) explains that while the choice to put one's child in a lower performing school than the traditional public school may seem to produce fewer desirable results from an outside perspective, the choice actually may be an informed, calculated decision for the parent, who decides other factors are more important than test scores. Academic success is not the only guidepost for the decision to enroll in a charter school as families look at other factors, including the composition of the study body, the structure of the curriculum, and the nature of the

school community. Increasingly parents make these choices intentionally and they are typically of a complex nature.

A recent article in *EdNC* highlights the complex decision-making process that a parent might go through in selecting a school for their child. In explaining why she chose to send her son to a struggling traditional public school in Charlotte, while neighbors chose charter schools, private schools, or relocated to avoid attending one of the lowest performing schools in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg system, Pamela Grundy (2017) explains that a "school is not a business—it is a community that reaches well beyond its walls. Building schools that reflect the society that we want our children to live in is a more daunting task than simply reorganizing internal operations and monitoring test scores" (para. 4). Wilson (2016) would attribute this desire to send Grundy's child to a lower performing school as a "preexisting, stable and ordered preference for schools" (p. 149). The point here is that, many of the parents who go against common understandings of school choice sometimes do so in a highly informed way. These parents are typically educated and aware and can make "impassioned explanations" for their choice of school attendance (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2014, p. 488). One of the reasons I was interested in doing this study was to see if teachers were making the same kind of decisions when they chose to work in charter schools.

Ultimately, while it is important to assess if schools are meeting academic benchmarks and providing a sound education to the students that attend them, this is not always the main concern of parents use when choosing the school that their child will

attend. Similarly, teachers may choose to teach at a school that is less focused on academic achievement and more in line with their individual values.

Teacher Innovation and Autonomy in Charter Schools

Innovation is a legislated purpose of charter schools in North Carolina. This idea behind this purpose is to allow educational leaders to create an environment where teachers are given flexibility to design educational systems and practices with fewer mandates and requirements. Part of the goal of innovation is to empower teachers as professionals (Lubienski, 2003). The ability to work in a more professional atmosphere, where teachers could try out new ideas and weren't mandated to follow curriculum scripts and pacing guides, for example, might lead teachers towards working in charter schools.

Innovation in Charter Schools

One of the original purposes of charter schools was to be a laboratory for innovation that could be shared with public schools, helping to raise the bar so that all schools could serve students well. In actuality, a competition has ensued, which has left some proposing that charter schools should replace traditional public schools (Kahlenburg & Potter, 2014). Charter schools were originally proposed to complement the traditional public-school system and provide a test area for innovative curriculum approaches and non-traditional methods for educating diverse student populations. Have these original purposes been realized by the charter school movement? Similar to other charter school debates, there are no simple answers to this question.

One of the first things we must do to assess the extent of charter school innovation is to determine what constitutes an educational innovation. Innovation is difficult to define. According to Lubienski (2003), "the concept of innovation itself is contested, particularly in a politicized area such as school reform" (p. 403). In a political world, politicians and citizens alike will typically spin the realities of innovation to something that fits their agenda, for example, claiming practices that have been in place for a long time as innovations. In this way, mere changes become described as innovations. Change as innovation is a concept that Lubienski refutes. He argues that a change alone does not denote an innovation, it is only a departure from what is already being done. Berends (2015) echoes the concern that change does not automatically equate to innovation. He contends that what some educational providers in charter schools promote as innovative change is standard practice in many educational circles. His examples include the hiring practices of charter schools, which some see as innovative, but are merely a natural reaction to autonomous control. Decisions that are made to respond to different stakeholder groups with particular educational needs and social expectations do not necessarily rise to the level of innovation (Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010). Moreover, practices that arise out of necessity are not inherently innovative, they are often just different.

Researchers have found that charter schools do not tend to be more innovative than their traditional counterparts (Lubienski, 2003; Cannata & Penaloza, 2012; Miron et al., 2010; Preston et al., 2012). The reasons for this lack of genuine innovation can vary, but commonly the need to achieve high test scores to remain accountable to state

standards is a factor that leads to charter school practices mirroring those of traditional public schools. The introduction of a centralized curriculum such as the common core has also been noted as a deterrent to innovation and autonomy (Oberfield, 2017). The need to conform to accountability models and remain competitive with the traditional public schools causes the charter school to adopt more traditional practices that serve specific populations and produce required results (Berends, 2015; Lubienski, 2003). The lack of evidence of innovation in charter schools contradicts the belief of many charter school teachers about their perceived level of autonomy and innovation.

Teacher Autonomy

Market theory concepts such as the ability to adapt and compete and the assumption that teachers in charter schools have more autonomy than traditional public schools spur the notion that innovation will occur at a higher level in charter schools (Preston, Goldring, Berends & Cannata, 2012). Teachers in charter schools echo this belief that autonomy leads to innovation. Based upon survey data from teachers in charter schools throughout the nation, Oberfield (2017) found that they were likely to express a feeling of autonomy that seemed to foster an innovative environment (Oberfield, 2017). Oberfield found that charter school teachers are 133% more likely to believe that they had classroom autonomy than their traditional public-school counterparts. This autonomy did seem to be conditional however; one participant explained that teachers in her school are allowed autonomy dependent on "the teacher's level of experience and her student's test scores" (p. 76). Conversely, teachers and administrators in traditional public school's report that they do not feel like they have the necessary authority to

determine what is educationally sound for their schools (Berends, Springer, Ballou & Walberg, 2009). This lack of autonomy did not come from a lack of experience or results, but rather from the structures in which the traditional public schools exist. While the feelings of autonomy exist in charter schools and teachers are more likely to express feeling innovative, it is not clear if these feelings mirror actual practices.

The degree of innovation and autonomy in North Carolina charter schools is something I discussed with study participants as part of my interviews with them. This information is discussed in my findings' chapters. I was curious about how much autonomy they felt they had in their current charter school setting and whether this was a factor in their decision to leave the traditional public schools.

Teacher Attrition in Charter Schools

Studies show that teacher attrition is higher in charter schools than traditional public schools (Ndoye, Imig, & Parker, 2010; Stuit, 2012). For my study, it is important to understand reasons why teachers are more likely to leave charter schools, especially when I am trying to understand the reasons that teachers are leaving traditional public schools to work in charter schools. The teachers that I interviewed go against some of the trends of their colleagues who often return to the traditional public-school setting.

Based on a survey of charter school teachers who have left the profession: working conditions, dissatisfaction with the school, and job security were the most reported reasons for charter school teachers give when they leave their jobs (Stuit, 2012). Stuit also reported that charter school teacher salaries are typically lower than traditional public-school salaries. This salary discrepancy is partially explained by the fact that

charter schools are not required to employ certified teachers. Miron and Applegate (2007) suggest that the lack of certification is a possible reason that many charter school teachers leave the profession. The uncertified charter school teachers are often not well-educated about issues related to curriculum, student development, pedagogy, and discipline, and consequently may not be as prepared to handle the demands of the job. In addition to the possibility that teachers are not certified in the charter school system, Stuit explains that there is also a great deal of difference in experience in the charter school, as often charters are likely to recruit younger, inexperienced teachers (p. 270). This is important information to understand when trying to determine why experienced teachers leave traditional public-school environments to pursue charter school positions.

Summary of Literature Review

Current research highlights the critiques of charter schools and how those critiques, such as charter school's segregation, could be contributing to a decline in how democratic principles are realized in our society. The research also shows many reasons that parents choose specific schools for their children. Currently, there is not much information that shows why teachers choose to teach in charter schools. Oberfield (2017) maintains that "Teachers, like students, are not randomly assigned to schools, but rather, pick and choose schools according to a mixture of financial, professional, and personal factors" (p. 12). In some cases, the personal decision on where to teach may be as simple as distance from their house to the school (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb & Wychoff, 2013). Yet we don't know enough about the decision-making processes that teachers go through when they decide to work in a charter school and whether they even think deeply about

larger school purposes or are aware of the democratic foundations of public education. These are questions that I address in my study.

We simply do not know enough about teacher's decisions and how these decisions impact others, our schools, and society. I hope to take the information that we know about charter school choice and add to it the viewpoint of the teacher. Through examining the viewpoints of charter school teachers, we will better understand the impact of charter schools on democracy and society as a whole.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Much has been written about why parents and students decide to attend specific charter schools instead of traditional public schools (Bast & Walberg, 2004; Cuchiarra & Horvat, 2014; Lubienski, 2003; Miron & Nelson, 2002; Renzulli & Evans, 2005; Wilson, 2015, 2016). There has been comparatively little investigation into the reasons that teachers choose one type of school over another. Promises of innovation and a lack of bureaucracy are common rallying cries of charter school leaders that may lead teachers to choose that environment (Chubb & Moe, 2011; Berends, 2015). While there are likely numerous reasons that teachers choose a charter environment over a traditional school setting, without systematic research, we can only speculate about the reasons behind these choices.

The purpose of my study was to examine how teachers make decisions about teaching in a charter school as well as how these choices reflect the values they hold for education. In this exploratory, qualitative study, I interviewed a select group of current charter school teachers to learn about their choice to switch from a traditional public school to the charter setting.

North Carolina law states that a purpose of charter schools is to test innovative teaching practices and inform teaching practices for all of public schools (NC Statute 115C-218). I was curious if a sense of freedom and a drive to innovate were involved in

the decision-making processes of charter school teachers, as well as if they feel like they are able to be innovative in their current settings. I also investigated teachers' perceptions of the role that charter schools play in serving the needs of their children and if the goals of the original pioneers of charter schools are being met such as creating "small, engaging educational settings within low-income communities, where children of poverty, of color, and immigrants could be educated well, cared for, and nurtured academically, with intent" (Fabricant & Fine, 2012, p. 2). I was also interested in how these teachers would respond to critiques of charter schools, for example, that they lead to increasing segregation, decreasing public commitment to democracy, and "creaming" of the top students from traditional schools and creating "winners and losers" in the metaphoric game of schooling (Ladd, Clotfelter, & Holbein, 2015, p. 2). I set the foundation for this research by conducting a pilot study involving interviews with charter school teachers.

Pilot Study

In order to refine my research approach for my dissertation, I conducted a pilot study with two teachers who have taught in a charter school after beginning their teaching career in a traditional public school. I developed my interview guide based upon the interview questions that were used in an earlier study related to parent and student decision-making when choosing a charter school by Terri Wilson (2010). I reached out to Dr. Wilson via email, and with her permission, I altered the questions she had created to make them more suited to interviewing teachers in order to assess their preferences when choosing to work in a charter school after working in a traditional public school. I

also modified the questions some based on my review of the literature. In many instances, I was able to easily adapt Wilson's questions to ask about the thoughts and motivations of teachers instead of parents and students. Other questions were not as pertinent and I excluded them from my interview protocol. I also added some questions that were specifically relevant to my research questions. For example, I asked teachers directly why they leave traditional public schools in favor of charter schools.

After I determined the preliminary questions that I wanted to ask, I submitted the questions for review to my dissertation chair and also to Dr. Wilson for feedback. Each reviewer suggested that there might be a few too many questions for the initial interview and that some of the questions seemed repetitive. I reviewed the questions, combined questions where appropriate and investigated ways to shorten the protocol. In the end, I opted to use all questions for the pilot interviews to determine if there would be enough time to reasonably cover all of the information that I was requesting from the participant.

After seeking feedback, I conducted two different interviews using the protocol. Through working with colleagues, I was able to locate two different teachers who had worked in traditional public schools and were currently working in charter schools. I interviewed each teacher at their respective schools during planning periods after getting permission from the administrators at each school. Each interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes and I audio-recorded them, with permission from the teacher. During the interview, I took notes on important issues and ideas that were brought up by the teacher and also documented recording times on the protocol of issues that were particularly salient so that I could easily reference the recordings prior to transcription. I

then listened to each interview to hear the answers again and assess the interview as a whole.

My goals for this process were to first establish a meaningful interview protocol that produced answers that would guide me towards addressing my research question of determining why teachers choose charter school teaching positions after teaching in traditional public schools. Second, I wanted to get more experience in interviewing to become more comfortable with the process and get practice creating a dialogue with the interviewee. Probing for deeper meaning and requesting explanation of participants answers were not things that came naturally to me, so it helped to practice them before conducting this dissertation study. I also wanted to use this experience to determine if my questions should be worded differently, expanded, or possibly eliminated depending on the answers that were given.

Resulting Information from Pilot Study

Using the interview protocol, I created for the pilot study, I interviewed two different teachers. One was a third-grade teacher in a kindergarten through fifth grade charter school. The other was an art teacher in a fifth through eighth grade charter school. The schools were very different and in different geographic regions. The elementary school was in an urban setting and the middle school was in a rural setting, so their student demographics were quite different. Even given the different settings, their responses were surprisingly similar.

Both schools have a heavy focus on the arts and the teachers expressed a strong desire to promote hands-on learning. Each teacher expressed that there was a sense of

strong support from the administration. The teachers felt that their administrators were more focused on the mission of their schools than on the desire to produce high test scores at the end of the year, and this was one of the reasons they were attracted to these schools. They noted that accountability was talked about and quality instruction was a high priority, but also that the schools recognized the need for hands-on learning and teachable moments as the most important aspects of the education offered at their respective schools. The middle school art teacher mentioned that she previously had conversations with many parents who were willing to sacrifice higher test scores for opportunities for their children to work in a more hands-on experience-based environment. This willingness to put less emphasis on academic achievement seems to be a benefit of working in an environment where the students have chosen to attend a school with a specific mission.

I also asked the teachers how the relationships with parents differed in the charter school and the traditional public schools. Each teacher noted that the charter school seemed to offer a more welcoming and open environment. In the elementary school, there was a requirement that an adult from each family volunteer one hour per week, per child enrolled in the school. The teachers felt this helped to create a sense of ownership and responsibility for the family in the school. It also created opportunities for the teacher and the parents to interact on a regular basis. The middle school teacher echoed this feeling of interaction and connectedness. She mentioned that after teaching art in traditional public schools, as one teacher who was shared across three schools and had a total of forty-five classes a week, she welcomed the change of only teaching at one

school with approximately twelve different classes in a week. Fewer classes gave her the opportunity to connect with students on a personal level and also to make connections with families.

Each of the teachers felt like they were more likely to take a risk in their charter school environment as compared to their previous positions. One of the teachers mentioned that they were "encouraged to fail." Her administrators acknowledged that when teachers fail they are more likely to make improvements and were less likely to be complacent. In the middle school charter, there was a requirement to write at least one grant per year. This ensured that teachers were branching out and trying out new ideas and approaches. They were also required to produce a leadership plan, outlining how they would grow and expand their influence over the school and what new things they would take on to benefit the students. This plan is born out of a desire to grow, but also out of necessity. With the school leadership being fully site based, it was very important that each of the teachers "wear many hats" to accomplish the mission of the school. The teacher from this school had to step out of their comfort zones and share responsibility for running the school. In this same vein, each of the teachers mentioned that there was less bureaucracy in the charter school than in their previous settings. If they wanted to have a parent night or participate in a specific program at their traditional public school, they would have to get permission from many different groups and possibly from the district office. In their charter school, they were given permission to branch out, make partnerships, and pursue their goals without all of the red tape.

Both teachers noted that the proximity to their residence was also a factor when choosing their charter school. Knowing that they will be in a specific school until they choose differently was a comforting thought for the teachers. In larger systems teachers, especially new teachers and enrichment teachers (such as art) can be placed in any school based on the needs of the district. The anxiety created by this uncertainty and the stress of end of grade test scores and achievement were motivating factors for both teachers to choose the charter school. For the third-grade teacher, she felt that she was not able to be as creative as she would like to be in the traditional school. There was a very strict schedule and the administrator made certain that the teachers were teaching the appropriate subject at the appropriate time. At the charter school, she had the autonomy to change her schedule as needed and be more flexible. For the art teacher, the same stress was there in traditional public schools, but it was manifested differently. She was required to tutor in math, a subject that she did not feel competent in, but that was not the biggest problem she felt that she faced. Her biggest concern was that the administration did not seem to appreciate what she did. She was looked at as a baby sitter so that "real teachers" could plan for instruction (likely a consequence of high-stakes testing in only certain subjects). She noted that one administrator never came into her class for an entire year. This seeming lack of appreciation helped to guide her towards the charter school.

Echoing some of the research literature, both teachers noted their classes were less diverse in the charter school than in the traditional public school. The teacher from the rural charter school mentioned that this was changing as the public became more informed about the existence and mission of the charter school. Each school

implemented a lottery for student placement. The only exception to the lottery in each school was sibling placement. If a student had a younger sibling entering the lowest grade that the charter offered, they would automatically be offered a seat at the school.

Finally, the teachers I interviewed for the pilot noted that their school was not perfect, and they recognized the criticisms that traditional public-school supporters raised against charter schools. However, they also felt that the positives outweighed the negatives and that accomplishing the mission of the school was a worthwhile endeavor. Based on these two interviews, I developed a good initial sense of some of the considerations made by teachers who move from traditional schools to charter schools.

Modifications Based on the Pilot Study

Conducting the pilot interviews was a helpful exercise to determine the usefulness of my questions and whether they would allow me to answer my overall research questions. While I gained lots of interesting information, I realized I did not spend enough time asking about key issues related to innovation, autonomy, the purposes of education, democracy, and the reasons that the teachers decided to teach in the first place. Asking about purposes of education and reasons for teaching would likely give me a better handle on the values that the teachers espouse and would allow me to determine a frame of reference for their decision to teach in a charter school. Adding questions on these topics also helped me to determine how their values fit into the role of public education advancing democratic principles.

Methodology

I conducted a basic qualitative study for this research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This methodology best lends itself to the type of information that I sought from my participants. Given that I was trying to understand experiences and decision-making processes in rich detail, I used interviews as my central research strategy. I selected five different charter schools to recruit teachers for the interview. Each of the charter schools had a different guiding purpose and all were located in a reasonable driving distance from where I live. Moreover, I had connections through my peers and classmates that would enable me to gain entry into each of the schools, thus providing an accessible sample of convenience. Choosing participants from different types of schools allowed me to compare and contrast the different values that the teachers from each school hold.

After I selected the schools, I sought two teachers from each school who had taught in traditional public schools and now taught at one of the five charter schools. These teachers were recommended to me by the administration or by a contact from each school. I reached out to each of the teachers via email, and once they agreed to participate, I shared with them full details about my study. I then shared with them the paperwork approved by the University of North Carolina Greensboro Institutional Review Board. Due to the limited risk involved in the study, they were not required to sign any consent paperwork, they only were required to receive the paperwork. I then interviewed each of these teachers at their school sites. I audio recorded, transcribed, and coded each transcript to search for different themes that help me to answer the research questions.

As I have mentioned, the primary purpose of my study was to understand the decision-making process of teachers who leave the traditional public schools, as well as how they understand the role of charter schools in a democratic society. As with other qualitative studies, I was not trying to make a generalization or prove a specific reason that teachers are choosing charter schools (Kilbourn, 2006). Rather, this was an exploratory study that provides a window in to the decision-making process of a small sample of teachers who left teaching in traditional public schools and now teach in charter schools. I wanted to provide these teachers with a platform to weigh in on the charter school choice debate with their own thoughts, words and actions.

Sample Population

As previously mentioned, I selected two teachers each from five different charter schools. I provide a chart below that lists the pseudonyms I selected for the participants and the school. I tried to give each school a name that aligns with the charter school focus. I also include information on the student population and demographics. This information provides a context for the discussion of the findings in chapters four and five. Each of the teachers spent at least two years teaching in a traditional public school and then moved to a charter school and taught at least one full year at that school. I selected these criteria strategically as I wanted teachers who had experience in both settings. If I selected teachers who had only taught at a charter school, their reasons may be based solely on employability or some other reason that deals less specifically with teacher's desire for change. As I mentioned, I selected teachers through personal invitation and snowball sampling, starting with conversations with my principal colleagues and

classmates. After I conducted the interviews, I sent follow-up emails to several participants to comments they make in the interview. Each of the interviews lasted for approximately one hour.

Table 1

Charter School and Participant Information

Charter School Pseudonym	Participant One	Participant Two	Total Number of Students Enrolled	Percentage of Minority Students Enrolled
Artist's Charter School	Erin	Ashley	490	27.76%
The Social Justice School	Laura	William	255	47.45%
The Environmental School	Stephanie	Erica	1650	10.24%
The Leadership Academy	Alise	Ellen	771	12.97%
The College Preparatory School	Andrea	Alexandra	801	10.36%

Note. Demographic information retrieved from http://apps.schools.nc.gov/ords/f?p=145:73:::NO::: on August 11, 2019.

Concurrent with the interviews, I researched each of the represented charter school's websites to gather supplemental data. I describe these schools below, in part

because this information helps to contextualize the teachers' choices. I particularly explored the mission of the school and degree to which the school foregrounds an inclusive, public mission (as opposed to representing themselves more like an elite private school). This website analysis gave me a preliminary understanding of how central democracy was to the mission of the school, as well as the degree of diversity in the study body.

I briefly describe each of the participating charter schools below. The names of the charter schools have been changed, as well as the name of the participant, in order to provide anonymity and maintain confidentiality of the information I gathered in the interviews.

Artist's Charter School

The Artist's school seeks to engage all students, parents, and school employees in an arts-based curriculum. The school website specifically references North Carolina's charter school laws on their website. These references include providing opportunities for students and innovative instructional practices. Artist's Charter School seeks to improve learning for all students, encourage innovative teaching, provide choices for parents and students, and create professional opportunities for teachers. They provide a mission statement that encourages "active and creative scholarly exploration" and focuses on "multiple ways of knowing."

The Artist's Charter school is an urban charter school with 490 students and a 27% minority population. The school began its 17th year of operation in fall of 2019. The teachers who graciously agreed to speak with me for this project were Erin and

Ashley. I provide more information about these teachers, as well as the other 8 participants in my study, in the next chapter.

The Social Justice School

The Social Justice School is a new school that is began its second year of operation in the urban downtown of a mid-size city in the fall of 2019. This school was the most diverse of the schools that that I studied, with a 47.45% minority population. According to their website and charter, the school is committed to provide an education within the framework of social justice. Their website describes the teachers and administrators of the school as "experienced educators who have an unwavering commitment to renew public education." The website states that the school seeks to produce engaged learners and socially conscious citizens. This school promotes project-based learning and hands-on activities that are interdisciplinary and cooperative. William and Laura are the pseudonyms of the teachers I interviewed at this school.

The Environmental School

The Environmental School website states that the mission of the school is to offer an "academically aggressive" environment that employs hands-on learning with concentrations on environmental education and how the actions of students affect the world around them. The school encourages students to find their passions and gives multiple outlets for students to express themselves through clubs and entrepreneurial opportunities. Students are exposed to multiple Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM) extra curriculars.

The Environmental School is a rural charter. It is the only charter school in its home county and serves students from surrounding counties as well. It has been in operation since 2013. The website claims a nearly 15% minority population although current state records report the minority population at closer to 10%. I interviewed teachers Stephanie and Erica from this school.

The Leadership Academy

The Leadership Academy is a charter school located in a rural area, but it draws students from multiple areas including some urban areas. Part of the Leadership Academy's mission is to "provide it's students with a solid foundation of leadership skills, knowledge and information" to prepare the student for college. The school expects each student to participate in service learning and requiring 25 hours of service for each student each year. The school is extremely focused on personal accountability, individual awareness, and excellence.

The Leadership Academy opened its doors in the fall of 2013 after years of preparation by the board of trustees. In a section on the history of the school on the website, they leaders of the school note that they wanted to offer a private school type education that would be accessible to students who could not afford a private school experience. The Leadership Academy has a minority population of close to 13%. Ellen and Alise were the teachers who represented The Leadership Academy in this study.

The College Preparatory School

On their website, the College Preparatory School is described as a regional school that draws their students from many different local education agencies. They offer a

rigorous academic environment that prepares students to be successful at the collegiate level. Their motto is: Cultivate, Reinforce, Expect. They seek to provide students with the skills necessary to be successful autonomous adults who can function in society independently. Beginning in sixth grade, the school seeks to promote this independence and places a high priority on individual student accountability. The College Preparatory School provides opportunities for students to use school time for service projects, but they do not require these projects.

The College Preparatory School opened its doors during the 2012-2013 school year. They currently have 801 students with a 10% minority population. The two teachers I interviewed from this school were Andrea and Alexandra.

Data Collection Methods

I interviewed two teachers from five different charter schools for a total of ten interviews. As previously mentioned, I based my interview questions on the questions used by Wilson (2010) in her dissertation related to the thought process of parents who chose a charter school for their children. I modified and further developed my interview protocol based upon findings from my pilot study and review of the literature. My semi-structured interview guide is included as Appendix A.

While I asked some version of the broad questions on my guide to each of the 10 teachers, I also asked a range of follow-up questions depending upon their responses. After I conducted each interview, I used a service to transcribe them verbatim. I then read over the transcripts carefully, coding the data for recurring themes and also for compelling stories that were offered by the teachers. I had already also gathered

information from the websites and mission statements of the charter schools where the teachers are employed to get a better understanding of their context and the ways in which their expressed values align with the school values and goals.

Data Analysis Strategies

I analyzed interview data using standard qualitative research procedures, coding the transcripts of the interview, collapsing codes into a set of categories, and developing themes from those categories. I initially broke the data down into the different topics I discussed in my literature review, such as innovation, autonomy, mission, and population. This is a technique referenced in Merriam and Tisdell (2016) called a priori coding. I used these codes in regard to the teachers understanding of democracy and the schools influences on enrollment and segregation. The interview questions often directed the teacher towards an answer the would fall into specific categories within these topics.

I also developed other codes and categories that I based on participants answers to the interview questions. Merriam and Tisdale (2016) state that the forming of the categories is a "largely intuitive process" where "meaning is made explicit by the participants themselves" (p. 211). I was able to categorize fairly easily when dealing with the reasons that teachers chose to leave traditional public schools. Teachers noted categories that dealt with family commitments, values, and personal fulfillment. I grouped these categories into a theme dealing with teacher's personal reasons for leaving charter schools. Teacher also gave answers that fell into professional reasons for leaving the traditional public-school system such as increased autonomy, perceived innovation, and accountability. As a means of ensuring trustworthiness, I also talked with a peer

reviewer about the categories and codes that I used with the data from the interviews. I describe this process in my section on trustworthiness.

In addition to the coding process, I used website analysis as secondary data to help contextualize the comments made by my interviewees. In analyzing the websites, I looked particularly at the mission and vision of the school, statistical data for enrollment, and types of clubs and opportunities for each student in the school.

Trustworthiness

I used multiple strategies to ensure trustworthiness of my findings: member checks, reflexivity, peer review, and multiple data sources. First, I used member checks to make sure that the participants had an opportunity to review their transcripts, clarify any of their comments, and add any additional thoughts they might have about the issued we discussed in the interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 259). Member checks also ensured my participants perceived their comments accurately reflected their perspectives. I utilized email to ask questions about specific parts of interviews that required some clarification on my part. For example, I emailed a few participants and asked them to clarify practices that their school used related to retention and transportation. In one instance, the teacher confirmed the use of retention as a strategy to counsel students out of their school. In the other instance, I needed to clarify the structure of transportation in one of the schools.

Second, I was reflexive and purposely thought deeply about the information I gathered in my study, for instance, trying out different hypotheses about the data and seeing which seemed the most persuasive given what the participants said in the

interviews. The purpose of using reflexivity is that the researcher shares his or her biases and beliefs the reader is able to make a more informed decision about how the researcher is interpreting the data (Creswell, 2016, p. 192). Coming from a traditional school setting and having my own beliefs about charter schools colored my interpretations of the data and it is important that this information is shared with the reader. As part of my analysis, I tracked my emerging thoughts regarding charter school practices. I often had to confront my own assumptions about the practices of the teachers and schools from my interviews, metaphorically bracketing them so that I could better listen to the participant's voices and not interject my own biases.

Third, I received feedback on my coding and interpretation of data from two different peer reviewers. The first reviewer was a former teacher who helped me to group and categorize my information into codes and themes. She reviewed the data and tracked for categories and themes while I did the same. I then reviewed her categories and my categories to make sure there was significant agreement with the categorizations.

A final strategy I used to enhance trustworthiness was basing my interpretations on more than one piece of data. Specifically, I analyzed the websites of the charter schools where my participants teach so as to provide a richer context for understanding their choices. I looked at the mission and the vision for the schools, and explored the messages about the purposes of education and the relationship between schools and democracy that were both explicit and implicit throughout the websites. I used this information in the descriptions of the charter schools that I provided earlier in this chapter

and to help me in my analysis of the data, especially to contextualize the comments of each of the individual participants.

Ethical Considerations

I feel confident that my current position as an administrator did not create a conflict when interviewing the teachers, analyzing the data, and drawing conclusions. By using the trustworthiness techniques above I was able to make sure that the information was conveyed in a way that is ethical and appropriate. I also followed IRB protocol in securing permission to interview teachers and provided them with details about the study and forms to secure informed consent.

Data Reporting

Initially, I had planned on reporting my findings from this studying a single chapter. However, after I finished the coding and categorization processes, and outlined my findings, it was apparent that it would make more logical sense to report in two different chapters. The first chapter deals with the reasons that teachers left traditional public schools. These reasons were both personal and professional. In this chapter, I also provide a description of the participants as well as information about the charter schools where they worked.

The second findings chapter deals with teachers understanding of democratic principles and how these ideals were present (or not) in their teaching and in their schools. This chapter also deals with the teacher's perception of their schools' practices and the potential negative effects of these practices. I juxtaposed teachers' perceptions with the missions and visions of the schools. I used this information to compare and

contrast their answers with the expressed purposes of the schools as well as in reflecting on the teachers understanding of the democratic impact of their schools.

Limitations

Given that this was an exploratory study that took place in one area of the country, my findings can't be generalized to other settings. However, this is common in qualitative research where the goal is depth as opposed to generalization. My study was limited to charter school teachers in a particular location (central North Carolina) and because I only be conducted one interview with each teacher, I may have missed some of the nuances in their choices. I am not able to generalize the information that is collected across the teacher population as a whole, but I nonetheless give some insight into the broad considerations of teachers as they move from traditional public schools to teach in charter schools.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I described the methods that I used to conduct my qualitative study and to ensure trustworthiness of the data and my interpretation of that data. In chapters four and five I share my findings of my study. In chapter four, I discuss the findings related to the teachers' reasons for leaving the traditional public school. In chapter five, I examine the teachers understanding of democracy and how their choices effects on democratic principles and promises of schools. Finally, in the last chapter, I draw some conclusions to the study, answer my research questions, make some recommendations for practice, and offer some final reflections.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS ON TEACHER PREFERENCES

I begin this chapter with descriptions of the participants, including some basic demographic and background information on each I then present findings in relation to why teachers left the traditional public-school (TPS) setting. As I analyzed the interview transcripts, I identified several themes as to why teacher left their traditional public-school position for a position in a charter school. I discuss these themes in relation to the following topics: the vision of the charter school and the purpose that the charter seeks to address, the teacher's current phase of life and family commitments, perceived accountability (teaching to the test), and administrative micromanagement/teacher autonomy. Included in the final topic, I also discuss issues related to teacher leadership and perceptions of innovation.

Although each teacher comes from a different background and they teach in several different schools, there were both commonalities and stark differences in their perspectives. Even with teachers who teach in the same charter school, some answers they provided were surprisingly different. I present a general overview of the participants to note the stage of their overall career and some of their past activities that brought them to their current position in a charter school. In some cases, I include information about their spouse, children or lack of those things because they shared that information with

me and it is relevant to important choices that the participant made in order to arrive at the decision to teach at a charter school.

Demographic Information and Background of Participants

Each of the ten participants I interviewed for this study are current charter school teachers. Nine of the charter school teachers were women and one was a man. One teacher was Black and the other nine were White. Each of the participants are licensed to teach at their employed grade level. Three of the participants are elementary level teachers, three teach both fifth and sixth grade, and four participants are middle school level teachers. They have varying degrees of experience in the TPS and each teacher has at least one year of charter school teaching experience.

In order to ensure confidentiality and promote candid answers to my questions, I have given each participant a pseudonym.

Table 2

Teacher Location, Experience and Demographic Information

Teacher	Location	Grade Level	Sex	Race	Traditional Experience	Charter Experience
Stephanie	The Environmental school	Seventh	F	White	5 years	4 years
Erica	The Environmental School	Sixth	F	White	7 years	2 years
Erin	The Artist's School	Third	F	White	22 years	3 years
Ashley	The Artist's School	Fifth	F	White	10 years	2 years

Laura	The Social Justice School	Fifth and Sixth	F	Black	21 years	1 year
William	The Social Justice School	Fifth and Sixth	M	White	3 years	3 years
Alise	The Leadership School	Third	F	White	13 years	2 years
Ellen	The Leadership School	Fifth and Sixth	F	White	10 years	2 years
Andrea	The College Preparatory School	Eighth	F	White	2 years	2 years
Alexandra	The College Preparatory School	Eighth	F	White	16 years	2 years

Stephanie

Stephanie is a current language arts and journalism teacher. She has a total of nine years' experience, with four in her current position. Her certification is in middle grades English Language Arts and Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) education. Stephanie was recruited by a friend of hers to work at the charter school. She had been out of the TPS for a few years raising her own children. She initially had reservations about teaching at a charter school because of the perceived reputation that the charter school had in her hometown. Stephanie notes, "I had not heard anything positive about charter schools, specifically the one in our area." Still Stephanie explained that had it not been for the charter school, she would not have returned to teaching. "After the [job] interview, I just knew that this was a place that I wanted to be."

Erica

Erica has taught for a total of nine years, with seven of those within the TPS. She is a current sixth grade math teacher and a lead teacher for the school and has certification to teach Kindergarten through 5th grade. Erica says that she was recruited by the school to come teach by a former administrator who was now working at the charter school. She was an elementary school teacher in the TPS, but feels like she has always been a middle school teacher at heart. Erica says, "if I have to be really honest, I likely would not have left the TPS if it had not been for my daughter." She said that her current school was a better situation for her daughter and that it was worth the fear of the unknown to make a better situation for her daughter's education.

Erin

Erin is a third-grade teacher who is certified in Kindergarten through fifth grade, special education and AIG. She has a total of 33 years of experience and six of those years have been in the charter school. Erin said that she felt like the charter school had "the feel of a one room school house," which was something that she was missing in TPS. She was recruited to the school by some parents of students who she was tutoring. They thought she would be a good fit for the school. After this recruitment went on for a period of time, she described that "during a faculty meeting I had an epiphany moment where I knew I was tired of being dictated to" and that she needed to leave the TPS.

Ashley

Ashley is a fifth-grade teacher with 10 years of total experience. This is her second year in the charter school. She is certified in Math (6-12) and AIG. She was tutoring students from the charter school and when a position opened up, an administrator at the school approached her and offered her the position. Although she was not seeking a position in the charter school, she felt like it was time for a change and that she was not feeling as supported by her traditional school's administration as she would have liked.

Laura

Laura is a current fifth and sixth grade teacher who teaches all subjects at her school. She has twenty-one years of experience with one full year of charter school experience. Her first experience was in a private school and then she worked three years in a TPS. Her initial response to why she left the TPS was to practice some self-care. She says, "I was looking for an opportunity to remind myself of the most fulfilling aspect of teaching." She wanted to feel fulfilled in what she was doing. The mission of the charter school where she currently teaches is "very much aligned to [Laura's] beliefs and goals for education."

William

William is a current fifth and sixth grade teacher who is certified in English Language Arts (6-9) and Exceptional Children General and Adaptive curriculum (K-12). He has a total of six years of experience teaching and three years of charter school experience, although he has only been in his current position for one year. When asked why he left the TPS he says he, "saw a billboard and wanted to investigate the school."

After taking a look at the school he realized that, "[the vision of the school] was really what I believe in." He had a desire for something different and feels that he has found a good fit at the charter school. He consistently feels like he made the right decision and that the charter school is the right place for him.

Alise

Alise is a current third grade teacher with 13 years of experience. This is her second year in a charter school. She is certified to teach Kindergarten through fifth grade. Alise said that she started to question what was valued at her TPS. In her perception, there was too much paperwork and not enough time devoted to the child. Her own children attend the charter school and she explained that this was part of the reason that she wanted to teach there. Her biggest concern was that the TPS was "only concerned about teaching the curriculum and not the whole child."

Ellen

Ellen is a current fifth and sixth grade teacher who has a total of 16 years of experience. She taught 14 years in a TPS and is currently in year two of her charter school experience. Ellen's certification is in English Language Arts for ninth through twelfth grade. Her initial response for leaving the TPS was that the culture of the school where she was working was "unique and that I got threatened on a daily basis." Ellen was looking for a school that was more in line with her values and a school that her own child could attend. She felt that a lack of parent support was making it difficult for her to teach in the TPS setting. Although she was worried about starting over at a charter

school, she felt that a smaller, more family focused school would be of benefit to her and her family.

Andrea

Andrea is an 8th grade civics and economics teacher. She is certified in 6th through 12th grade social studies. She has a total of four years of experience with 2 in traditional public schools and 2 in her current charter school. Andrea grew up in the area around the charter school and although she did not attend the charter school, she was familiar with it and had friends who attended. Andrea explained that she wanted less "other" when referencing her decision to leave the traditional public schools. She described the "other" as meetings, paperwork, and unnecessary changes to her schedule.

Alexandra

Alexandra is a current 8th grade English language arts teacher. She has 16 years of total experience, with two of those years coming in charter schools. She is certified in Kindergarten through sixth grade. Alexandra's father was initially on the board of the charter school when her charter school was formed, so she was familiar with the school, although she never worked there during his tenure on the board. She stated that, "her sons and daughters needs drove her to the charter school." She also noted that she was burnt out with public schools and needed a break from that environment for her mental health. Her only reluctance to leave the traditional public-school system was the loss of her sick leave. Even in spite of that, she said that leaving TPS was "the best decision she has ever made."

Each participant brought their different experiences and personal needs to their decisions to start teaching in a charter school. They shared these thoughts and their experiences with me during the interviews. Although each person came from a different background, even in these short introductions, there is a glimpse into the decisions and motivations that teachers exhibit when moving from a traditional public school to a charter school.

Themes

While the participants brought a range of experiences and beliefs about the purpose of schooling to our conversations, alongside their own personal goals, there were common themes that emerged across their interviews. I organize the data I collected showing the reasons that teachers left traditional public schools into three categories: values, instructional goals, and administration. In terms of values, teachers are drawn to a school that aligns with their vision and values, supports their current personal/family needs, and also allows them the ability to teach towards a certain clientele. The topic of instructional goals relates to the teacher's perception of the school's level of accountability to achieve high test scores versus their ability to focus on teaching the whole child (not just raising their test scores). Also perceived innovation and instructional autonomy and how each of these things affect the desirability of the school are related to instructional goals. The topic of administration is about how the teacher perceives administrative management (and micromanagement), administrative styles, and administrative support.

Values

I asked teachers a set of interview questions to determine how well their personal values aligned with the charter schools where they currently teach. I wanted to determine how intentional the teachers were in selecting a workplace that exemplified their personal values and determine how much of their decision was based on the specific mission and vision of the charter school. Teachers showed through explanations about their decision to teach at the charter school they were meeting personal needs that had not been met in traditional public-schools. In some cases, teacher responses also showed that the teachers were seeking to reach a certain clientele through their decision to teach at the charter school.

School Mission and Vision

As I have noted in my review of literature, the vision and mission of the school is an important part of the decision to attend a charter school for students and parents. As would be expected, this is also an important part of the decision-making process for the people who teach at the charter schools. Although most of the teachers who I interviewed could not state the vision or mission of their school, they were definitely able to articulate what it was about their school environment that drew them to their current position.

Ashley notes that her school values students, not the curriculum. The school recognizes that the curriculum is a way to impact the kids. She also notes that the size of the school is very important as she is able to build relationships with the students. Although Ashley teaches all subjects in her fifth-grade classroom, she is able to

incorporate her art background into her teaching at her current school. She feels that the arts-based theme of her school allows her to connect with students a different level.

Erin, who works in the same charter school as Ashley, echoes these sentiments. She noted the feel of a one room school house and the ability to connect with kids because of the size of the school. Erin mentioned that the vision of the board and the level of involvement that they have with the students at her school is important. She states, "everyone who is making decisions [for the school] are totally invested in the kids. [The decisions] are really kid centered and I do not always see that in the district [schools]." She personally values focusing on the student and does not feel like the TPS does a good job of doing that. The charter school does a better job of that in her opinion, as she explains "that is my kind of approach and that is the school's approach." She feels that the school is more customer centered and that customer is the student.

The vision of Stephanie's school is to incorporate Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM) into their curriculum with a real-world focus. This aspect of the school was the biggest draw for Stephanie.

> When I came to interview at the school I knew it was where I wanted to be. The way [the principal] described the vision of the school, teaching kids in a hands-on way, [with a] STEAM focus, how they were going to try to make everything real world. So, they wanted, they were going to have a micro farm and they were going to try to grow things and then set up like a stand to be able to for the kids to actually experienced selling things. And um, I don't know, I just loved all of it. Like everything he said was exactly what I'm all about.

The ability to make school meaningful to her students and the fact that this was a focus of the administration was a big part of Stephanie's decision to work for a charter school.

Although she had a fear of leaving the TPS, she felt that the draw of teaching in an experiential way was the thing that "put her over the edge" in her accepting the position at the charter school.

Erica, who also works at this school, described the general mission of the school to be "learning by doing." She actually did investigate the school and noted that science was a big part of how the school was trying to engage their students and that it made sense to her that "in order to learn Science, you have to do Science." The hands-on approach of the school was something that drew her to this particular school as she did not feel that this was something happening at the traditional public school.

Andrea works at a school that has a college preparation focus. She feels like the school is a good fit for her because it has set very high standards for their students. She stated the school has higher expectations for the students that attend than at traditional public schools. In her mind, this creates a school that consists of a "more advanced" level of students. This aspect of the mission and vision are important to Andrea, because of the type of school that it creates and the type of student it caters to. Andrea feels that the students who attend the charter school are more involved and attentive to their academic goals and these are the types of students she wants to work with. This creates a good fit for Andrea.

For her personal fulfillment, Andrea notes that the focus on college prep is important to her because she did not feel that she was prepared for college and she wants to make sure that her students are prepared. She also wants them to be prepared for life.

She feels like this school does a better job of preparation for her students and also that the service project that the students have to complete help to do this.

Alexandra also works for this college preparation academy. Ironically, she states that she, "actually does not feel like everyone should go to college and it is not as important as society makes it out to be." This sentiment is in direct opposition to the mission and vision of the charter school. In fact, Alexandra mentions that there was "nothing significant about the mission that led her to teach at the charter school." With this specific teacher there were more important factors that led her to her current position, which include providing a place for her son and daughter to go to school, a topic which I discuss later. I did find is surprising, however, that she was not able to articulate much about the vision and mission of the school where she chose to work – and chose to enroll her students. Moreover, that mission seemed somewhat inconsistent with her actual values.

Ellen was looking for a place where her values aligned with her schools. She feels like she found that in her charter school. Specifically, she was looking for a place that valued education in regards to the student, but more importantly to her, she wanted to work at a place where the parents also placed significant value on education. Her understanding of values related to what she needs from the administration and the parents. She wants to be supported so that she will be able to teach and she feels like this is an important focus of this school. The school has a leadership focus and works to nurture students who are likely to serve their community. Ellen did not mention the mission of the school in her answers; instead, her answers were typically more self-

serving and personal. She did mention one aspect of the goals of the administration that distinguished the charter school from the TPS in regards to hiring teachers. She says that the administration seeks to fill needs versus filling a position. She explains, "I did not get hired to be a soccer coach, I fulfilled the need of the kids to have a soccer supervisor. [The decision to hire] is more driven by what presents itself instead of what you 'have to' provide." This explanation shows one area where she is in alignment with her administration and their values.

Alise also works at the same charter school as Andrea. She mentioned that her school is very welcoming and it is student focused, both of which she really valued in terms of her current school. However, she did not make any direct references to the fact that the mission was a drawing factor for her.

William is a teacher at a school formed around the value of social justice. He states that he was drawn to the school because of that focus as well as the ability to teach using project-based learning. William says that he came to this school because there was, "very much a desire to fulfill a commitment to a philosophy of teaching" and that he could experience this active, hands-on philosophy in his current position. William feels so strongly about the mission of the school that he hopes to be able to help open another school with the same values once the one where he works, which has only been open for a year, becomes more established. He is very much focused on social justice and feels that he is able to impact students in his position at the charter school.

In regards to project-based learning, William discussed how the social justice focus and the hands-on approach to teaching are interrelated. Students do not learn

subjects in a vacuum; they learn how to relate personally to the discussions they have in interdisciplinary ways in order to put their values into action. He referenced discussions and projects that center around controversial subjects such as climate science and the Black Lives Matter movement. He said that, "age appropriateness is something that we constantly deal with so that the kids can understand [what some might think are controversial subjects], but this is definitely something we could not have gotten away with in traditional public schools."

Laura also teaches at the same progressive, social justice-oriented school as William. She says that she was looking for a school that had a holistic, experiential approach to students and learning. She was also looking for like-minded people who would value what she brings to education. She did not have those things in the traditional public-school setting.

> I'm deeply committed to racial justice work. I'm deeply committed to social justice work. I'm deeply committed to environmental justice. If you want me to be a part of my team, value all that I bring, [I ask] does the public-school system value all of the person or do they value the person that gets the test scores?

In her current setting she feels that she has found a place that values all that she brings to the student.

Laura also felt that she was constantly at a crossroads with the traditional public-school system. She wanted to make an impact, but the structure of the schools did not permit her to do so. She consistently had discipline problems, but she also had problems with the way discipline was handled.

> I wanted to get away from a punitive form of dealing with students that had trouble in the classrooms, [but] I could not derail that system. At the same time, I did not want to feed that system. I constantly found myself in a conundrum.

Leaving the traditional public-school system was very much a philosophical and value based decision for both Laura and William. This is probably not surprising, given that they both chose to teach in a charter school that is explicitly focused on issues of social justice and democracy.

In most cases, the teachers I interviewed had student-centered responses when talking about what they valued and how they perceived education. Whatever the teachers understanding of the vision or mission of their current schools, it was evident that all of the teachers felt like their position in a charter school was more aligned with their needs and values, even when they could not articulate the stated mission or vision of the school. In many cases, those needs were more personal than pedagogical, as I describe in the next section.

Teacher's Personal Needs

As might be expected, the decision to teach in a certain school is often based on a personal attraction to that setting. In my interviews, I learned this was definitely the case for many of the charter school teachers. Whether it was a strong desire to have their children in the school, or to be in the same school with their children, or to be in a situation where they feel more appreciated or less "burnt out," teachers brought their personal needs to their decisions and their schools. Within the group of teachers that I interviewed, six of the ten had relationships with either the board or with a teacher who

worked in the charter school. There was very much a mentality among the staff at the charter schools to recruit their friends from the traditional public-school settings.

Of the ten teachers that I interviewed, five of them had children who attended the charter school where they worked. I did not expect this to be the case, but it was striking that such a large number of participants from my study that had this in common. This is an area worth further exploration, especially if and when decisions related to convenience and opportunity for family members seem to take precedence over school vision and missions.

Ellen's ultimate reason for leaving the traditional public-school system came from her desire to have her own children in the charter school where she teaches. She had looked at private schools and realized that those schools would be too expensive for their family. She readily admitted that the majority of the research that she did regarding her current school was for her children's benefit.

Alexandra was very similar to Ellen in regards to her decision to teach at the charter school. She has two children who attend with her currently and stated that the main reason she left the traditional public school was because of her daughter's desire to distance herself from her friends. She wanted to escape the "teenage drama and was tired of her friends at her past school." Her son would be entering middle school at the same time and she wanted to take this opportunity to get him into a different school during that transitional year. Both of these teachers referenced burnout multiple times during their interviews, as well and that they felt that they "made the best decision ever" to leave the traditional public school and that they "felt like they got their lives back" by making that

decision. Alexandra says that her husband often tells her that he "got his wife back" through her decision to teach at the charter school.

Alise, Erica, and Stephanie all mentioned that their children are part of the reason that they are at the charter school, but they are not the sole reason. Erica even noted that she would not have left the traditional public school if her daughter had not wanted to come to the charter school, but it was not the only reason she came. She did say that if her daughter would have wanted to stay at the traditional public school, then she would have likely stayed as well. Each of these teachers mention that the charter school is a good fit for their own child, but acknowledge that there were other more important factors that led to their decision to leave the TPS.

In the cases of the other teachers interviewed, it was evident that their personal needs were being met by their decision to teach in a charter school, but those personal needs were much more centered around the philosophy and/or mission of the school than having found a good home for their children. In the cases above, it seemed that the decisions were primarily personal and likely self-serving. The teachers who had their own children at the school also seemed to have stronger thoughts about the clientele of the school, what types of other families enrolled their children there, as well.

Clientele

Parental involvement is a term that is often heard in the traditional public schools. Teachers talk about how to get parents more involved in their children's education and more involved in the school in general. When speaking with the participants, each one of them felt like there was more parental involvement in the charter school setting versus the

TPS. The teachers mentioned that they taught students who came from families who "valued education." One of the participants noted that lack of parental support was a specific reason that she left traditional public schools. She did not feel that she was respected by the parents of the children in her previous school. Among all of the participants, there was agreement that parental support and involvement are positive things, but for some there was also a sense that the involvement creates a certain type of student that is more favorable to the teacher, and in the long run, easier to teach.

Erin stated that her school has many, "parents that are invested in the arts and that those parents provide more opportunities outside of the school setting for their children." She concluded that the teachers and the school do not have to provide as many opportunities for the student because they are getting those things at home and the school has to be less of a parent figure for those students. This gives them the ability to focus on their curriculum.

Twice during the interview, Stephanie mentioned that the parents of her students' "care" deeply about their child's education and that they are "caring enough" to fill out the application to attend the charter school. The somewhat hidden implication here is that students who go to traditional public schools do not have parents who care about their education. Stephanie went on to mention that the fact that the parent cares seemed to change the demographic of the school.

Alexandra noted also that there is much more parental involvement in the charter school and that produces an environment that is significantly more "distraction free." She felt that based on the parent's desire for their child to be at the charter school, all of

the kids had "the same mentality of achievement" in her current classroom. This was not the same feeling she had in the traditional public school and she went as far as making statements that there she was dealing with kids who had no business being in her classroom and kids who did not deserve to be in her classroom. She mentioned that her charter school could be described as a "private public school" and that her administration will have conversations with students explaining that it is a privilege for the student to be at their school, and although their parents put them in this school, they do not have to be allowed to stay there. I cannot verify that those conversations actually occurred, but it is definitely a perception that Alexandra has about her school and her administration. Alexandra has strong feelings about the students who she has taught in the past and also mentioned that students and teachers leaving the traditional public school should be a wakeup call to the parents and that "public education is free, but it has been taken advantage of." In Alexandra's case, it seems that the clientele of her charter school was definitely a draw, as she valued being in what felt like a more exclusive and elite setting.

Ellen, who had some similar views to Alexandra about her children and the reasons for leaving traditional public schools, shared some of her views regarding clientele. Ellen suggested that her charter school is, "a school for people who cannot afford private school, but do not want to go to the traditional public schools." In her assessment, this is why the school consists of mostly upper middle-class students and families. She went on to say that when contemplating accepting her current position, she did not expect to have students with diverse needs. "I did not think that I would have any

kids that had and IEP or were on a 504," she says. While this was not the case, it was a contributing factor to her decision to teach at the charter school.

As I have stated, each of the participants mentioned that there was more parental involvement in the charter school than with the traditional public school. Although each participant felt this way, it wasn't necessarily a contributing factor to their decision to teach at the charter school, nor did it have much bearing on their perception of the clientele of the school. In most cases with the participant, it was just a novelty that they were not used to, or it was a contrast to the norm of the traditional public school.

Instructional Goals

The current educational culture values high achievement that is shown through test scores. I asked each of the participants about how accountability was approached in their charter school versus the way it was approached in their experiences with traditional public schools. I also asked if and how the ability to have instructional autonomy figured into their decision to be in a charter school setting. In a general sense, instructional autonomy has to do with the understanding of the teacher that their values and the student's well-being are of more importance than the curriculum. In this section, I also describe the participants understanding of the instructional innovation that they use in their classroom and the freedom that the charter school provides to be innovative.

Accountability for Testing

When asked about how her administration approaches accountability at her charter school, Ashley responded: "The test isn't the whole child and we are there for the whole child."

Her response is very similar to the answers that were given by most of the interview participants. Erin, who teaches at the same charter school as Ashley, echoed this sentiment by saying that academics are important, but so is real life. She said, "I just think the whole mission of keeping everything fresh and alive and energetic is important, but in relation to real life." Neither she nor her administration felt like that could be done by teaching to a test. According to the teachers I interviewed, in each of their charter schools, they sensed more of a commitment to the holistic goals and values of the charter than primarily preparing students to pass tests.

Surprisingly, the desire to minimize the importance of standardized tests was also present in the charter school that designates itself as a college preparatory school. Alexandra noted that "administrators do not really even want us to mention the test." She said that her administration was more concerned about the students learning and they did not have any conversations with her about her personal EVAAS data. This is a stark contrast to the traditional public-school experience that Alexandra had.

Andrea also described how there is much less pressure when it comes to testing at the charter school. She mentioned that the administration has a strong expectation that the students do their best, and that they represent their school well, but as far as specific pressure about end of grade tests, she did not feel it. She said, "We want them to do well, but it's not our main focus. We're not spending every moment, every lesson preparing for that one singular item." She went on to say that they are much more focused on preparing them for college and the work place for when they leave their school. She focused their work on public speaking, presentations, essay writing, and developing a

good work ethic. Her goal and the goal of the school are to prepare them for life, not simply for success on a standardized test.

Ellen and Alise agreed that their school puts much less pressure on them as far as the test goes. They also agree that they talk about end of grade testing, but it is in a much different way than is typical in traditional public schools. Ellen feels like that there is much less pressure at the charter school when it comes to testing and that there is less competition between the teachers. Alise agreed and said that "we talk about [the test] and I feel like that helps, you know, the morale of [the actual process] of working together to make things better." Both of these teachers felt that the charter school does a better job of having the teachers collaborate to make things better for their kids, versus creating a competitive environment where the teacher feels like testing is the only metric by which they will be judged.

William, who teaches at the social justice focused school with an emphasis on experiential learning, stated that there is more accountability towards their goal (social justice) than the test. He felt that, "our administration keeps us accountable to how we are teaching and how we are staying true to our mission of social justice." It is interesting to hear the way he articulated that the "how" is more important than the "what." He also said that they acknowledge the test, but also realize that the test is a snapshot and a singular data point. The approach of their administration is to marry that information with all of the work that the student has done throughout the year to offer a more nuanced and holistic picture of student success.

Laura felt the same way about testing and her perception of the administration in the building where both she and William work. She said that the administration is more focused on the teacher's ability to "teach in ways that are not necessarily driven by assessments and benchmarks." She mentioned that they are standards based and that they look for ways to provide overlap in those standards and not teach in a way that isolates skills, but provides context for an integrated experience. The focus on testing and subject matter was something that drove Laura from the traditional public-school setting and the way the charter school approaches curriculum and learning is refreshing for her.

Stephanie and Erica's experience with their administration pointed to a similar approach to testing. It is interesting that they both felt an internal need to put pressure on themselves to succeed. Stephanie felt like she does this because this is the only thing that she ever knew as a traditional public-school teacher. She said, "this is something that is ingrained in me, but there is no pressure from our administration." Erica felt the same way about the administration, but also notes that she is very critical of herself. She said that this is so much the case that when the administration was not as concerned about the test as her past administrations had been, she felt like she was not as important as she had been in her past setting. She said that testing has always been something that, "is just drilled into you that defines you as a good teacher." When that pressure was not present at the charter school, she questioned why she was there. It took her a while to realize that good teaching could be measured in other important ways. Her pressure to produce scores had once been such a focus that she did not know how to conduct herself in an environment that did put the same value on the test.

However, despite feeling more autonomous, both Stephanie and Erica felt like in the past year the administration has begun to put more pressure on the teachers over the scores. They attribute this to administration changes and also to added pressure by the legislature to have charter schools prove their worth and viability. They both felt like they are positioned to do well in this new administration because of their overall approach to teaching and their past experience with high stakes testing. Erica said that not all teachers share that welcoming approach to a renewed interest in testing data. She has overheard teachers in recently initiated "data meetings" saying that "[these meetings] are why I left the other school" and that when teachers have interviews at the school, they initially think that there is no testing required and that they therefore do not have any accountability for student performance . While this is not the case, it may be a reason that teachers are entertaining teaching at a charter school, although accountability is something that they cannot escape.

Instructional Innovation

One of the original stated goals of North Carolina charter school legislation was to provide an environment that welcomed and encouraged pedagogical innovation. Ideally, this innovation was to be tested in the charter schools and then transferred to the traditional public schools when it proved to be successful. With the apparent minimization of testing in charter schools, it would stand to reason that there should be a fertile environment to test non-traditional instructional strategies and practices in the charter school.

I asked each of the teachers what they thought about their school and the degree to which it was innovative. In almost every interview, the teacher felt like their school had the ability to be more innovative, but could not give specific examples when asked. They felt like their administration was open to creating an environment where teachers were able to take risks and that they were in an environment where you were not likely to hear "no."

The examples of innovation that I heard essentially equate to varied instructional strategies such as providing students the opportunity to do a project versus a worksheet, or involving a class in a whole group project versus a lecture. Andrea summed up innovation at her school by saying:

> I would say that things are still taught in those same ways because your still, you're dealing with people who have been teaching these things for a while and that is how they have done it and that is how they are going to do it. Um, but I think we do have the ability to be more innovative if we wanted to.

From my own experience in traditional public schools, I think that this is a very similar feeling among teachers in that setting. They teach the way they know how and even when given some flexibility from the administration, the teacher does not way to stray too far from their comfort zone.

Within these seemingly flexible cultures, participants also feel like sometimes they have to be more innovative because they have fewer resources than the traditional public schools. For example, they discussed restructuring schedules or repurposing instructional supplies, but none of the innovations seem transferable or anything that is truly boundary stretching for public education.

Interestingly, a few of the participants felt that the increased demands of the state to monitor charter school student performance through testing and to increase test scores were going to continue to limit the ability of the charter school to be more innovative. Erica, who initially felt like there was not enough emphasis on the test went as far to say that, "the demands of state testing limit innovation much like in the traditional public school." This is an interesting take on who is responsible for innovation in the classroom. We have a teacher who says that she needs more accountability to feel a sense of importance, and she also says that the current level of accountability limits her ability to be innovative in her classroom. In this case, it seems that the limit to innovation in the classroom is the teacher, not the governing bodies that surround them.

Administrative Support

Throughout their interview responses the teachers alluded to a sense of autonomy that was lacking in the traditional public school, but was created at the charter school. They also mentioned that strong principal support was part of their experience in the charter school. Their desire to feel like a professional and not feel like every aspect of their job was micromanaged and questioned caused many of the teachers to pursue positions at the charter school. I examine these feelings of micromanagement versus a sense of autonomy in the next section.

Micromanagement versus Autonomy

From my review of literature, I learned that there was a strong sentiment that teachers would chose a school based on the leadership style of the administration. This is also the case with teachers who choose to teach in a charter school. Many of the teachers

felt that they were being micromanaged in the traditional public school and felt that they would have a better experience in the charter school. This felt sense of autonomy that they have in the charter school now can come from many sources. The parents can have a vision of their child's education that rests outside of test achievement, administration can be less strict on their requirements for lesson plans, or the sheer fact that there is no administrative office pushing down dictates to the charter schools can be a refreshing experience for charter school teachers.

In almost every interview, teachers noted that they were not interested in teaching students through scripted programs. They wanted the ability to decide at the student level upon the best suited instructional technique to make a difference. William stated that in the traditional public school where he worked there was, "not much agency for the teachers to interpret the standards in a manner that relates to the students in their classroom." This is not the case in his current situation. Before he was given a curriculum and was told to teach that curriculum. In the charter school, he feels like he has been given kids and his job is to teach the kids. He described the support that he is given in the classroom as "overwhelming" and that his administration is very encouraging and helpful. He also notes that the board is very active in the everyday operation of the school, but described how the feel is very different than his experience with the control that district offices possessed in traditional public schools. He felt that the board truly takes the time to understand what he is doing in his classroom and that they are active in a caring and supportive way.

Erin had the same feelings about the district office and their motivations. She said, "I always felt like the district office was so political. Here in the charter school, I feel like their only goal is to educate the children." Ashley shared similar thoughts, stating, "here at the charter school, I do not have a district person to report to." Again, Alexandra did not feel like she was being micromanaged by her administration, but often felt like the district would put unreasonable demands on the administration to get results and those demands would trickle down to the teachers.

The comments of the charter school teachers about administrative support point to an interesting take on the structure of the schools. There is often a layer of protection between the teacher and the district office in traditional public schools. Surprisingly these teachers placed the blame for micromanagement or excessive expectations on district office workers and their demands. This feeling could spring from the motivations that the teachers implied about the district and the demands that were placed on the administration in their schools. In traditional public schools there is very much a top down flow of information and mandates starting with the district office. The flow of expertise and autonomy seems to be very different in a charter school where teachers are considered the experts and the boards of the charter schools are facilitators of the school operation. The teachers I interviewed described how they are given the freedom to teach and charter school administrators help to clear the way for them to do so.

This lack of district control and the autonomy of the administration in charter schools is a likely reason for the renewed sense of autonomy that the charter school teacher possesses. Stephanie said that, "Administration will likely not tell you no. If you

have a vision for something you are likely to be given permission. They want you to push the envelope."

Erin echoed this feeling saying that she does not have people looking over her shoulders. She felt like the administration honored the skills and abilities of the teacher so that they are able to present the curriculum in a way that is comfortable in relation to their abilities and meaningful to the students. For example, this freedom allows Erin to integrate puppetry into her teaching. William feels the same way. He said that, "if [a teacher] has a certain skill set, they want to highlight that." He attributed this support to the shared values that the school has from the fact that the administration and board recruit teachers based on those shared values.

Overwhelmingly, the charter school teachers felt like they are trusted to do their job. Ellen said, "they are not going to be checking up on us constantly, they expect us to do our job." Alise also says that she is given complete autonomy. She said for the first time in years she is not afraid of who is going to open the door while she is teaching. She said, "how I get the kids [where they need to be] is totally up to me. I am not micromanaged and they basically leave us alone, as long as you are doing your job." These teachers do not feel like this was the case in the traditional public schools. There, they felt the administration micromanaged their classrooms and instruction, constantly checking lesson plans and critiquing them through multiple intrusive observations.

Of the ten interviews that I conducted, nine of the ten teachers mentioned that their lesson plans were not checked and they were given the freedom to do their job. Only one of those teachers, Erica, felt like her administration was strict on lesson plans

and that they were checked every week. This could be a situation where the administration felt like they needed to check Erica's lesson plans or it could just be a situation where the traditional public-school administration happened to be a little more lenient with that requirement in Erica's previous school. Even with this being the case, Erica feels like she has more autonomy and freedom in the charter school. She said that in "traditional public school, things [e.g., mandates to cover items in the curriculum] were constantly added but nothing was ever taken away." Currently, she has to turn in her lesson plans and she has to conduct parent contacts (10 a week), but she still feels that the overall culture of the school is that she is in control of her classroom and how it operates on a day to day basis.

The consistent refrain from the teachers that I interviewed was that they wanted to feel some control of their classroom and that they wanted to feel valued as a professional. Each one of them expressed that the charter school environment did a better job of providing that feeling of professionalism and trust than the traditional public school. Alexandra sums this sentiment up well by saying, "we have a job to do and the administration has a job to do. They trust us to do our job and they pretty much leave us alone." This is likely the relationship that teachers in traditional public-school desire with their administration, but is also a relationship that was elusive to all of the interview participants when they were in that setting. In each interview, the administration was a major topic of concern and their leadership style was a determining factor in the teacher's willingness to continue teaching in their current role or to seek a different position.

Summary

The teachers who I interviewed consistently wanted to teach in a place that shared their same values, offered them the ability to teach in a way that is consistent with those values and surrounded by people who honored their importance as an individual as well as a professional. These basic needs were not being met within the traditional public-school system. They made a choice to meet those basic needs. In the next chapter, I discuss how some of the decisions, fueled by personal choices, can create some unintended consequences, especially in terms of the relationship between democracy and education. While the consequences have been addressed by charter school opponents, it most cases, my interviewees had not thought carefully about them.

CHAPTER V

TEACHERS AND DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES

After exploring the reasons that teachers left the traditional public-school system in my interviews, I then investigated the teacher's perception of democracy and how charter schools impacted the democratic goals of education. I was interested in whether they had thought much about democracy or troubled over their decision to teach in a charter school – something that I had done in the past and that kept me away from teaching positions I had been offered in that setting. I asked each teacher a general question about their understanding of democracy as well as specific questions about how they helped to cultivate the habits of democratic citizenship in their school and classrooms. I also asked them to discuss specific practices at their schools which may influence access to the school, and consequently impact equality of educational opportunity. Practices that limit access are typically common criticisms of charter schools. While there is a great deal of research on these things the types of structures and practices that limit charter school enrollment, such as the absence of free and reduced lunch and transportation, I could find no research on whether teachers who work at charter schools understand and endorse the activities or if they realize the impact that their activities have on charter school enrollment and how they affect kids. It is important to note here that each teachers' comments are idiosyncratic and they may not reflect official information shared by the school or the values and mission expressed on

the website and by administrators. In this chapter, I also discuss the charter school teachers' perceptions related to if and how their schools promote diversity and seek to diminish segregation in their schools. Here I focus on racial, socio-economic, and special population segregation. By examining these areas, I wanted to determine if the teacher understood how the policies at their school affected enrollment and diversity. Once again, these answers are based on teacher perception and may or may not reflect how administrators at the school would respond if I had interviewed them instead.

Teachers Perception of Democracy

I discussed democratic ideals and principles in the introduction of my dissertation because these ideals are currently up for debate as part of the school choice movement. One of these principles and original purposes of schools was to prepare students to participate in a democracy by teaching the habits, skills, and dispositions of citizenship. Charter school critics are vocal about how charter schools create environments that lack diversity and restrict access for some students, suggesting that they are more about individual growth and schooling as a means to personal achievement than commitments to common goods. As I have discussed before, education is a highly political environment and there are many stakeholders involved. Partly for this reason, and because charter school critics argue that the movement is frequently elitist rather than democratic, I wanted to know if charter school teachers had thought much about the democratic implications of their choices. Were they concerned that working in a charter school could have negative consequences for the traditional public schools and the students who attend them? Did they consider any broader consequences of their choices

or believe that teaching at a charter school reflected a value choice as much as a personal or practical one?

I compiled the findings I discuss in this chapter after I asked the charter school teachers several questions to assess their understanding of democratic principles, the democratic foundations of public education, and how schooling affects the students in their care. I first posed a basic question to the participants about what they thought the purpose of schooling should be and ultimately, why they chose to teach. I did this to get the teachers to think about their personal purpose and how that relates to what school should mean to society as a whole.

When asked about the teacher's perception of democracy and how it relates to schools, I was often greeted with a response of confusion or misunderstanding of the question. When this was the case, I then eased into, or backdoored into, the idea of democracy by asking each teacher what they thought the purpose of schooling should be. For example, why should each of their students be in school and what should they get out of it? Their responses were often general or very basic and some of the teachers had significant difficulty answering this question. One participant noted that she did not think she would have to think this hard to answer my questions.

In terms of the purposes of schooling, responses ranged from student specific answers such as to make the student a better person when they left the school than when they came, to preparing students for a better life. Two teachers had more difficulty in answering the others in the group: Alise and Alexandra. Surprisingly, they both work at the charter that is tasked with building the capacity of leadership in their students. They

had the most difficulty responding to this question while at the same time their school has a specific goal of promoting leadership and preparing students for the future. After reframing the question many times, Alise discussed how she thought the kids should be able to have a voice and be involved in the decision-making process for her classroom. Based on her difficulty even talking about the democracy and its role in public schooling, it was evident to me that this was not a topic that Alise had thought of before. Ellen, a few halls over, was only able to relate democracy in her school building to the adults. She mentioned that they have a say in how the school is run and are given choices about the way their classes are set up. When pressed, she admits that she had never thought of the purpose of what she does and how it relates to the bigger picture of society.

Stephanie and Erica, who both teach at the Environmental School, held similar thoughts on the purpose of schooling. They want their students to be prepared to be successful adults. Erica terms this as being a "better person than you were when you came here." She is very quick to point out that the better is not always an academic designation and, in many cases, it is more about creating relationships with the people in the classroom and in the school as a whole. Stephanie has a similar response in saying that she wants her students to be "as prepared as possible to be successful adults." This preparation for life involves the students seeing differing viewpoints and making sure that their responses to others are "kinder than they would be otherwise." In each of these answers we see teachers who want to prepare their students to be able to respond to others and the world around them in emotionally mature ways. They feel like the

purpose of schooling should be to help their students participate in a meaningful way in society.

When posed with the question about her perception of democracy, Erin began her explanation by saying that she is "not a real political person" and that living in a democracy means that someone is likely to become offended by another viewpoint. She notes that she has to consistently guard against this. When I changed the question to ask about the purpose of schooling, she explained that she feels like the purpose should be to "get them ready for the real world and make sure that they understand that he world does not revolve around you." She went on to say that she wanted to produce students who were solid contributors who could make a difference in the world. While Erin had to be prompted and her views on the importance of individual accountability seemed to be less of a concern, she was able to determine a purpose of schooling that aligns with common ideas about democracy and the purpose of schooling.

Ashley stated that the reason she teaches is to help us all as a society. She said emphatically, "You have to have a well-educated workforce." She is preparing students to be contributing members of society. One of the most important ways that she does this is by making sure that kids have the ability and the tools to speak up and think critically. She explained that she does not typically address democracy in her classroom, but she wants to give the students the tools necessary to be a good citizen and to get involved in society as a whole. However, she was not able to elaborate or give further examples when questioned about how she does this in her classroom.

The remaining participants each had pretty firm ideas about why they teach and what they contribute to society by doing so. Laura excitedly stated that her purpose is "to make the strange familiar." She felt like the more new and different things she is able to introduce to the student and expose them to, the better off they are going to be when interacting with society. She described how we fear what we do not know and she wants to make sure that the students are not sheltered in a bubble. Her further goal is to have the students practice a healthy type of civil disobedience. She obviously does not want to have her students get in trouble, but she wants them to challenge conventional thought and practices in society as a way to create a more socially just world. She gives them a safe place in their classroom to investigate those issues.

Sharing some similar goals as Laura, which is not surprising since they work in the same school, William wants to impart a desire in his students to do things that they think that cannot do. He wants them to develop a passion around subjects that cause them to mobilize to action. He does not feel that school is beneficial when it is limited to what students learn in the classroom for the purposes of passing tests, but that the lessons should be extended in order to make society better. He is also very passionate in his belief that schools should allow all types of people, regardless of their backgrounds and beliefs. He is proud to say that the school where he works is "absolutely a public school, any kid can go here." He feels that his school exists to serve the public.

Andrea and Alexandra, who teach at the college preparatory school, each have similar thoughts on the purpose of school and why they teach. They both mention that they seek to benefit society as a whole and produce well educated future generations that

will in turn pass important information down to the next generations. Andrea discussed how she wants to produce students who are able to make sure that the nation is able to continue long after she is gone. Alexandra expresses a more individualized answer offering that she wants to advance society, but also to "promote independence at a personal level and self-care" while benefitting the greater good. This was a surprisingly inclusive answer considering she earlier stated that she was not sure that every student deserved to be in her classroom based on their behaviors.

In general, teachers were able to articulate the need for schooling to affect not only the student, but society as a whole. However, most struggle to articulate the meaning of democracy and the role of public schools in supporting it. In the next section, I describe how each teacher explained how they accomplish the goal of furthering democracy and how, in their opinion, their schools help to promote democracy for everyone.

School and Teacher Influence on Democracy

During our interviews, I asked teachers how their school impacted democracy as well as how they addressed and cultivated democratic habits and dispositions within their classrooms. In this section, I break down how the teachers felt that their school helped to promote democracy and how they accomplish this goal within the context of their school and classroom. After discussing teachers' perception of the influence of their school, I then discuss their own practices in each of the different charter school settings.

The Environmental School

It was very interesting to me that neither of the teachers from the Environmental School mentioned the mission of the school to produce students who were environmentally literate and keenly aware of their actions and the impact of those actions on others. This is an explicitly stated piece of The Environmental School's mission and vision.

Stephanie felt like her school promotes democracy by offering hands on activities for students to prepare them for the "real world." She stated that the school is also, "very big on service projects." Her school offers a "flex day" each month where students are able to participate in community service projects and explore topics outside of the regular school curriculum. She explained that this is a very important aspect of the school that allows the students to look outside of themselves and give something back to the community. She also described how the school has a strong focus on public speaking and communicating with adults. In her opinion, these activities contribute to society by creating individuals who are able to communicate and participate in discussions and create opportunities to exchange ideas.

Interestingly, Erica did not share this same perception of The Environmental School. She does not mention community service or even the existence of a flex day. She instead stated that she thinks the school does a good job of promoting citizenship through their expansive sports program. Explaining this connection, she mentioned that students get the opportunity to interact each other on a team and build positive skills like teamwork and cooperation that positively impact society. She also thought her school

could do a better job of placing students in the community more, noting that it is difficult in her view to form a tight-knit local community because we "have students from all over."

In Stephanie's classroom, she discussed how she promotes democracy by encouraging students to go outside of their comfort zone and investigate things in their communities that need changing. She specifically mentioned two things that she did in her classroom. One is that when she teaches the novel *A Long Walk to Water*, she has the students participate in a service project where they help to fund well building in Africa. She quickly noted that she makes sure to cover all of the curriculum, but she also incorporated activities that extend beyond the curriculum and make the subject matter real to the students.

Stephanie also mentioned having guest speakers come in to talk about homelessness within the community and what that looks like. She felt like this is an extremely impactful lesson for the students because it causes them to look outside of themselves and realize that there are people with needs inside their own community. She mentioned that the students are always very reflective in their essays and that typically they are just not aware of the needs in their community. She felt like she helps to give them that awareness.

Erica's comments on how she promotes democracy in her classroom were rather broad and generic. She said that she "does a lot of group and partner work" and that "I make sure to put students in situations where they have to work together and get along." In contrast to Stephanie, it seems that Erica's approach is not as well thought out and

planned. She sees value in having the students exchange ideas, but she does not seem to make this a priority like her colleague.

The differences in how they approach exposing students to experiences could easily explain the difference in how they both perceive their school's ability and purpose to influence democracy. There seems to be a purposeful approach to Stephanie's instruction and her desire to influence her student's actions, while Erica seems to assume that preparation for citizenship just happens.

Artist's Charter School

Describing the Artist's Charter School, Erin argued that it is a school wants to promote a "perspective that is not their own." While it is a key democratic principle to value all people's opinions and diversity, Erin was not able to describe the relationship between multiple perspectives and democracy. Nonetheless, she maintains that the school is much more open to different viewpoints than the TPS and that they often have discussions that surround those differing viewpoints. She says the students are able to be more open at the Artist's Charter School and that they are able to express themselves in ways that are uncommon in traditional public school. She admits that this sometimes causes conflicts, but the school staff and faculty are very dedicated to helping students to resolve conflicts peacefully and work through problems through discussion. The school leaders very much want to promote a sense of belonging and community to everyone who is there, both staff and students.

Ashley also explained how the Artist's Charter School is able to promote democracy through providing their students with the skills and the desire to get involved

in the community. She sees preparing students who have a voice and are able to think critically as one of her mandates based on the school's vision. She also said it is very important for those students to be able to express their viewpoints in a cogent and appropriate manner.

While there are some differences in their perspectives, both teachers in the Artist's Charter School agreed that their school has a democratic focus and that they want to prepare students to be able to express themselves in a way that will be of benefit to society. However, while both Erin and Ashley mentioned broad ways they promote democracy in their classrooms, they gave limited and fairly superficial answers when describing exactly what they do to nurture and develop democratic habits and values. Erin says that she wants to make sure that students investigate both sides of issues so that students can be able to understand each other's perspective. Ashley says that she holds class meetings regularly so students can express opinions and promote a sense of community. Similar to the Environmental School, while these charter school teachers recognize that collaborative and service-oriented can promote some democratic ideals, they did not describe these larger purposes in advancing democratic ideals.

The Social Justice School

William and Laura find it difficult to talk about how their school promotes democracy absent how they promote democracy in their classrooms. They both asserted that cultivating democratic habits, dispositions, and values is something they do on a daily basis and that it is something that is engrained in the DNA of the school. In fact, Laura thinks the reason that all of the teachers are there is because of how the school

values each of their inputs and their ability to incorporate democratic ideals into their teaching. William expresses similar values, and notes that the school leaders are not only willing to listen to the voices of the teachers when deciding how and what to teach, but they also make sure that they listen to the student voices too. William says, "we cater to all of their needs" when referring to the students. He admits that catering to their needs is exhausting and that it would be much easier to teach the students what he feels is important and move on instead of making sure they all have their opinions heard and needs addressed. Both Laura and William are committed to the mission of The Social Justice School and maintain that even though the work is exhausting, it is important enough to do.

In describing what she sees as her job responsibilities, Laura discussed how important it was to make sure that the students have a voice in what is taught in the classroom. She understands that she has to cover a curriculum, but she has to work in a way that gives the students a voice in that content and activity. She really pushes social interaction and interpersonal relationships in her classroom; students are not allowed to label other students as this thing or that thing, but instead learn to acknowledge there are people in the class that have different characteristics. This is an important aspect of her class because students are able to separate people from their beliefs and thoughts. They can actively disagree with the persons beliefs or expressions, but still have respect for the person they are. With this understanding, she wants her students to "disobey, but disobey respectfully." She also says,

> I don't want them to say what they think they should say. I want them to think through what they should say and if they don't agree, I want them to think through what their counter argument or narrative should be and be able to present that, in a respectful manner.

She is able to do this because she sees value in all of her students and she teaches them to see that same value in each other.

Out of all of the participants, Laura was the only one who referenced a specific philosophy of democracy in schools, noting that she was a big fan of John Dewey. Her knowledge of his philosophy and his teachings shines some light onto why she is so dedicated to providing a democratic education to her students and uses the frame of democracy to guide her actions in the classroom.

In supporting democratic diversity and inclusivity, William explains how students in his classroom are very good at listening to and accepting other people's viewpoints. They do not "boo" each other and they are respectful when each other presents. He notes that it was not always that way and it was something that he had to teach his students. He says that no matter what the activity or content of the lesson, he always tries to incorporate at least two different perspectives on the information. He gives a specific example of reframing the narrative around Christopher Columbus and the indigenous people where he celebrates the indigenous people instead of Columbus. This is in stark contrast to what often occurs in traditional public schools.

Another specific activity that he likes to do is to give students different speeches without telling them who gave the speech. In this way, they are encouraged to determine if they agree with the information or not without knowing who delivered the address. He

always finds that students are surprised with whom they agree and it helps to open their eyes to what they believe versus who they believe. This ability to think critically is one of the habits that The Social Justice School tries to cultivate.

William also seeks to include all students in his classroom and give them a voice. He has worked with the counselor to start a chapter of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) at his school. He noticed that there was not an avenue for all students to express themselves and wanted to make sure that this was changed. He also mentioned that parents had concerns about LGBTQ issues at the school and felt like this would be a way to address some of those issues and begin a conversation. He is pleased with how the community and the students have responded.

Creating, maintaining, and furthering democracy is at the center of everything that The Social Justice School does. Given that this school is the one most modeled on democratic ideals, it is no surprise that the teachers who teach there share those same ideas and help to develop the habits of critical citizenship in their classrooms.

The Leadership Academy

The two teachers from the Leadership Academy, Alise and Ellen, had a difficult time articulating a purpose for schooling and how they see schooling as a democratic function. The school where they work is built on character education and promoting leadership. Their answers were the vaguest when trying to determine what their school and they did to promote democracy. Alise notes that the school has regular assemblies, but feels like the kids should have more opportunities to be involved and make decisions. Ellen did not mention the student's participation in democracy, instead only noting that

the administration listens to the teachers and they have a voice in what goes on at the school level.

In relation to their classes, Alise offered that it is the job of the teacher to expose the students to things that would be termed as democratic. She tries to give the kids opportunities to make decisions in the classroom. She also discussed how using problem-based learning lessons helps students to become better critical thinkers, to know and understand the purpose of what they are learning, and to collaborate with her peers. In my notes I termed this as backdoor promotion of democracy. It is not an expressed goal of the instruction, only a byproduct.

Even when pressed, Ellen could only explain that she liked to see her students grow. That was the extent of her desire to express the democratic ideals that were present in her class, even as I pressed her to elaborate. She noted that she like to see her students being productive citizens outside of her classroom, but she did not or could not elaborate on what she did to help make that happen or what she meant by productive. She did say that they (her coworkers and administrators) truly care about everyone at the school and they want them to be successful. There just did not seem to be much of a plan to make that desire happen or a vision of what it meant to be successful, beyond an individual one.

The College Preparatory School

The teachers at College Prep are asked to prepare each of their students to attend college. When it comes to the school's ability to provide this education in the context of democratic values, Andrea says that the school does a good job of getting the input of the teachers in order to provide a thorough education to their students that the staff can really

support. In addition to this, she expressed that the school does a good job of getting the student's input on issues to incorporate their viewpoints in to the everyday operation of the school. She also says that the students are able to participate in service projects such as cleaning waterways to give back to the community. At the same time, she mentions that fostering a sense of community is difficult at the school because the students come from so many different places. Since the school draws students from such a large geographical area, a student may be the only person at the school that lives in that area. This presents a problem for the school to be able to really impact the communities their students are from, or to unite the students around an outside purpose.

Andrea says that she develops democratic habits in her classroom by promoting conversations to ensure that students consider different points of view on content material. She wants all of her students to really question the validity of what they think they know. She expects them to be responsible citizens and research the points of their arguments. She did lament that although she wants to make sure that all of the student's different views are taken into consideration, there is very little diversity in her classes which tends to lead to conversations that are typically one sided.

Alexandra does not answer the question of how democracy is realized in her school in exactly the same way, but she mentioned that The College Preparatory School could very easily be "labeled as a private public school." She says this in the sense that the school is very centered around meeting each individual student's needs, as opposed to developing commitment to common goods and social justice. At one point she stated that "she believes in public schools even though she is at a charter school," making a very

clear distinction between TPS and her school. She is not able to articulate a way in which she promotes democracy in her class and even notes that she feels like she "should really do more research into charter schools" even though she is presently employed by one. Alexandra further states that she feels like the kids in the TPS needed her more and that she was making a difference with them, more than with her current charter school students.

Democratic Challenges to Enrollment

The thing that I was most interested in going into this study was trying to determine how teachers who work at charter schools make sense of their choices, especially in light of the critiques of charter schools as undermining the democratic purposes of public education. I addressed this issue directly with them. I asked them about their choices and to respond to criticisms of how charter schools may create unintended negative consequences that are antithetical to democratic values, such as limiting rather than enabling equality of educational opportunity. In this section, I review the thoughts and feelings that the teachers possess about these critiques of charter schools. These responses came out when they answered general questions or when they responded to direct questions about specific criticisms of charter schools. These criticisms include a difficulty to enroll in the charter school because of the parent's ability to navigate the charter school system, the use of retention to pressure parents to leave the charter school, the lack of free and reduced lunch programs in charter schools, the lack of transportation and the lack of special population services in charter schools. I discussed

these criticisms during the interviews and I describe my analysis of their comments below.

Teacher's Perception of Parental Involvement

One of the most commonly leveled criticisms, the inability for parents to navigate the charter system, was indirectly addressed by the teachers during the interview process. Lack of parental involvement was a concern in the TPS for the majority of the teachers I interviewed. This also became a topic of conversation when talking about who was attending the charter school and if certain policies or practices limited access to the school. This involvement ranges from the ability to navigate the charter enrollment process to the ability to come in and volunteer when there was a requirement to do so. Two of the schools have a requirement of parents to come in to volunteer once a quarter. While none of the other schools have this requirement, in order to enroll their children, parents must be able to research the school, determine if their values align, apply and typically enter a lottery, and transport their children. Each step in this process can serve to limit who is eventually able to attend the school

To enroll their children in a charter school, most of the teachers I interviewed described how the onus is put on the parent to "care" enough to do the work and get the student in the school, or keep the student in the school. Alise says that "the parents have to be involved here. They have to get you to school here. They have to give you something to eat." This puts a tremendous amount of responsibility on the parent to be able to provide these things in order for the student to attend the charter school. While this is likely a burden to a parent who may be struggling to provide the student with

everything they need, Alise explains that it is a good thing because the parent and the student "earn" the ability to attend the charter school.

Laura mentions that ack of parental knowledge is an issue, but in contrast to some of her charter school teaching peers, she discussed how it is something that The Social Justice School seeks to address. She says, "we feel that we are limited only by [the lack] of parents knowing who we are. We have been able to problem solve [about] getting kids here. It is something we have been very intentional about." The leaders and teachers at The Social Justice School charter school maintain it is there job to go out and educate the public about what they are and what they do and how they can have access to the school. William shares this sentiment about The Social Justice School stating that he does not want where he works to be like "other" charter schools. He realizes there is a stigma around charter schools and makes sure to let everyone know when he is talking about his school that they are a "public non-profit school that seeks to serve all students." Alternatively, the perception of parents, according to Alexandra, is that The College Preparatory School is a "private Christian school." Sometimes the mere perception of the school is enough to dissuade parents from allowing their children to attend. One of the most striking things that I was confronted with after conducting these interviews was how often I felt that the teachers had not reflected on the perhaps unintended consequences of charter schools or their impact on larger social goods and democracy at large.

Retention as a Tool

Grade level retention for students not making progress is an issue in all schools. It is also one that is often more challenging in TPS than in charter schools. Students who

are not making adequate progress from year to year should be given the opportunity to improve and go at their own pace. Two of the teachers I interviewed, at two different schools, mentioned that the administration sometimes uses the threat of retention at a grade level as a way to persuade parents the withdraw their children from the school. Alise says that during her job interview the administrator told her that, "We have three families this year that are not coming back next year because we are going to retain their kids if they come back." As alarming as this sounds, it seems like a normal practice to Alise. She adds that using this practice "you weed out some of the kids that shouldn't necessarily be here or that aren't willing to live up [to the school's expectations]."

Alexandra says that her administration will use the same tactic. She notes that it is usually done around the 10th grade and it is used to send the parent a message that the "school might not be the right fit for their [child]." Alexandra and her administrators allude to the fact that each student needs to fit a mold or be a "certain type of person" in order to succeed at The College Preparatory School, and at times these expectations are more consistent with a private than a public school.

Using retention in this way limits the parents and the child's access to the school, which is something that is complicated in a democratic society where we strive to provide equality of educational opportunity. In these cases, there was an understanding by these two teachers that the schools were using retention as a way to weed out low performing students, which is an option that TPS are unlikely to pursue to the same extent.

Free and Reduced Lunch

I asked participants specifically if their school offered free and reduced lunch, particularly because the absence of this is a commonly cited way researchers suggest charter school are exclusive. I received conflicting answers regarding a lunch program, even from teachers at the same school. This suggests that regardless of the actual policy, a barrier to charter school enrollment is present because the whole staff was not aware of the policy and adequate food was not available equitably to all students. For example, Stephanie and Erica at The Environmental School answered the question differently. Stephanie says that the students are able to apply and the school provides lunch to the student if they need it. Erica states that there is not a program for the student and they either have to bring their lunch or have it catered in daily, which they have to pay for.

Similarly, Andrea and Alexandra have different understandings of how lunch is ensured at The College Preparatory School. Andrea says that there is no lunch program offered "as far as she knows." This is with the exception of Fridays when the school orders pizza from a chain restaurant. Alexandra said that she does not know how they do free and reduced lunch, but she, "is sure that there is something in place." Her understanding of lunch is different than Andrea's. She thought that lunch was catered in every day for five dollars a day. A $5 a day charge for lunch could certainly deter some families from considering a charter school as a viable option. This situation seems even more problematic because it seems that neither teacher has a firm understanding of how their students are provided with lunch. Not only did these teachers not know about

potential challenges and financial barriers to enrollment, but they also didn't seem particularly concerned.

Others of the teachers in my study were more informed. Erin explains that there would definitely be kids who would qualify for a free or reduced lunch program if it was offered at the Artist's Charter School. Since there is not a program, student are required to bring their lunch every day. This is the same situation at The Leadership Academy. Alise mentioned that there is not even a cafeteria at the school and they eat in the classroom. Ellen does say that students are offered snacks if they happen to forget their lunch.

Out of the five charter schools where the teachers I interviewed worked, The Social Justice School was the only school that participated in the free and reduced lunch program. William says that he is not sure if the school qualifies for Title I, but the school definitely participates in the free and reduced lunch program. Laura agrees and states that the students have access to free and reduced lunch in "whatever capacity is necessary" in order to assure that they are able to attend the school without hindrance. This offering springs from the same desire to plan ahead and make sure as many obstacles to attendance were removed for The Social Justice School students, ensuring that the school was truly accessible to all families in the area.

Even though there was only one school that offered free and reduced lunch, three of the teachers did not believe that access to lunch was a limiting factor for attendance to their school. Seven of the ten teachers did acknowledge that the inability to feed their students created a burden on the parents and limited the student's ability to attend their

schools. For example, Erin believes that the lack of a lunch program keeps some students from attending the Artist's Charter School. Ellen says that she had not thought of it, but if "I have to make my kids lunch every day and I cannot afford the food, then I would not be able to take my kids to that school."

In traditional public schools, all students have access to free and reduced lunch regardless of their location. When charter schools do not provide this service, they set themselves apart from traditional schools and limit access to their school. While this is not necessarily planned, it does create unintended consequences for enrollment. This is true of transportation as well.

Transportation and Its Effects on Enrollment

Of the five schools represented in the interviews, three did not offer any type of transportation to students. The Environmental School and The Social Justice School both offered some form of transportation, although the structure was different at each. The Environmental School provides transportation through a series of hubs where students meet the bus at a central location. This type of system still requires that the families share some of the burden to provide transportation, although it provides some greater level of access for families. The Social Justice School provides a transportation service that is paid for by the school. In their system, the students are picked up at their home address. Both Laura and William confirmed this.

While the desire to provide transportation by both schools should be commended as a way to ensure democratic access, there seems to be a fundamental difference in the plan or the lack of planning for transportation. Erica notes that when determining a plan

for transportation, the Environmental School assessed where the majority of their kids were coming from and then placed a hub in that area. At that point, students had already signed up to come to the Environmental School and the school then determined the location of the transportation hub. In this scenario, while some transportation was provided, the transportation system limits the people who can enroll. With the Social Justice School's plan, they decided to provide transportation on the front end so that parents would not have to have an alternate plan prior to enrolling. This proactive nature shows that The Social Justice School understands that the absence of transportation limits access to charter school enrollment and that they wanted to make sure it was not an obstacle for any family. Laura says, "from the very beginning we wanted to show that this was a school for everyone and it was accessible to the public."

All of the other teachers note that there is no school offered transportation and that the burden of transportation is solely on the parents or guardians. Day cares are allowed to pick students up at each of the schools. Alexandra feels like the burden should be on the parent and says, "you have to provide your own transportation, so you really have to want to come to our school." This statement seems to combine the sentiment that there are students who deserve to come to The College Preparatory School with the notion that the school should not be required to provide transportation, positioning this school more like a private school than a public one. As Alexandra alludes to, a parent who really values education will find a way to get their child to the school. She added that there are carpools around the area with which students can participate. This seems to offer a slight solution to the problem of transportation,

although I cannot imagine a parent who feels disconnected or unwanted would pursue a carpool with a perfect stranger in order to get their student to school.

Special Population Services and Their Effect on Enrollment

All of the teachers discussed how their school was not as prepared nor do they have the staff resources of Traditional Public Schools in regards to exceptional children (EC) populations, with the exception of The Social Justice School. William mentioned that the way that they teach and engage their students draws many students with special needs. Conversely, in a few cases, teachers assumed there would not be an EC population to address at the charter school at all, and they shared that as a reason that they left the TPS.

The majority of the teachers said that although their school had fewer staff for EC as compared to TPS, they indicated that the service was sufficient for their population. At the College Preparatory School, Andrea and Alexandra stated that the EC services meet the needs of their students. Andrea says that the EC specialist has a case load of seven students and Andrea attributes this low case load to the mission of the school and the type of student it attracts. Alexandra echoes this response saying that the service is better because of the low case load. Ellen does not see this the same way at the Leadership Academy, where two EC teachers provide service for a school population of 700 students. She says that, "the school is not equipped to handle all of the needs for her students." She estimates that she has six students with an IEP in a class of 25. She does not agree that the school has provided the appropriate support for the teachers or students in this area.

Outside of EC students, Erica notes that the charter school does not have the ability to screen students that may be Academically/Intellectually Gifted (AIG). They do provide services in the classroom for those students, but they have to come to the charter school pre-qualified. Erin mentions that the Artist's Charter School does not provide an English Language Learner (ELL) program and that this is definitely a limiting factor for students to enroll in the charter school.

Regardless of the level or the efficiency, each of the five charter schools where the teachers worked provided some form of special population services. However, without a full range of services there will inevitably be students who slip through the cracks or who do not pursue the school because of a lack of sufficient services.

Perception of Charter School Effects on Segregation

In this section I discuss the teacher's perceptions of the degree of segregation that is present in their schools and the potential causes of that segregation. I address both racial and economic segregation. However, there are potential influencers of segregation that may not be controlled at the school level such as geographic location. While I understand the reality of segregation in charter schools, in asking about this issue, I was not seeking to determine causality of segregation, only the perception of the teacher and how it relates to their experience in charter school. I provided the actual demographic data of each charter schools enrollment in my methodology chapter.

Each of the schools from where teachers participated in the interview hold a lottery for enrollment. All of the teachers I interviewed were aware of the lottery and

held that the school was very strict in upholding the legitimacy and integrity of that lottery.

Racial Segregation

When entertaining the idea of teaching at the Environmental School, Erica was told by her colleagues that she was going to teach at a school that promoted white flight. This comment came from the administrator of her TPS and she always found it interesting, because he admitted that he did not have any demographic information about the charter school. He was making that comment based on the assumption that charter schools in general produce white flight. Erica did not check the demographics of the Environmental School either, only the teacher turnover rate. She was more concerned about how the teachers were treated than whether the school was serving all types of students. In one sense, this could be looked upon as a positive, indicating that Erica was going to teach at the school regardless of the clientele. Conversely, she did not examine the demographics of the school to verify if it was serving students from a diverse background, seemingly because this was a low priority to her.

Stephanie previously taught at a rural traditional public school. She says that there is definitely more diversity at the Environmental School than her old school. Even so, she feels that the school could do a much better job of reaching out to Hispanic kids who live near the school. Although there are some Hispanic kids who attend the Environmental School, the school does not market towards that demographic. Stephanie notes that there are some "parents who speak Spanish with students at [the Environmental School], so they must have figured out how to get here." Statements like this show that a

common understanding is that the family must navigate the system and the determine the relevant information in order to attend the school. The school does not take a leadership role in introducing itself to the community, it only takes the students who have been able to take the initiative to seek out the school.

Erin and Ashley both suggested that the Artist's Charter School supports a good cross section of the demographics of their community. Erin said, "the race of our school is representative of the town [that we] are in." She estimates that to be around a 60/40 mix with white students being the largest representation. The Artist's Charter School actually has a 27% minority population, so her perceptions are off. Erin mentioned that the school does a good job of using the lottery to select kids, but, she also realizes that there are students who are not able to participate in the lottery because of their lack of transportation or the ability to provide food in the absence of free and reduced lunch.

Describing the Artist's Charter School, Ashley asserted that school has a great deal of diversity. In her words, "it is a broad spectrum" of students who attend. While there may be a diverse population of students in some ways, the student body is 73% White. She does have an interesting take on the diversity of the charter school in relation to diversity at the traditional public school. She notes that although her TPS may have been more diverse, there was actually more segregation within the school. While the charter school might create white flight, the different classes within the TPS were actually more segregated and kept the students apart as well. She noted that the demographics in her advanced placement classes and regular education classes were

much more skewed than the charter school enrollment and that those differences were fueled by parent choices.

Alise and Ellen at the Leadership Academy and Andrea and Alexandra at the College Preparatory School describe that their charter school is definitely less diverse than their experiences in a TPS. Andrea said that the College Preparatory School is "greater than 90% Caucasian and that there is not much diversity." She does not think that the school markets itself to a certain demographic, but the mission of the school does promote membership of "a certain type of student."

Alexandra, at the Leadership Academy, also said the school is less diverse than her TPS experience. She mentioned that she currently has "one African-American student out of 125 kids in 8th grade, but she fits right in." I was uncertain whether Alexandra meant that the student felt comfortable in that setting, if the other students helped her to fit in, or if she acclimated to that environment, or even why she felt the need to tell me that she only had one Black student.

Alise also discussed how the Leadership Academy is less diverse noting that "here I don't really feel like I have to talk about Kwanzaa or Hanukkah, you know, in the [traditional] public school, I felt like we did." This statement implies that she experiences the students to be of a homogenous nature that not only encompasses race, but also beliefs.

In describing conscious enrollment choices at their school, Laura and William at the Social Justice School talked about the lottery system as very similar to what TPS use in magnet schools across their county. They both mention that although their school is

not marketed to any particular student, they have tried to do a good job of getting the word out about their school to everyone in the community. William mentions "the placement of the school positively affected the ability of the school not to segregate." Laura concurs saying, "so if the charter school is placed in a golf course community, then certainly there is going to be some segregation there, but we deliberately went out of our way to locate our charter school in the center of downtown, of a city." There was a conscious effort when planning the school to attract students of all backgrounds. Laura says the same thing in a different way, saying that we "will go to the hood to recruit kids." It is very important for the leaders and staff of The Social Justice School to not hide behind a lottery system as a reason for non-representative demographics. They wanted to make sure that the school had a diverse population, so they made sure that the diverse sections of the community were aware of what the school was trying to accomplish and that the school was accessible to the community.

Socioeconomic Segregation

Charter school opponents argue that charter schools pull students from diverse socioeconomic areas and segregate the wealthy from the poor students. Students who are not able to provide the necessary resources and materials to access charter schools are left to stay at the traditional public school that may not be as well funded. The teachers I interviewed acknowledged these arguments and had varying responses based on their experiences.

Both teachers from the Social Justice School and the Artist's Charter School mentioned they have a wide range of students from socioeconomic groups. The Social

Justice School attributes this to their ability to provide free and reduced lunch benefits to their students. The teachers at the Artist's Charter School attributed their socioeconomic diversity to the area of town in which the school resides. Ashley says that the Artist's Charter School has students who range from "really wealthy, high achieving, academic parents [with jobs] downtown, to you know, being raised primarily by grandma, because mom was not in the picture because of drugs." Each of these schools is in an urban area.

Stephanie asserted that her charter school is more socioeconomically diverse than her TPS. However, she mentioned a bit of a caveat, and she sees the diversity because at the TPS where she previously worked, Stephanie had very few students from the upper class and she has those students currently at the charter school. So, while the charter school critics would say that there are more upper-class students attending the charter schools, Stephanie would say that the Environmental School is creating a more diverse socioeconomic school because it is at least combining students from different economic classes.

In considering their student population, Alise and Ellen claimed that they have a homogeneous socioeconomic group throughout the school. They are mostly middle to upper middle class, while Ellen is quick to point out that they do not have the "great kids that are going to the elite schools." She suggests that the Leadership Academy is a school for students who cannot afford private school, but they do not want to attend their traditional public school.

Alexandra and Andrea also agree that the College Preparatory School is less diverse socioeconomically than their TPS experience. Andrea does think this occurs

intentionally, but sees it as a byproduct of bringing together students with similar interests. Alexandra has another take on the lack the economic diversity at the College Preparatory School. She explains that each student has to provide their own computer in order to attend the school. She further states that some of the trips that the school takes make it difficult for the student to afford attendance. She referenced a trip that was taken this past year to Colonial Williamsburg that cost each student $490. When I asked if there was a fund or a way that students could apply for assistance she said that there was not. She said, "[the student] either pays, or [they] stay back." While there is not a requirement to attend the field trip in order to attend the school, it definitely sets a precedent about the type of student who attends at the College Preparatory School, and if you cannot afford this trip then you are likely not that type of student.

This segregation may not be intentional, but the practices of the school influence the type of student who attends and that influences the perception of the school. These practices also impact the access to the school and shape how students come to understand what it means to live in a democratic society.

Summary

Throughout this chapter I have described the experiences of ten different educators and how they understand their roles in, and their influences, on democracy at their schools. Many times, their experiences were similar and yet their perceptions were still different. Some times their experiences were different and their perceptions were the same. Each person who I interviewed had good intentions and wanted the best for their students as well as for themselves, even if most of them struggled to talk in any deep way

about the role of their schools in supporting and furthering democracy. There are many nuances and circumstantial events based on the policies of the school that shape the experience of each teacher within each of their schools. Sometimes these policies create consequences that must be examined in order to determine if they are intentional or just a byproduct of a plan that was not as well thought out as it could be.

In the next chapter, I examine my research questions in light of the responses of the teachers who I interviewed and analyze those responses and reflect on possible next steps in the charter school movement, especially if it is here to stay all public schools contribute to the nurturing of democracy. I look at the policies and values of the charter school to determine if there is any correlation between the values of the school and the teacher's perceived level of access for potential students of the school. I also make suggestions in order to help reduce the possible unintended negative consequences of charter school policies and values.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

When trying to determine the fundamental purposes for public education, one is likely to get as many different responses as they number of people they ask. Education and schooling are truly unique in the sense that the affect every person in society. Students and parents are consumers in the education market, teachers and schools are providers. Every level of government is involved in providing free and universal public education. What further complicates the issues surrounding the purposes of public education is that even the people who choose not to be consumers of this resource have a very personal and legitimate ownership of the educational institution by virtue of the tax system. We all pay local and state taxes that help to fund public education for all children. In some cases, the people who have the least personal interaction with the public-school system have the most influence over schools and shape how they operate and are governed.

Local, state, and federal government officials set the direction for the public education system, but they are influenced by the voices of many stakeholders. These officials are constantly under the microscope of their constituents to provide the best return on their investment to the public and to provide opportunities for those involved in the education system. The limited resources that are present must meet the needs of all, and there is a constant struggle to satisfy everyone involved. In some ways, charter

schools are a way for governments to provide a middle ground between a public option ofeducation and an option that provides choice for participants within the public system. Charter school options have been analyzed by constituents, debated by politicians, implemented, and revised. In addition to these debates, scholars have analyzed the reasons that parents and students choose charter schools over traditional public schools. These reasons can range from a personal preference of values (Wilson, 2016) to accessing innovative teaching strategies and increased opportunities for student learning (Lubienski, 2003). Regardless of the specific reason, it is evident through my study that each decision to attend a charter school, and to teach at a charter school, is personal and unique; reasons vary from person to person.

Within this educational debate, there is a segment of the educational population that has largely been ignored in the research around school choice, that is, teachers. Without this group, the educational system could not exist, but their voice is largely silent in regards to the charter school debate and analysis. In my review of existing literature, the teacher is addressed as a commodity or a delivery system of the government to provide the requests and preferences of the public. Little attention is given to the voice of the teacher in understanding the mechanisms of public-school choice. There are designated purposes related to goals for charter schools in general that are laid out in legislation. Within this broad vision, a group of people develop a vision for a school based on particular values and foci that must be expressed in their charter, then parent and students choose that school based on those desires and values. Lost in this shuffle are the teachers who deliver instruction and are essentially the boots on the

ground to accomplish these purposes. Examining their understandings of charter schools as a public education choice provides essential information to bridge the gap between the expectations of legislation and the actual product that is being delivered to students. Without teachers who deliver the product of education with fidelity, there is a breakdown in the quality of that proposed education. Through this study, I hoped to address this gap and determine how teachers made their decisions and if they realized the importance of their decisions and the consequences of those decisions.

Summary of Key Findings

The results from this study provide some information as to why teachers choose to teach in a charter school and how much thought they give to the impact of their decisions, particularly on the role of schools in democracy. In many ways, the choice to teach in a charter school implicitly promotes a certain view or perspective on the purpose of public education, regardless of how much thought teachers have given to that fact. Nonetheless, often teacher's decisions simply relate to a personal choice or value that they espouse. Yet those decisions have the potential to create conflicts, especially between democratic purposes of education and the teacher's expressed belief system.

My study involved investigating teachers' personal preferences and decision-making processes related to why they decided to teach in a charter school. Each of the teachers who I interviewed had experience in the traditional public schools' system prior to their employment by a charter school. This was a very important part of the design of the study because I wanted to determine what aspects of the charter school were more

desirable to the teacher in comparison to their experience in the traditional public-school setting.

Personal Reasons

My expectation was that there were specific reasons that the teachers chose the charter school over the traditional public school, as opposed to them winding up there by accident or happenstance. Findings from the interviews revealed that in most cases teachers did have specific reasons for pursuing employment in a charter school. Some of these reasons were personal, such as the ability to teach in a charter school that shared the same vision for education that the teacher possessed. In other cases, the teacher wanted to provide an opportunity for their own children to attend the school and accomplished this goal by working in there.

Each of the teachers in my study agreed that their teaching philosophy aligned with the missions and visions of the school in which they now teach. The shared values held by all the teachers in my study involved being student focused and valuing the whole child over the curriculum or over student achievement as narrowly measured in standardized achievement tests. However, in only a few cases were the teachers actually able to explain the mission or vision of the school (for example, as it is expressed on the websites). Yet, they could explain how their own personal values were aligned with how they experienced their current schools. For example, one of the schools examined had an expressed desire to impart environmental literacy and project-based learning. Each of the teachers from this school expressed that the ability to teach in a hands-on way was an important factor in their decision-making process, but neither of them referenced the

environmental focus of the school during our interviews. The teachers I studied seemed to have taken what they wanted from the mission of the school and aligned it with their personal desires. The teachers referenced things such as teaching students first, instead of focusing curriculum coverage. They also discussed teaching in hands on ways with project-based learning to justify their desire to move to the charter school. At the same time, they had a difficult time explaining how their instructional practices were any different than they had used in the traditional public school.

Although only one teacher mentioned burnout by name, there was a strong sense that each of the teachers that I spoke with needed a change. This desire for change led them to explore options at charter schools. They mentioned needing to feel more like a professional, needing their voice to matter, and needing to feel less micromanaged by their supervisors. There was a very real sense that the structure of the traditional public school was beginning to wear on them.

Other personal reasons that teachers gave in choosing charter schools had much to do with relationships. Half of the teachers had children who attended the charter schools in which they worked. In each of these cases, they noted that their children were a factor in their employment. In three of those situations, the children were the driving factor in their decision to teach in the charter school. These teachers shared that if it were not for their children needing a change and finding that change in the charter schools, they would likely have not entertained leaving the traditional public schools.

In another interesting finding related to personal connections, six of the ten teachers that I interviewed had a relationship with someone from the charter school prior

to applying for a position there. These were direct relationships with either teachers, administrators, or board members. All of the participants had heard of the school and possibly done some tutoring for students from the schools, but the ones who had relationships with the employees of the charter were essentially recruited to work in that environment.

Professional Reasons

Each teacher in the study noted that they felt a sense of autonomy in the charter school classroom. This sense of autonomy helped to provide a feeling of professionalism that they had not had in the traditional public-school classroom. Every teacher who I interviewed expressed the ability to determine what was important instructionally in their individual class. Prior to the charter school environment, most felt micromanaged by their administrations and district offices. In their current environment, they felt like they were trusted to make good decisions for their students and for the success of the classroom.

The teachers also expressed the fact that there was a useful division of labor between themselves and their administrators. The teachers were given control of the classroom and the administrators were given control of the school. They each felt that there was a mutual trust between both parties, regardless of the location. Teachers largely asserted that they were hired to do a job and as long as they were doing that job, they would be left alone by the administration. This was a stark contrast with the traditional public-school system where the teachers often experienced multiple layers of control over them that dictated their actions, curriculum, and ultimately their results.

Accountability and the expectations of teaching to tests were also specific reasons that the teachers gave for leaving the traditional public-school system. Each of the teachers explained that it was important for the students to do well on the end of grade tests, but they also discussed how the charter school did a much better job of creating a balance between the importance of the test and teaching a well-rounded student-centered curriculum. This focus by the administration and the charter school gave the teachers more freedom to express themselves and concurrently, to provide a range of options to allow the students to express themselves.

Teacher Understanding of Democracy

The teachers I interviewed did not have a strong understanding of democracy. They also did not seem to understand the need for a relationship between democracy and education. For the most part, teachers explained that they did collaborative work to get the students to work together and understand each other's points of view. Teachers also noted that they wanted to create successful adults who can contribute to society. For many of the teachers, they conflated democracy with productivity, suggesting democratic citizens are successful, productive, and prepared to function in society, as well as give back through service. Most of the teachers I interviewed expressed a desire to expose students to situations that were uncommon for them, that is, to expand their perspectives and worldviews. They wanted the students to participate in debates and see multiple sides of an issue to expand their experiences and their compassion for people who think differently than they do. Teachers noted that they did this through their assignments and set up classroom rules that required active listening and respect. Teachers also expressed

the desire to create a well-educated workforce. This concept fits well into the desire to create students that will function successfully in a society that already exists. While these are all positive outcomes of the education process they do not necessarily promote democracy.

As I noted in the first chapter, Joel Westheimer in *What Kind of Citizen* (2015) states that being a personally responsible citizen does not typically translate into strengthening democracy. Although the teachers that I interviewed are creating forums for students to empathize with each other, and validate each other's thoughts, they have not done much to advance democracy. Westheimer states that "citizenship in a democracy requires more than kindness and decency. It requires a need to develop convictions and to stand up for them" (p. 46). Teachers from my study were able to discuss how they create personally responsible and even charitable citizens, but with few exceptions, they did not discuss promoting social-justice oriented citizens who develop rich habits of democracy. In a sense, it is like the teachers are treating symptoms of a disease (by teaching citizenship as good behavior) rather than treating the disease (teaching democratic principles). Teachers were not able to articulate what they specifically do to promote democratic principles to their students.

In addition to the teacher's understandings of democracy, I asked a number of questions about the ways in which charter schools were inaccessible to some students, sometimes creating what feels like more exclusive or private settings. Teachers discussed many factors that shaped and influenced enrollment, including parental involvement, whether or not the school offered free and reduced lunch, transportation

availability, and the availability of special programs such as Exceptional Children's services and English Language Learners. All of these factors influence enrollment practices and demographics at charter schools. The teachers I interviewed had varying degrees of knowledge about how these issues played out at their schools, and surprisingly, sometimes the two teachers who were at the same charter school gave conflicting answers related to the policies and practices of their schools.

Teachers understandings of democracy and the role of schools in preparing students for democratic citizenship correlated in many ways with the types of charter schools where they worked. Teachers from the Social Justice school described policies that were designed in order to limit the effect of exclusionary transportation and food issues. That school had deliberate policies in place to make sure students from low socioeconomic groups could enroll. In other places such as the Environmental School, they provided transportation to their students through busing hubs, but they did not provide a lunch program. None of the other schools provided transportation or a lunch program.

How well each teacher understood the mission, vision, and policies of their charter schools varied. In some cases, teachers from the same school had different understandings of how transportation or lunches worked at their school. In particular, at The Environmental School one teacher stated that students were able to apply for a free lunch program and the other teacher stated that there was no program available for the students. In this instance, regardless of the policy, the program was not fully available to

the students, even if it did exist, because the teacher was not able to supply that information to the student.

In general, teachers from each school overestimated the enrollment of minorities in their school. The exception was the Social Justice School which explicitly markets to a diverse group of students. In each of the other cases, the teachers note that their school is not very diverse, but they explained that by discussing their location or their mission. These teachers suggested that diversity (or lack thereof) was not a byproduct school policies or practices, but an indication of parent and student choices.

Throughout the interview process, it was a struggle for the teachers to relate what they do back to any specific democratic principle or a desire to promote democratic principles. In most cases, the teachers had not given much thought to the impact that the policies and practices of the schools had made on their students or on the community around them. In many cases, the practices and policies were seen as a way to ensure that their student population was appropriate for the mission of their school. The more strict and rigid the practices were, the more likely the students were to exhibit a character that aligned with the mission and vision of the school. Thus, the teacher felt that the practices were appropriate and not exclusionary.

Research Questions

I designed my study to answer two different research questions. The first question was why do teachers choose to leave traditional public schools to work in a charter school. As I described in the previous section, the decision to leave the traditional public school was based on both personal and professional reasons. Teachers noted that

they left the traditional public school because they both valued the mission of the charter school and they also felt valued by the charter school.

Each of the teachers felt a connection with the mission and vision of the charter school and their ability to impact students emotionally and socially in addition to academically. The teachers felt that the traditional public school was primarily focused on the academic achievement of the student and their ability to produce high test scores. Even when the teacher could not specifically reference the mission of the charter school, they felt that the mission of the school was in alignment with their personal beliefs.

The teachers also felt that they were themselves more valued at the charter school. They experienced being professionals who were able to make decisions in their classroom that effected their students and learning. The charter school allowed them to teach a curriculum that was teacher designed versus district designed. The teachers felt more trusted in the charter school to meet the needs of the students by the methods that the individual teacher chose. There was an overwhelming sense that the charter school teaches felt more like a part of a community instead of a cog in a large educational machine.

The second question that I investigated was how charter school teachers understand the role of schooling in a democracy. The short answer is that many do not. At the very least, they are not able to articulate much at all about the relationship between education and democracy, or unpack the meaning of democracy. Teachers gave answers as to why they teach and the purposes that they seek to fulfill, but they were not able to

articulate how they specifically contribute to furthering democratic principles in their school or in their classroom.

In many cases, the teachers did not see a connection between the actions that they took as a classroom teacher every day and how they influenced enrollment at their school or promoted democracy. They discussed exposing students to other ways of thinking and cultivating mutual respect for their peers, but they were not able to relate that to specific democratic principles such as equality, promoting citizenship, and nurturing political participation. While most of the teachers exposed students to different activities that promote equality, citizenship, and civic participation, they did not expressly relate these concepts to the foundations and building blocks of democracy. It seems to me that their students are left with pieces of the democratic puzzle, but not a framework with which to participate in a democracy and advance democratic ideals.

Further, I learned that most of the participants do not realize the effect that their actions and school policies have such democratic values as inclusion, diversity, critical thinking, and social responsibility. Specific actions such as lack of transportation and free and reduced lunch limit access to the school for specific populations of students and thus creates an inability for some students to participate fully in the arena of school choice and ultimately, promote inequality.

Implications

Every action has a reaction. It seems that for every well-meaning decision that people made, there are possible negative aspect to that decision, or consequences that are not fully considered. None of the teachers in my study chose to teach in charter schools

for problematic reasons, such as escaping certain kids or opting out of public goods. However, neither did most of them think about how their personal decisions have larger ripple effects, or how these decisions can make them complicit in practices that go against their expressed values (for example, creating elitist, publicly-funded schools, or contributing to segregation. In drawing implications from this study as I whole, in this section, I discuss various dimensions of the impact of teacher's choices to leave TPS for charter schools.

Impact of Teacher's Decisions on Schools

A teacher's decision to teach in a charter school is personal, but those personal decisions have very public consequences. Individual teachers make the decision to teach at a charter school because of their values and their needs. Much like the charter school movement seeks to provide an option for students to address their needs, the choice movement also addresses the teacher's personal needs. With growing numbers of charter schools, teachers, like students, are able to make an active choice to determine their ideal educational environment (Wilson, 2014). These decisions come with unintended consequences for the students who the teacher has left behind in the traditional public school and for those students who come to the charter school. When quality teachers leave the traditional public school to teach in a charter school, the students who are left behind in the traditional public schools are impacted. This is not to say that all teachers who leave traditional public school are the highest quality, but when they are, the students who have less ability to navigate the system are left with teachers who are potentially less able to meet their needs. At the very least, the existence of the charter

school as an option for teachers complicates the ability to recruit quality teachers to traditional public schools, especially when charter school policies often make these schools more attractive to teachers, especially as they experience more autonomy, less micro-management, and often small class sizes.

Impact of Teacher's Decisions on Society

When teachers seek employment with a school that aligns with their personal mission and vision, they are doing so to create a conducive work environment in which they hope to succeed. When the decision to teach at a specific charter school is purely personal, the teacher employs, in essence, a set of blinders to the potential negative impacts of charter school policies. The teachers I interview explained how the unique missions of charter schools shape enrollment, attracting certain types of students. While this is a positive effect to link students with a school that is going to help them to be successful on a personal level and provide a personal opportunity, it also limits the ability of the school to create a diverse group of students with different backgrounds and beliefs who can learn from each other, and learn how to collaborate across lines of difference. Schools that hold fundamentally different philosophies inherently segregate the population. Erickson (2011) and Minow (2010) describe school choice as a means of segregation in relation of students. The same is true for teachers. This value driven decision-making creates schools around a common purpose. That common purpose creates schools with a more homogeneous population. While the schools do not segregate on purpose (instead they do so by mission), a de facto segregation exists.

Much like the decision to attend the charter school is based on relevant needs and desires of the students, the teachers I interviewed also hoped to create a match with their personal views, desires, and values and their workplace. These decisions often create schools that consist of mostly homogeneous populations that largely share the same values and likely similar viewpoints. Wilson (2015) noted that students are drawn to communities that share the same interests and preferences. While typically these decisions are made with a positive intent, there are also negative effects based on "race, class, language and other forms of difference" (p. 181).

Even when democratic principles are specifically recognized and taught in many charter school environments, a lack of diversity creates a void of opposing views. This is likely the case in the College Preparatory School where population is the least diverse. Even if there are debates and conversations about different ideologies, the viewpoints of the diverse groups are likely marginalized, even if that is done unintentionally. When the teacher does not explicitly focus on making sure that multiple viewpoints are heard and respected, the students in the minority may not feel like they have the ability to express themselves. In this way, the structure of the school and the classroom works against the teachers desire to express differing viewpoints, even if the expressed desire is to give all students a voice.

Teacher's Understanding of Their Impact on Enrollment

With the exception of the Social Justice school, teachers were either largely unaware of the impacts of the school policies on enrollment in their charter school or they felt that the policies helped to create the type of school in which they wanted to

work. Multiple teachers noted that the guidelines of the school attracted a specific type of student. Those same teachers felt that the necessity for the students to provide their own transportation or lunch translated to a commitment to take responsibility and do what was necessary to attend that specific school.

In *The Dirty Dozen: How Charter Schools Influence Student Enrollment*, Welner (2013) mentions twelve ways that charter schools influence their enrollment with specific practices. I saw many of these practices in the schools where the teachers in this study worked. Some of the schools did not participate in the free and reduced lunch program. This excluded students who could not afford to buy the catered lunches that were available at the school for five dollars a day, or were not able to provide their own lunches to bring to school. Other schools did not provide transportation to and from the school. If the student could not provide their own transportation, they were automatically excluded from the school. While most of the teachers that I interviewed understood this as a school practice, they did not understand the repercussions of that practice. As I mentioned in my literature review, tactics like these have been used before in order to "resist desegregation" (Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2010, p. 332). So, in one breath, teachers are promoting inclusion for all and in the other, they are either implicitly or explicitly promoting segregation.

Even some of the more nuanced techniques that Welner (2013) describes were used by the charter schools where the students who I interviewed were employed. These practices included using retention as a way to persuade a family that the school may not be a "good fit" for the student. Two teachers mentioned that threats related to retention

were made by administrators in their charter school by in order to help the family decide that another school may be a better option.

There were also schools that did not provide instruction for academically gifted students or English Language Learners. This is consistent with research by Howe and Welner (2005) that shows that charter schools typically enroll a lower percentage of special needs students than traditional public schools. By not providing these programs or by not providing sufficient support for Exceptional Children's programs, the charter schools are able to influence the type of students who enroll, as well as the range of diversity present and thus further segregating the population of the school.

Interestingly, with the exception of those from Social Justice school, the teachers I interviewed had given little thought to the effect of these policies. Some of the teachers expressed that they had not thought of the policies in that way and were unsettled by that feeling during the interviews. Other teachers stood by the fact that these policies created schools that aligned with the needs of the student body and the mission of the school. In both of those situations, I sensed that the teachers felt that their schools were justified in their policies as they helped to create a unique and distinctive, mission-driven learning environment of which they wanted to be a part.

Teachers Understanding or Lack of Understanding of Democracy

Perhaps the most salient finding in my study was how little any of the teachers were able to talk about democracy and how individual decisions had larger societal impacts. They simply had not given much thought to the role of schools in preparing students for democratic citizenship or what this meant on a practical, day-to-day level,

beyond broad ideas about collaboration, diversity, and hands-on activity. The teachers made decisions to work at charters school mostly for personal reasons: the environment was better for them and their families. They did not see this choice as impacting a larger erosion of public schooling, for example, or implicitly endorsing forms of choice that could lead to further segregation of schools or reproduction of privilege. This is not to say that the teachers' decisions were selfish, but the decision to teach at the charter school was generally not based on how it would impact society or democratic principles.

While this is generally the case, several teachers had given much thought about why they wanted to teach in a charter school and who they wanted to impact and provide opportunities to. While the decision to teach at a charter school is a personal decision, it also has unintended consequences for society as a whole and the individual student. Within the teacher's ability to choose there is a wide spectrum of the teachers understanding. Some teachers, like the teachers at the Social Justice School made the decision to specifically impact underserved students while the other teachers give the students little to no thought at all. While most of the teachers that I encountered were somewhere between those two extremes, the decision to teach in a charter school is not entirely made within a vacuum. Each decision that is made intentionally or unintentionally comes with consequences, both positive and negative.

Ultimately, teacher decisions impact the landscape of schools, much like parent and student decisions. Teacher choices help to create environments that welcome certain types of students. This aligns very well with the findings of other research on parent and student choices and their effects on segregating schools (Ladd et. al, 2015; Miron et. al,

2010; Siegel-Hawley & Frankenburg, 2010). Teacher choices, like the student choices, are value driven (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2014; Wilson, 2014) and while this does not inherently lead to problematic outcomes, it does affect the type of students who enroll in the charter school.

In order to balance this effect of teacher choices there must be planning involved to counteract the unintended consequences of those choices. Planning must be done to include students of all ethnicities and socioeconomic groups and to better educate the charter school teachers to notice the effects of their decisions on the students they teach and society as a whole.

Limitations

As I could not locate any studies related to the decisions of teachers to work in charter schools, I designed this study to be exploratory. I worked with only ten teachers, and as noted earlier, this small sample size, while common with qualitative research, is none the less a limitation. It is not possible to characterize all teacher's decision-making based on a sample of ten teachers. Another limiting factor that arose in my study was the differences in mission for each of my schools. For example, the mission of the Social Justice School aligned well with an investigation of democracy in schools, and thus the teachers from this school had unique advantages when answering the questions that I posed. Schools that had other missions were not explicitly formed to serve underrepresented populations, and thus questions that I asked about this took some of my participants off guard. While it provided often contrasting answers to the general responses of the interview questions, it also made it difficult to frame some of the

answers that came from teachers who worked at schools that were seemingly less in tune with societal needs and less aligned with democratic values.

Recommendations for Practice

Based upon the research I did for this study, I offer recommendations for practices in three different areas. Recommendations can be made to traditional public schools, charter schools, and teacher education programs. By becoming more aware of what teachers' value and of the gaps that the teachers possess in their understandings, each of these institutions could be strengthened.

Recommendations for Traditional Public School

The teachers that I interviewed expressed a need to feel valued and a need to be seen as professionals. The majority of the teachers in the study expressed that they wanted to feel as if they were making an impact on the whole student and not just their academic needs, as expressed in increased standardized test scores. They also wanted to be seen as a valued member of a team who has input on the daily activities that occur in schools.

For traditional public schools, I would suggest learning from the teachers in this study about what they valued in schools, as working in a place where your values are aligned creates stronger overall communities. The charter schools were places that addressed students' social and emotional needs as well as their academic needs, for example, providing arts-based education to allow students to express themselves and implementing programs that allowed for a personalized education for the students. The teachers I spoke with wanted to see their students as more than a test score. They wanted

to be able to impact their students on a personal level as well as an academic level. Creating this more communal, student driven setting in TPS would likely encourage more teachers to seek out that setting.

For administrators at traditional public schools, I suggest supporting teacher's leadership and involvement in decision making processes at the school level. Teachers felt that they were often undervalued as professionals in the traditional public school. They often felt micromanaged and that their opinions did not count. Involving the teachers in curriculum development, school leadership decisions, and valuing their personal opinions would go a long way to increase morale for teachers and increase the likelihood that they stay in a traditional public-school environment.

Recommendations for Charter Schools

The decision to teach at a charter school for the 10 teachers in this study was personal, relational, and values-driven. Teachers rank their personal needs very high in the decision-making process to teach in a charter school. They also mention that the relationship that they have with their administrator is a very important indicator of job satisfaction. For this reason, I suggest that charter school boards work very hard to put administrators in place that are in tune to the needs of the teachers in their schools. I further suggest that it is important to hire administrators who are familiar with the local educational landscape who have relationships with teachers and families in the area. While the charter school board must find an administrator, who is aligned with the vision of the school, it is important that they are able to recruit teachers who can share that vision and trust the administration.

Given the different answers that the teachers gave in relation to the interview questions regarding school policies and perceptions of charter schools in general, it is important that charter school leaders take some time to address specific criticisms of charter schools with their employees and to talk about issues related to the role and purpose of public schools in a democratic society. This will help the teachers to be a united front when addressing the public criticisms of charter schools. It will also help to make sure that the students at their school are all able to access programs in the school in an equitable way, and that all public schools serve public, not just personal, goods.

Recommendations for Teacher Education Programs

When I interview new teachers for positions, they have inevitably been told by a family member or by a person who is currently a teacher, that they should possibly investigate other career choices as the challenges of teaching in the current climate are many. I am convinced that this is the case because most of those teachers giving that advice have forgotten why they became teachers in the first place. They have forgotten that the teaching profession is bigger than their personal struggles or difficulties that they have on a daily basis. I am also convinced that teachers need to understand how what they do impacts society as a whole and our country's ability to operate as a functioning democracy.

I personally never encountered any instruction during my formal teacher training that exposed me to the purposes of schooling or democratic principles. I never deeply investigated the relationships between education and democracy and it was evident that the teachers in my study had not either. Horace Mann (1957) discussed the relative ease

to make a Republic, as opposed to the challenge of cultivating involved Republicans. Teacher education programs would do well to at the very least expose teachers to not only the history of the education system, but also to the many different viewpoints on the purposes of education and the effects of that system on democracy. In this way, teacher education programs could position themselves as democratic gatekeepers. Westheimer (2012) states that there are too few school programs that "address the root causes of problems or challenging the existing social, economic, or political norms [in order to] strengthen democracy" (p. 44). If we are to have an informed debate with all stakeholders on the purposes of education, we must seek to have some uniformity in our understanding of those purposes within our own group of professionals. This must start with the teacher education programs in order to provide our educators with the tools to navigate democratic principles on their own.

Recommendations for Future Research

As noted in my limitations, I interviewed teachers at only five charter schools, all with distinctive missions. These differences in schools produced vastly different answers. Given the opportunity, I would like to see an investigation of how groups of schools with common missions and visions approach the concept of democracy and work to prepare their students for civic life. In a study with this design, schools that promote a similar mission would be studied together to determine if the values of the teachers from those schools also aligned and promoted a more uniform democratic ideal. It would also be interesting to see if schools with specific missions or visions consistently did more or less to promote democratic ideals.

Along those same lines, it would be interesting to conduct a case study on a school that has the promotion of democracy as its mission and determine how well that school accomplishes its goal and how those practices could be transferred to other schools. A specific study on the Social Justice school could be useful to determine if the school is accomplishing its mission of inclusivity and how the school specifically impacts democratic principles. As charter schools supposedly are places to try out innovations, the democratic innovations of schools like the one centered around social justice in this study could be shared.

Another interesting possibility could be to study the reasons that charter school teachers choose to either return or to teach for the first time in traditional public schools. It would be interesting to see the reasons that the teachers gave for their choice of employment in that scenario.

Finally, it would be interesting to be able to interview legislators to determine their viewpoints on democracy in schools. Since they are the people who set legislative agendas and make laws to govern education it would be interesting to get their understanding of the democratic purposes of education considering their position would not exist outside of a democratic system. Do they think democratic purposes should drive public school decision-making?

In addition to these possible studies, it would be beneficial to increase sample sizes and possibly create survey questions that could be given alongside the interview to more fully understand the teachers' knowledge of democratic principles and practices. However, given my own experience and the experiences of the teachers in this study, I

don't think we do nearly enough to center democratic values in our discourses and practices related to education.

Final Thoughts

As I have stated previously, I have had the opportunity to teach and be an administrator in a charter school. I have never been able to pull the trigger on accepting one of those positions. This is mostly to the fact that I worry about the ability to reach all students, especially the most marginalized, if I moved to a charter school

For the most part, investigating these charter schools has solidified my choice to remain in the traditional public school. In most cases, I don't think there has been enough planning and forethought for charter schools to meaningfully include students of diverse racial, social, and academic backgrounds. The lone exception I saw to this was the Social Justice school. Painstaking effort was given to ensure that the school marketed to students who belonged to underserved populations. They made efforts to provide transportation to their students and ensured that the students would be fed. These are the necessary steps to create a school where the student is first, not the mission. Each detail must be expressly reviewed and adjusted prior to students walking through the doors. Otherwise, the school is only adjusting serve the population that "shows up."

I have also stated that I am a traditional public-school administrator who values the ability for people to choose. I feel like this is rare as most of my colleagues cannot see the benefit of providing school choice. They see charter schools as the enemy. While I appreciate school choice, I also am aware of the critiques of charter schools. Through this study, I was able to dive deeply into the critiques of charter schools and I was also

able to see that the critiques are often justified. However, the existence of the negative consequences in charter schools does not automatically allow the critic to conclude that charter schools are bad. That would be oversimplifying the issue. In most situations, these negative consequences are not purposeful, the charter schools do not seek to segregate, they seek to provide a service, the negative consequences are a byproduct of poor planning and insufficient thinking about the democratic roles of public schools. That is not to say that some charter schools do not intentionally create these consequences, but from my investigation in this study, it seems as if the administration and staff simply have not thought enough about these negative effects. In a sense, the teachers from my study did not realize they were making an impact on society at all, much less a potentially negative or exclusionary impact. They were all just trying to make decisions that were good for themselves and for their families.

My hope is that studies like this will increase the likelihood that the participants are more aware of their actions and activities and how they affect other people. It would benefit society as a whole if all thought about our individual decisions in relation to larger social goods. Racism, classism, sexism and inequalities exist. There are also many well-meaning good people, who are functional racists and sexists because of ignorance. Our jobs as educators should be to produce people who are able to recognize the unintended consequences of our decisions. If we are to do this, we must first do this within ourselves.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introduction, provide a small overview of the research study and its purposes:

• Timeline for the interview: approximately 1 hour
• Explain the consent form and voluntary nature of the study; review IRB form
• Recording the interview; double-check the recording (volume) before you start

Part One: Choosing a School to work in

• Background of interviewee: name, current position, past position, years in TPS/Charter, certification.
• I wanted to find out a little more about what led you to choose (Insert School Name) to work in? What led you to (Insert School Name)?
o How did you find out about (Insert School Name)?
o Is this the only charter school you have worked in?
o How long have you been in a charter school? How long has it been since you worked in a TPS?
o What led you to seek out a different school?
o Where did you work prior to this position?
• What other schools did you consider when you were choosing (School Name)?
o How did you find out about them?
o Did you visit or apply to any of these schools?
• What was important to you in choosing (School Name)? Why did you decide on this school?
• Can you think back to a moment when you first came to realize that this school was the right choice for your employment? What happened? How did you know you made the right choice?

Are your plans to continue in this position for the foreseeable future? Until retirement? Are there any factors that could influence this decision positively or negatively?

Part Two: Public Dimensions of Schools

• In what ways have you been able to get involved in (School Name)? (Clearly teachers are involved from an employment standpoint, but are they able to make their own personal mark on the school?) Are there more opportunities here than in TPS? Are there less? What do you prefer?
• Possible follow-ups: What kinds of relationships have you formed with other teachers? Have you been able to form better or different relationships with parents in this position

compared to TPS?

Dependent on answers could push to elaborate in regards to:

• Did you feel any hesitation in choosing (XXXXXX charter school) over your traditional public school?
• Was it a conscious decision to stay in the district lines when joining a charter? Was decision to go outside of district lines important?
• What type of school did you attend growing up? Did this influence your decision to be in a specific school system?

Part Three: Revisiting Preferences

After revisiting some of the factors that led them to school), questions:
• What do you think was the most important factor to you in choosing (Insert School Name)?
• How has this (named preference) changed, since you have come to be involved in the school? Are there other factors that would be more important now?
Looking back, what advice would you offer a teacher who was just beginning to navigate employment choices in xxxxx county/district?

Schools as Public Spaces: By extension, what might these choices and their outcomes reveal about the nature of these schools as new kinds of public spaces?

What do you feel like the purpose of schooling should be (why do you teach)? Are you able to achieve that purpose here?

In what ways was the school's mission important in your choice?

In what ways do you feel part of the school community? If so, what were some of the things that invited you into and fostered this sense of community? If not, do you feel there is a "school community"?

In what ways does the school balance creating an educational space for students with a shared mission? Also, how does the school prepare students for engaging/ interacting/participating in a broader environment?

A criticism of charter schools is that they pull only the best students from traditional schools. How do you feel about that statement? Do you see evidence of this happening at your school?

Another criticism of charter schools is that they promote segregation. Do you see that in your school? How do you feel about that statement?

How important is accountability in your school? Does your mission align with achievement/compete with it/or is it more important to achieve your mission?

Do you feel like you have more autonomy in your charter position than you did in the TPS position?

Is your current environment more innovative? Do you feel like you are able to take more risks in your current environment?