POOLE, DAWN C., Ed.D. How Do Personal and Professional Experiences Influence Second-Career Alternatively Certified Teachers' Decision to Stay in Teaching? (2018) Directed by Dr. Kathy Hytten. 179 pp.

The purpose of this study was to examine the personal and professional experiences of successful second career alternatively certified teachers who stay in teaching beyond the four years required to obtain a professional license in North Carolina. In this qualitative study, seven successful teachers shared their personal and professional experiences that influenced their career choices.

After collecting data through observations, document analysis, interviews, and focus groups, three overriding themes emerged. First, the working environment simultaneously supports and dissuades alternatively certified teachers. Second, personal temperament shapes reaction to first year professional experiences. And finally, the assets second career teachers bring to education may be counterintuitive to what logic suggests. A list of thirteen personal and professional characteristics shared among the study's participants could help administrators when considering teaching applicants.

Unfulfilled experiences from first careers worked as a motivator in participants considering teaching as a second career. And, while difficult to measure, the most important asset these teachers bring to teaching could be their desire to make a difference in the lives of others. The implication of this study involves how school administrators approach interviewing and hiring alternatively certified teachers as well as which support mechanisms are most likely to increase the likelihood of their staying in teaching.

HOW DO PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES INFLUENCE

SECOND-CAREER ALTERNATIVELY CERTIFIED TEACHERS'

DECISION TO STAY IN TEACHING?

by

Dawn C. Poole

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Greensboro
2018

Approved by

_____
Committee Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation, written by Dawn C. Poole, has been approved by
the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of
North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____

Committee Members _____

_____

_____

_____
Date of Acceptance by Committee

_____
Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Are you between jobs? Not sure what to do with your college degree? Do you enjoy spending time with children and want to make a difference in someone's life? If so, then teaching may be for you! Although it reads like a script for a bad television commercial, this whimsical invitation to join the ranks of teaching is much closer to reality than one might think.

Daily, individuals with no teaching experience are hired and issued alternative teaching certificates across the 50 states and in the District of Columbia. The conundrum of fewer people entering teaching as thousands are leaving finds America suffering from a teacher shortage of an enormous magnitude (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). In many poor, urban school districts, the pool of applicants for teaching positions is comprised, in large part, of uncertified and alternatively certified candidates. Increasingly, large numbers of public school students are taught for multiple and consecutive years by teachers with little or no pedagogical training. Those who oppose alternative certification condemn school leaders for reducing unsuspecting children to unwilling participants in exercises of on-the-job-training for alternatively certified teachers.

Opponents to alternative certification will not be surprised to learn this fast track to the classroom is proving to have unintended and unanticipated results. Studies show

that uncertified teachers often become frustrated and leave their positions midyear, a scenario that ultimately generates an even greater source of shortages in PK-12 schools. Jorissen (2003) documents how alternatively certified teachers entering teaching through short-term preparation programs struggle to implement effective classroom management techniques, motivate students who perform below grade level, and develop curricula that address local and state learning standards (p. 43). When alternatively certified teachers are ill-equipped with the emotional and professional resources needed to meet the significant, inherent challenges to teaching, their untimely departures create problems in schools that are costly in terms of student achievement as well as school districts' budgets.

However, not all alternatively certified teachers leave teaching. Proponents of alternative certification assert that nontraditional, second-career teachers tend to be particularly well-suited for working in urban schools. Ng and Peter (2010) suggest the personal predispositions of alternatively certified teachers may foster the growth of professional commitments which, in turn, reduce teacher attrition (p. 124). Individuals entering teaching as a second or third career typically bring life experiences to the classroom that can help them to identify and manage social issues common not only to the classroom, but to society in general.

Background

The first state-sponsored alternative certification programs began in the mid-1980s. In 1984, fewer than 300 certificates had been issued nationwide; in 2009, the number had risen to a staggering 59,000 (Heilig, Cole, & Springel, 2010, p. 388). With

alternative certification becoming a fast track to teaching, the turn of the century left states scurrying to establish guidelines and minimum requirements for applicants. To fill the void left by teacher shortages in an efficient and timely manner, lengthy and complicated waivers to hire non-certified teachers were replaced with applications that prioritized undergraduate degrees and test results from subject area competency examinations.

Within a few years, state and local school administrators streamlined the process for applicants to obtain alternative certificates, but not without significant resistance. Those who opposed alternative routes to teaching believed that to receive a teaching license, additional, not fewer requirements, should be placed on non-traditional applicants (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Ravitch, 2013). Opponents argued that in bypassing the traditional path to certification, the standing and reputation of educators would be lowered, thereby thwarting ongoing efforts to transform the public's opinion to one that would move teachers into a professional circle with doctors and lawyers. The opposition achieved a margin of success when most State Boards of Education agreed to revise the open-ended nature of contracts between alternatively certified teachers and local school boards. For example, in lieu of extensions, North Carolina requires applicants to complete a minimum of 24 hours of education courses through an accredited college or university within 3 years of obtaining an alternative certificate (North Carolina Professional Educator's Licensure, 2016). Failure to meet the time-sensitive guidelines results in a certificate being permanently revoked.

In addition to alternative certification providing a quick entry into teaching, the financial benefit afforded alternatively certified teachers is significant. Teachers who complete traditional preparatory programs typically spend 4 years enrolled in a college of education, and in many states spend an additional year student teaching or working as an unpaid intern. Alternatively certified teachers forgo any type of student teaching and upon signing contracts are compensated using the same salary schedule as traditionally certified teachers. Teaching salaries are typically based upon years of experience, and in some instances, levels of education. Alternatively certified teachers' years of experience begin accumulating at the time of hire—not upon receipt of a professional license.

To entice new teachers to schools serving minority and low-income students, systems often award signing bonuses to new teachers (Fong, Makkonen, & Jaquet, 2016; Yaffe, 2016). For those teachers living and working in middle-class neighborhoods with years of experience built into their salaries, moving to a more challenging environment, only to earn a few additional dollars per month, is not as tempting as it is for new teachers. Based in part on higher beginning salaries, alternatively certified teachers often begin their teaching careers in poor, urban schools. Therefore, it is not surprising that students living in poverty are four times more likely to be taught by teachers with alternative certificates; yet, the Schools and Staffing database reports that alternatively certified teachers are less likely to stay in schools serving high poverty and minority students than traditionally trained teachers—averaging approximately five and a half years in comparison to 9 years for regularly certified teachers (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 59).

Research Problem

Alternative certification is billed as one of the answers to a growing teacher shortage, but the rate at which alternatively certified teachers are leaving teaching is at least as high as that of teachers with professional licenses (Cochran-Smith et al., 2010). We don't know much about what causes some alternatively certified teachers to stay in teaching while others leave. Redding and Smith (2016) assert that low levels of initial preparedness leave alternatively certified teachers with few resources to effectively manage their classrooms. They suggest this lack of preparation leads to an early departure for many alternatively certified teachers. However, Ng and Peter (2010) speculate that because second-career teachers possess strong professional identities from prior careers, they could be more likely to stay in teaching. This speculation makes me wonder whether a causal relationship exists between alternatively certified teachers' personal and professional experiences and their decision to continue to teach. But unfortunately, there is not much overall research on the experiences of second-career alternatively certified teachers.

By listening to the stories of teachers with alternative certification, and by identifying the personal and professional experiences that influence their career decisions, we can begin to better understand how to support new teachers entering the profession through nontraditional routes. School districts spend a substantial amount of valuable human and financial resources on recruiting and training new teachers at the beginning of each school year (Villar & Strong, 2007). If common experiences can be identified among second-career alternatively certified teachers who stay in teaching, we

can work to optimize the effectiveness of how we train, support, and retain alternatively certified teachers.

Purpose of this Study

Data on the retention of alternatively certified teachers is limited and inconclusive, though most researchers agree that they are as likely as their traditionally certified counterparts to quit teaching or migrate out of urban school settings, typically one of the most difficult contexts in which new teachers struggle to find success (Heilig et al., 2010; Ng & Peter, 2010). Much has been written concerning teacher attrition rates in general, but few studies have focused on why alternatively certified teachers stay in the profession, and still fewer on how their personal and professional experiences contribute to their decisions. At least as important as understanding the characteristics of alternatively certified teachers who leave teaching is understanding the characteristics of those who stay. The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of a sample of successful second-career alternatively certified teachers who stay in teaching beyond the 4 years required to obtain a professional license in North Carolina, and to determine if commonalities exist that can assist efforts to increase retention rates for alternatively certified teachers.

Research Questions

1. What professional experiences are shared by successful second-career alternatively certified teachers in their career(s) prior to teaching that contribute to their transitioning to a professional license?

2. What professional experiences are shared by successful second-career alternatively certified teachers in their first 4 years of teaching that contribute to their transitioning to a professional license?

3. What personal life experiences are shared by successful second-career alternatively certified teachers who teach for a minimum of 4 years and transition to a professional license?

Researcher Positionality

I began my career in education during the mid-1990s as a middle school teacher. During the next two decades, I worked in school administration at the building level as a high school principal and at the district level as a director of curriculum and instruction. Hiring teachers during the early- to mid-2000s was a rudimentary task; I narrowed the group, interviewed the candidates, and offered the position to a qualified, in many instances, experienced teacher. Most principals no longer have the luxury of selecting from such an extensive pool of qualified teachers. Many times, there is no pool and certainly not one that includes experienced, certified teachers.

Almost a decade ago, I relocated with my husband to North Carolina. He accepted a position working as a superintendent, and I made the decision to return to the classroom. I missed teaching. For the next 5 years, I spent my days teaching Shakespeare to seniors and Harper Lee to freshmen. Only after much chagrin and an uncomfortable amount of pleading from my superintendent/husband, 5 years ago I agreed to leave my classroom and once again return to an administrative role. As an instructional coach, I work with our school system's new and struggling secondary teachers. Approximately

half of the teachers with whom I work began teaching with an alternative certificate. My professional experiences with this population of teachers have contributed to my desire to understand why some alternatively certified teachers become successful classroom teachers while others leave before acquiring their professional license.

Overview of Methods

In this qualitative study, I interviewed second-career alternatively certified teachers to identify shared characteristics of successful teachers who stay in teaching after they acquire a professional license. I was interested in determining if commonalities exist that could assist efforts to increase retention rates for alternatively certified teachers. I used purposeful criterion sampling to identify seven second-career alternatively certified teachers for this study (Creswell, 2015, p. 110). I conducted semi-structured interviews with the teachers and two focus groups. The interaction among participants during the focus groups added additional insight into the data I gathered through interviews. I also used documents such as email responses, resumes, lesson plans, and teacher handbooks in the data analysis process (Yin, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

In crafting this basic qualitative study and analyzing my data, I was influenced by career development theory and experiential and transformative learning theories. Each helped shape the design and methodology of this study, including the questions I asked participants, and influenced how I interpreted the findings. In what follows, I provide a synopsis of each theory with a brief analysis of its connection to my research.

Career Development Theory

Careers are born out of a series of jobs and are affected by previous ones. I drew on career development theory to explore how second-career alternatively certified teachers' successful transition into teaching was influenced by previous occupational experiences. In addition, the theory helped me understand how the group of teachers I worked with acclimated themselves into the social context of teaching.

Career development theorists portray the work environment as one in which an individual's personal identity undergoes a change during a transition from one career to the next (Jorissen, 2003, p. 43). In my experience, school settings are often not conducive to an alternatively certified teacher developing a new identity that leads to a successful transition into teaching. Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985) address the socialization process for teachers, and the challenges it poses, by writing,

> On the one hand, first-year teachers are seen as prisoners of the past (either anticipatory socialization or pre-service training), and on the other hand they are seen as prisoners of the present (institutional pressures emanating from the workplace). Significantly, in neither case are beginning teachers viewed as making any substantial contributions to the quality or strength of their own induction into teaching. (p. 4)

Moving from established expert in a different career field to beginning teacher can be a daunting experience. This challenge in part explains why a mid-career change to teaching is typically driven by altruistic and intrinsic motivations (Wilkins & Comber, 2015, p. 1013). For second-career teachers who successfully transition into new work environments, the desire to make a difference and become a force for social good compels many to promptly and effectively become engaged in efforts to improve their

schools (Kyriacou, Kunc, Stephens, & Hultgren, 2003). This is significant because if second-career teachers feel they have assimilated into a new vocation through which they can bring about a positive change, this could serve as an explanation of why some choose to remain in teaching.

Career development theorists assert that career-changers have the potential to make important contributions to their new work environments, especially when employers work to ensure sufficient training and supports are in place during the initial phase of transitioning from one career to the next. Second-career teachers' perceptions of the value or the lack thereof that they bring to teaching because of the previous occupations are key in understanding how earlier professional experiences influence their continuing to stay in teaching. Career development theory can help us understand the nature of the contribution that alternatively certified teachers can make in schools.

Learning Theories

One aspect of transitioning into a career as a teacher is learning new roles and responsibilities. Successful transition may be related to the ways in which new teachers learn the expectations of the position, as well as strategies for success. Two learning theories were particularly useful for making meaning of the experiences of this population: Experiential Learning as discussed by Kolb and Transformative Learning Theory as discussed by Mezirow.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb's experiential learning theory is grounded in the belief that learning is a process influenced by an individual's environment (Simmons, 2016, p. 27). Experiential

learning theorists assert that when individuals are forced to deal with new experiences, they not only feel and react to situations, but simultaneously, they reflect on those situations, thereby shaping their interpretation of the overall experience. Kolb, Boyatzis, and Mainemelis (2001) offer the following definition for the theory: "[It] is called 'Experiential Learning' to emphasize the central role that experience plays in the learning process, an emphasis that distinguishes the experiential learning theory from other learning theories" (p. 229).

Experiential learning theorists propose that learning requires people to use abilities that may seem to be in opposition to one another while choosing how to react in a specific learning situation (Kolb et al., 2001, p. 230). Kolb goes on to emphasize the importance of one's "learning space." He asserts that when put into a new set of circumstances, an interaction occurs between the individual and the environment (p. 231).

Learning and space are especially important aspects when working in an educational setting. To become a successful teacher, a second-career educator must learn a new set of norms, procedures, and academic content while working within a new space. A second-career alternatively certified teacher is bombarded each day, each class period, with choices regarding how to manage the delivery of content, control student behavior, and establish relationships within his or her new space. For the new teacher to experience a smooth transition, all components must come together within a very short time period. Kolb's learning theory was useful in helping me understand how alternatively certified teachers navigate their new environments and make choices. Kolb et al. (2001) describe the importance of choice in the learning process:

> Each dimension of the learning process presents us with a choice. Since it is virtually impossible, for example, to simultaneously drive a car (concrete experience) and analyze a driver's manual about the car's functioning (abstract conceptualization), we resolve the conflict by choosing. Because of our . . . particular past life experiences and the demands of our present environment, we develop a preferred way of choosing. (p. 233)

An alternatively certified teacher quickly learns that in the school setting, as in life, choices have consequences; however, it is only after experiencing both positive and negative consequences that new learning, or what Mezirow refers to as a new frame of reference, can be created.

Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory

In 1991, Mezirow observed the personal changes that occurred in women who reentered the workforce after a significant amount of time has passed. Describing transformative learning theory, Mezirow suggests that learning is a process altered by an individual's frame of reference and perspective while encountering a new experience. There are a number of key ideas that are part of transformative learning theory:

> Point of view details the lens through which people view their experiences. Secondly, frame of reference provides the suppositions through which people make sense of their experiences to develop meaning and understanding. These frames of reference are constantly reshaped and validated through experience to provide new perspectives. (Simmons, 2016, p. 30)

Teachers constantly assess and interpret interactions occurring within the classroom. Prior to being given responsibility for his or her own space, the traditionally trained teacher typically spends a semester, or in some instances up to a year, working under the supervision of a veteran teacher. The student teacher uses this time to become

familiar with interactions that occur within the classroom. Alternatively certified teachers are not afforded this opportunity. Instead, the first day of school finds these new teachers entering a complicated network which they are almost always unprepared to navigate.

Theorists of transformative learning theory assert that when entering a new work environment, an alternatively certified teachers' frame of reference will be reshaped as new and different information is presented within the context of the unfamiliar situation. The teacher begins to view and ultimately interpret his or her interactions and encounters through a lens focused on the school setting.

Relevance of Theories

Career development theorists stress the importance of the initial induction process to how an employee transitions and assimilates from one work environment to the next, and how an existing work environment can influence the successes or failures of employees transitioning into new careers. The processes described by career development theorists prompted me to suspect that an alternatively certified teacher's previous personal and professional experiences would affect his or her transition into teaching, therefore influencing how I crafted some of the questions in my interview protocol. While I worked from a semi-structured guide when interviewing participants, the cornerstone questions were based on research that relied heavily upon career development theory.

Kolb and Mezirow's learning theories emphasize how adults acquire a body of experience or frames of reference that help define their lives. Alternatively certified teachers' prior knowledge and experiences influence the learning process as they enter a

new work environment. I have observed that second-career alternatively certified teachers experience a dramatic change in the way they experience both their personal and professional lives when beginning teaching. Throughout this study, as I listened to participants during interviews and subsequent focus groups, I referenced learning theories as a way of making sense of patterns in their development as teachers.

The ability to integrate and successfully transition into a career requires one to assimilate into a pre-existing environment or situation while simultaneously reflecting on events that are currently happening. In examining these phases as they occurred with the seven participants, both occupational and learning theories helped provide me with lenses that were useful in analyzing my data and arriving at the subsequent findings. Studies devoted to research on the personal and professional experiences of successful transitioners into teaching are few, and those that have been conducted usually yield inconclusive results. The few existing empirical studies conducted have typically categorized teachers into two groups: alternatively and traditionally trained teachers. I see this study as significant in that I make a distinction between first- and second-career alternatively certified teachers, in part because my sample included several teachers who had significant second careers prior to teachings, and others who had jobs, but not careers, before becoming teachers. This distinction is not made in previous literature on this topic, making me hopeful that my findings contribute to the small body of existing literature by providing a new and unique insight in the field.

Significance of the Study

In the fall of 2016, The Learning Policy Institute released a study that identified four major factors driving the nation's teacher shortage: a decline in teacher preparation enrollments, district efforts to return to pre-recession pupil-teacher ratios, increasing student enrollment, and high teacher attrition (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 59). While the first three factors undeniably have an adverse effect on how school administrators hire and retain quality teachers, the reasons for and solutions to each are beyond the scope of this study. Here, instead, I focus on the last of the four: high teacher attrition. Finland, Singapore, and Canada report an annual attrition rate for teachers of approximately 4%. Over the past 10 years, America's attrition rate has stayed around 8% (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 4). By reducing teacher attrition by only half, America's teacher shortage could be virtually eliminated.

Linda Darling-Hammond, an outspoken opponent of alternative certification, insists the responsibility for training PK-12 public school teachers rests with traditional teacher education programs; however, when asked to comment on possible solutions to the national teacher shortage, she conceded that there is a growing number of alternatively certified teachers needed to fill the teacher void in schools with high rates of low-income and minority student enrollments (Fox & Peters, 2013, p. 3). This study will contribute to a body of knowledge about how to support, develop, and retain those entering teaching through alternative routes.

Overview of the Dissertation

I divide this study into six chapters. In Chapter II, I review literature relevant to this topic. In the first half of the review, I explore four different areas that contribute to a growing teacher shortage. While the shortage is felt nationwide, I pay special attention to the literature focused on the dilemma facing our urban schools. Educators working in schools serving poor, non-White students are hiring alternatively certified teachers at a "breakneck pace" (Tricarico, Jacobs, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2015, p. 1). I dedicate the second half of the review to investigating the history of alternative certification. An examination of the limited research conducted in the field of second-career teachers working with alternative certifications reveals the necessity to understand this population's unique set of needs.

In Chapter III, I outline the methodology I used in this basic qualitative study. I begin the chapter with a description of the sample and the way in which I gathered data. While interviews served as my primary source of data collection, I conducted two subsequent focus groups which provided an additional layer of data that added clarity to some of my findings and richness to my description of my participant's experiences. I also observed a new teacher induction and looked at documents related to new teacher support. I conclude the chapter by outlining my positionality as a researcher and discuss issues of trustworthiness and the limitations of the study.

In Chapter IV, I present profiles of the sample and outline the strategies I used in analyzing the data. Chapter V includes a discussion of the three themes I identified after I analyzed the data and a presentation of notable characteristics shared among the seven

participants. In the final chapter, I summarize my findings and draw conclusions, answering my research questions and putting my findings in conversation with the literature on second-career alternatively certified teachers. In addition, I describe implications of the study and offer suggestions for future research and practice. I end Chapter VI with an overall reflection on the research process and what I learned doing this project.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The inability to find and secure traditionally certified teachers has become an educational dilemma, especially in high needs school districts. In 2015, South Dakota issued 33% fewer teaching licenses than in 2009 (Burnette, 2016, para. 21) and from 2010 to 2016, North Carolina's 15 Schools of Education reported a 30% decrease in enrollment (Hui, 2016, para. 2). Both urban and rural school systems continue to actively recruit individuals with non-teaching baccalaureate degrees. These efforts have resulted in more than 60,000 alternatively certified teachers being placed in public school classrooms across America. There has also been a significant growth in the number of alternatively certified teachers working in private schools, with their numbers doubling from 25% to 50% from 1993 to 2003 (Glass, 2008, p. 1). While considered an unorthodox path to teaching only a few decades ago, alternative certification now serves as a pipeline from the professional and business worlds to our classrooms. Some well-known and professionally respected certification programs recruit candidates immediately upon graduation from college (e.g., Teach for America [TFA]), but increasingly it is the midlife career changer who finds teaching, through alternative routes, an attainable and attractive choice.

Data indicate many educators now enter teaching as their second, third, and even fourth careers. Lerner and Zittleman (2002) found that in 1998, of those choosing to enter

teaching through a traditional teacher education program, one in three began their training not at the undergraduate level, but through a postgraduate program (p. 1). The National Center for Education Information (NCEI) estimates that approximately a quarter of a million teachers have been certified through alternative paths since the mid-1980s. They report, "More men, more non-whites, more mature, life-experienced, educated professionals have become K-12 teachers as a result of alternative programs" (as cited in Teaching Certification, 2016, "Alternative Teaching Certification," para. 3).

In general, the number of teachers entering the profession has significantly declined (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 15). When added to the nation's aging baby-boomer workforce and a record number of teachers leaving prior to retirement, this is a formula for America's largest teacher shortage in history. In the absence of thousands of traditionally certified teachers, those with alternative certificates have become commonplace in public schools in general, but in urban schools in particular. All but a handful of states now report a higher percentage of teachers with alternative certification teaching in high-poverty and high-minority schools than experienced, fully certified teachers (Gorman, 2016, para. 9). At the same time, recent studies indicate a large portion of alternatively certified teachers comes from privileged backgrounds. That these teachers often experience a disconnect in their schools and feel socially distant from the youth they teach should not come as a surprise (Foote, Brantlinger, Haydar, Smith, & Gonzalez, 2011, p. 401).

Complex issues such as the mismatch between the background of alternatively certified teachers and the students they teach influence why many scholars believe that

alternative certification programs do not necessarily increase teacher retention rates; in fact, some assert that relying on alternatively certified teachers may even perpetuate the cycle of high teacher turnover. Data on the retention of alternatively certified teachers are inconclusive; yet, existing studies suggest that they are as likely as their traditionally certified counterparts to quit teaching or migrate out of the urban school settings where there is the greatest need for teachers (Heilig et al., 2010, p. 399; Ng & Peter, 2010, p. 123). Earning a professional certificate is not an easy task for an alternatively certified teacher. The paperwork alone can be overwhelming for a new teacher while he or she is learning to manage a classroom, navigate complex schedules, and teach a rigorous curriculum. This new breed of teacher often becomes frustrated and defeated which, in turn, leads to an abrupt and premature departure from education.

Jorissen (2003) writes that there is little evidence to explain why alternatively certified teachers leave teaching but suggests that personal histories might explain the short tenures of those who abandon their positions (p. 42). Chin and Young (2007) likewise write of a need to understand why teachers with alternative certificates decide to stay and leave teaching, describing teachers' decisions as "a constellation of factors that are relevant to the decisions [of others] to enter into and remain in [teaching] careers" (p. 75). Yet, only a handful of empirical studies focus on why alternatively certified teachers continue to teach.

In the first half of this review of literature, I examine the current state of America's teacher shortage. I divide this topic into four subsections: Fewer Graduates Coming from Schools of Education, a Greying Teacher Population, Teacher Attrition,

and Teacher Turnover. In the second half, I trace alternative certification from its earliest beginnings to its current status and review the empirical research on alternatively certified teachers. I conclude the section by examining the limited amount of literature available on how alternatively certified teachers' personal and professional experiences influence teacher retention rates.

Teacher Shortage

The Washington Post printed an article in the fall of 2016 that received a great deal of attention from those of us in education. The headline read, "America has a teacher shortage, and a new study says it's getting worse" (Heim, 2016). In addition to giving readers a brief overview of what he referred to as the worst major teacher shortage in the United States since the 1990s, Heim (2016) previewed a study titled, "A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand and Shortages in the U.S." Heim cited startling predictions from the report, including an annual teacher shortage that could increase to over 100,000 teachers by 2018 and "remain close to that level thereafter" (para. 3). The report is especially concerning since a 2009 study found a staggering 50% of teachers leave the classroom within the first 5 years of their careers (Hansen, Backes, & Brady, 2015, p. 11). The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future states that close to 25% of new teachers leave the profession within the first 3 years, with typically higher attrition rates in poor urban schools serving a diverse student population (Tricarico et al., 2015, p. 237).

In 2012, schools with Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) rates of 75% or higher experienced a total teacher turnover of a little over 22% compared with just fewer than

13% in schools with lower FRL rates. Turnover was even higher in large urban districts. For example, schools in the District of Columbia Public Schools reported districtwide turnover rates at roughly 25%, but in schools with FRL rates above 80%, turnover was at a rather striking 38%—almost two in five teachers (Di Carlo, 2015, para. 7). Growing teacher attrition rates often cripple high-poverty schools in their efforts to effectively teach children. Frequent turnover leaves administrators under enormous pressures to place teachers into classrooms quickly, even if doing so means skipping formal and/or informal preparatory programs.

Fewer Graduates from Schools of Education

During the same period that America began feeling the effects of a growing teacher shortage, the Department of Education cited a 35% reduction in undergraduate and post-baccalaureate teacher preparation enrollments. The reduction translated to almost a quarter million fewer new teachers making their way to classrooms between 2009 and 2014 (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 10). College entrance exam data for 2015 show only 5% of incoming students indicate an interest in pursuing a career in education—a decrease of 29% since 2010. In a 2012 national survey of entering college freshmen, only 4.2% chose education as their field of study—less than half of the number who showed interest in 2007 (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 26). During a 2012 interview, Marge Scherer asked one of the most well-known scholars in the field, Linda Darling-Hammond, which current policies could be changed that would have a positive effect on attracting more of the nation's best and brightest to teaching. While perhaps contentious, Darling-Hammond's response was direct:

We could easily recruit and retain the best and brightest teachers if we actually made good on what President Obama said when he was campaigning: 'If you will teach, we'll pay for your college education.'. . . States that have done that have raised the bar. In North Carolina, the state brought thousands of high-ability people into teaching that way. . . . A follow-up study 7 years later showed that more than 75% of these folks were still in teaching. (p. 20)

Yet, the thousands of "high-ability" teachers finding their way to North Carolina are not enough to meet the state's demand. Wake County Superintendent Jim Merrill was reported in *The Raleigh News Observer* saying, "If you consider the number of kids that are no longer choosing to teach in schools of education, and the pay rate in North Carolina that's not attractive to neighboring states, we're really facing some tough statistics in front of us" (as cited in Hui, 2016, para. 7). If the statistics Merrill refers to include the number of teachers slotted to retire within the next decade, there are few who would disagree with the growing teacher shortage. Not only are there fewer individuals preparing to commit to teaching America's children, but those who have are quickly approaching retirement age.

A Greying Teaching Population

Fortunately, there are still individuals who dedicate a life of service to education, but their numbers are dwindling. Each year, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) publishes a report outlining national attrition and mobility rates for teachers. In September of 2014, this report showed that while retirement rates were flat between 2000 and 2001 and between 2008 and 2009, between 2012 and 2013 retirement rates increased from 27.8% to 38.3%—a significant increase of over 10% (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014). An estimated million and a half teachers are predicted to retire within the next 5

years (Fox & Peters, 2013, p. 2). In 2007, the costs of replacing a retiree were estimated to range from approximately $4,400 per teacher in small rural school districts to nearly $18,000 in large urban districts—a $7 billion a year expense for the nation (Goldhaber & Cowan, 2014, p. 450). With inflation costs, the figures are closer to $8 billion today (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 42). These numbers include recruitment and hiring costs as well as indirect costs that include professional development and training.

As significant as the dollar amount is, the fiscal costs associated with teachers' retirements are far outweighed by the effect on students, schools, and school districts when experienced teachers leave our classrooms. Not only does a retiring teacher's absence affect the next year's class of students, but his or her surrounding faculty members often feel the loss when he or she exits the building. In addition to teaching classes, veteran teachers chair committees, help set policy, develop curriculum, and mentor incoming teachers. Yet, to the surprise of many, high attrition rates in the United States often are driven by teachers leaving for reasons other than retirement. Even during periods of substantial layoffs and incentives for early retirement, most teachers who leave the profession voluntarily leave for reasons other than retirement (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 42).

Teacher Attrition

Addressing the problem of teacher attrition, the Alliance for Excellence in Education (2004) asks, "Why are so many beginning teachers, who enter the profession because they have a real desire to make a positive impact in the lives of children, leaving their jobs" (p. 12)? Since 1994, attrition rates for first-year teachers have been on the rise.

The National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research

(CALDER) reports high-poverty schools losing at least 20% of their teaching force

annually, and "multiple studies finding more than 50% of teaching staff[s] being replaced

every five years" (Hansen et al., 2015, p. 10). In schools serving high percentages of

minority populations, greater than 50% of their teachers leave at rates twice that of

teachers in schools with lower percentages of minority students (Hansen et al., 2015, p.

5). Data released in September of 2016 are beginning to turn the heads of school

administrators throughout the country. Sutcher et al. (2016) report that at the beginning of

the 2016 school year, America's public schools reported having the lowest number of

available teachers in the modern era, between 180,000 and 212,000 (p. 3).

The Learning Policy Institute estimates that the current attrition rate is about 8%

of the annual teaching workforce. They describe this workforce as a leaky bucket losing

hundreds of thousands of teachers each year, most them before retirement age. "Changing

attrition would change the projected shortages more than any other single factor

accounting for the current shortage" (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 59). Sutcher et al. indicate

that science and math teachers leave teaching at higher rates than English, social studies,

and elementary teachers. Educators working with special populations of students leave at

even higher rates.

It is important to note that most scholars draw a clear distinction between attrition

and turnover. Attrition is used to describe the act of altogether leaving an occupation:

members of this population are often referred to as *leavers*. On the other hand, teacher

turnover refers to relocation; if a school is experiencing a high rate of teacher turnover, this typically is a sign of teachers moving to another school in or out of district.

Teacher Turnover

Historically, urban schools have reported a shortage of certified teachers regardless of the number being prepared nationally (Gorman, 2016, para. 7; Jorissen, 2003, para. 1). The Shanker Institute, an organization that pushed back after the release of the NCES Teacher Attrition and Mobility Report in 2014, agrees that after approximately 15 years of increasing attrition rates, the turnover rate has remained stable since the 2004-2005 school year (Goldring et al., 2014). However, the Institute continues by discussing what it describes as "a considerable underlying variation" when presenting the numbers for teacher turnover in schools where students eligible for free/reduced-price meals make up 75% or more of the total population (Di Carlo, 2015, para. 6).

The National Center for Children in Poverty (2016, para. 1) reports that about 15 million, or 21% of all children live in families with incomes below the federal poverty threshold. School systems serving extremely high populations of economically disadvantaged and racially diverse students are losing teachers at a significantly higher rate than the national average (Di Carlo, 2015, para. 9). Laffoon (2012), however, found an exception to the rule in Kansas where a group of teachers living in one of the state's wealthiest school districts continues to work in neighboring schools of poverty. The socioeconomic diversity in the Drummond Public School System is significant. One-third of the schools qualify for Title I funding with the free and reduced population for all schools ranging from 1.6% to 44.8%.

Drummond collected data for the study through semi-structured interviews with 17 teachers who met three qualifying criteria: (a) rated as effective or accomplished on Drummond's educator rubric by school administration; (b) recommended by their administrator as a quality educator; and (c) taught in a Title I school for 5 or more years (Laffoon, 2012, p. 20). The research evolved from a curiosity regarding the beliefs and values of those who, for an extended period, continue to work in high poverty schools. Laffoon (2012) identified two reasons explaining why teachers in the Drummond School System choose to stay in these schools. First, teachers expressed a fear that by moving to a school with more resources and few students suffering from poverty, they would experience a diminished level of importance, and second, teachers indicated a devotion and loyalty to their students experiencing poverty. Teachers believed the differences they were making in the lives of their students outweighed any benefits a change of working conditions might bring to them personally (Laffoon, 2012, p. 56).

Unlike students in the Drummond Public School System, nationally a disproportionate number of poor, non-White students are taught by alternatively certified teachers. All but a few states report more alternatively certified teachers than traditionally trained teachers teaching in high poverty and high minority schools than in low poverty and low minority schools (Gorman, 2016, para. 9). While traditionally and alternatively trained teachers leave schools at about the same rate (Ng & Peter, 2010), alternatively certified teachers are less likely to stay in schools serving poor, non-White students (Hansen et al., 2015, p. 10). The revolving door effect of teachers entering and leaving is

even more profound in high poverty schools serving students who have the most to lose when there is little stability in the teacher workforce.

Alternative Certification

Due in part to increased teacher turnover and high attrition rates, the role that alternative certification plays in the education of our students has never been more important. The 2011–2012 Schools and Staffing Survey reports that approximately 25% of beginning teachers enter the profession through an alternative route to teacher preparation programs (Warner-Griffin, Noel, & Tadler, 2016). Yet, due to the challenges alternatively certified teachers face on a variety of fronts, some states report the annual attrition rate for teachers with alternative certifications as high as 60% (Heilig et al., 2010, p. 399).

The debate over alternative certification has produced a plethora of unsubstantiated assumptions about participants and programs. Ironically, it is most often from inside the realm of education that alternative programs find their harshest critics. In 2007, Humphrey and Wechsler conducted case studies of seven alternative teacher certification programs. Multiple interviews with the programs' administrative teams and document reviews produced the following key findings.

- Alternative certification participants consist of a diverse group of young and older adults reflective of the gender and racial composition of their local labor market;
- Large numbers of alternative certification participants have experience working with children in classroom settings;

- Alternative certification programs typically move participants into classrooms quickly, but do not offer full certification more quickly than traditional programs;

- Most programs truncate clinical practice, but consider it to be an important component of what they offer participants;

- The value of on-the-job training depends on the participant's background and the school context;

- Although mentoring is an important component of all programs, most programs exert little control over the mentoring that occurs; thus, the quality of support is unpredictable (Humphrey & Wechsler, 2007, pp. 520–521).

Ultimately, the researchers found that advocates for and against alternative certification fail to focus on the variation in certification programs and that alternatively certified teachers are a diverse group of individuals who "defy generalization" (p. 483).

In this section, I trace the history of alternative certification beginning with its inception in the early 1980s. This information provides an important context for the current state of teacher alternative certification. I start by introducing the landmark federal education report *A Nation at Risk*. While this transformative piece of legislation paved the way for a non-traditional route to the classroom, it wasn't until *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) was made law that, in a somewhat paradoxical manner, the process by which non-certified personnel could be issued alternative teaching certificates was simplified to its current form. Next, I examine the growing number of alternatively certified teachers and their characteristics. I then turn to a section on "Different Paths to

Alternative Certification," where I outline a variety of ways in which prospective

teachers arrive at certification. While each state is unique in how it issues alternative

certificates, each candidate is also distinct in how he or she finds his or her way to the

classroom.

Afterwards, I discuss empirical research in four of the more controversial and

high-profile areas associated with alternative certification for teachers. In the first, I

explore variation in teacher preparation, the second induction policy and practices, the

third teacher effectiveness, and the fourth, teacher attrition. Finally, I close the review of

literature with a historical perspective on how the personal and professional experiences

of teachers influence their decision to stay or leave teaching.

History of Alternative Routes to Teaching

The singular pathway to teacher certification underwent a dramatic overhaul in

the early 1980s shortly after the Secretary of Education created an 18-person National

Commission on Excellence in Education. The committee received little notoriety, but the

document they published caused more than a small stir within the world of education; *A*

Nation at Risk was the first government sponsored publication that advocated for college

graduates with no experience and/or background in education to pursue a career in

teaching by way of alternative certification. The reform initiative qualified a new group

of educators for immediate hire with all the benefits heretofore reserved for traditionally

certified elementary and secondary teachers (Goldstein, 2014, p. 170).

Following the 1983 release of *A Nation at Risk*, the National Center for Education

Information reported its first data collection on alternative licensure, and by 1990, some

general characteristics had begun to emerge from within America's school systems. Six

broad descriptors of alternative certification programs stood out as those most commonly

accepted. These programs were:

- Designed to recruit and license teaching candidates who held a bachelor's
  degree preferably, or experience in an occupation other than education;

- Processes to demonstrate mastery of a content area;

- Field-based programs;

- Documented time with a mentoring teacher;

- Completion of a planned program of study through a college or university;
  and

- Documented, usually at the state level, standards for a program (Feistritzer,
  2005, p. 3).

Over a decade later, after the rapid expansion of alternative certification

programs, a number of attempts was made to clarify the process. Feistritzer and Chester

(2000) provided a succinct description of alternative certification still widely accepted

today. They offer,

> [Alternative certification is] every avenue of becoming licensed to teach, from
> emergency certification to very sophisticated and well-designed programs that
> address the professional preparation needs of the growing population of
> individuals who already have at least a baccalaureate degree and considerable life
> experience and want to become teachers. (p. 3)

In 2007, Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden went a step further when they

outlined the specific characteristics of high-quality alternative-route programs. They

asserted that teachers completing these programs demonstrated the pedagogical skills

necessary to effectively teach students. These programs included:

- high entry-level standards;

- solid pedagogical training in subject-matter instruction, management,

  curriculum, and working with diverse students;

- intensive mentoring and supervision from carefully chosen, well-trained staff;

- exposure for candidates to excellent teaching and modeling of good practice;

- development of strong relationships among the partners;

- guided practice in lesson planning and teaching prior to a candidate's taking

  on full responsibility as the teacher of record; and

- high exit standards. (p. 120)

Almost 20 years after the release of *A Nation at Risk*, the federal government once

again intervened to support alternative certification routes as a way to increase the

number of candidates entering the profession whereby ensuring, at least in theory, that *no

child was left behind.*

Reshaping of Public Law: *No Child Left Behind*

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 was signed into law by President

George W. Bush on January 8, 2002. The law was part of an effort to improve student

achievement by reforming educational programs. Initially, the focus of NCLB was to

ensure all children achieved at the same high levels. As a first step, in 2001, the federal

government attempted to remove state-created loopholes that facilitated easy access to

emergency certification. Although the law originally sought to increase teacher quality by

limiting states' abilities to issue emergency certificates, it simultaneously required states

to have "a program to recruit and retain highly qualified mid-career professionals and

recent graduates of an institution of higher education . . . including recruiting teachers

through alternative routes to certification" (NCLB, 2001). Yet, because of its emphasis

on teacher quality and the subsequent effect on student achievement, NCLB mandated

that school districts work with state education agencies to ensure teachers of core

academic courses were highly qualified.

This all changed on December 10, 2015 when President Obama signed the Every

Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The new law replaced the Elementary and Secondary

Education Act of 1965 and the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. Most notable among the

changes to educational law was that ESSA eliminated the highly-qualified teacher

provision requiring a teacher of a core academic area demonstrate subject-matter

competency. Instead, the act only required candidates to possess a bachelor's degree and

a state-issued certificate (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

By directing states to actively recruit teachers through alternative routes, ESSA

actually encourages and therefore increases the number of teachers entering the

classroom with no pedagogical training, and in the worst-case scenarios, teachers with no

actual content knowledge in the area they are assigned to teach. For example, in North

Carolina, an individual holding a bachelor's degree in psychology can be issued an

alternative certificate to teach North Carolina history, the state's eighth-grade social

studies class. If the alternatively certified teacher grew up and attended public school in

South Carolina, or for that matter any state other than North Carolina, chances are very

slim that he or she possesses any significant knowledge about the history of North Carolina. Yet, the state declares that having earned a degree in psychology at some point in one's recent or distant past qualifies him or her to teach all social studies courses offered at the secondary level in North Carolina public schools.

Growing Number of Alternatively Certified Teachers

During the 1985–1986 school year, fewer than 300 teachers nationally had earned their certificates through a pathway other than a teacher preparation program; by 2005, the number had risen to over 59,000 (Sass, 2015, p. 4). Five years later, four of ten new hires were coming from non-traditional paths (Feistritzer, 2011, p. 21). At first glance, it might appear this upward trend in alternative certification is limited to teachers working in urban, inner city schools. However, this is not the case. For example, in 2015, North Carolina reported four rural school systems with alternatively certified teachers accounting for more than half of their secondary school staffs (NC Department of Public Instruction). But, North Carolina is not the only state relying on alternatively certified teachers to fill teaching positions. In 2015, Oklahoma issued more than 800 emergency certificates, more than had been given over the 4 previous years combined (Burnette, 2016).

The need for alternatively certified teachers is not limited to a region, a state, or even a specific portion of a state's population. Districts increasingly rely on these teachers who are well-suited to work in both rural and urban areas not only because they have alternative and/or emergency certificates, but because they understand the diverse communities of which they are a part (Ng & Peter, 2010, p. 123).

Characteristics of Alternatively Certified Teachers

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation found in a nationwide survey in 2008 that of 2,300 adults aged 24–60, 42% would consider teaching as a second career (Lee, 2011, p. 3). NCEI, as cited by Teacher Certification (2016), reports the following as characteristics of alternatively certified teachers employed across the 50 states and the District of Columbia:

- On average, 97% of those entering teaching through alternate routes state they feel highly competent in several areas of teaching;

- Seventy percent of those entering teaching through alternate routes are older than 30 years of age, 38% are male, and 30% are non-White;

- Forty-six percent of those teaching through alternate routes are teaching in a large city;

- Nearly half of those who enter teaching through alternate routes were working in a non-education occupation the year prior to entering an alternative route program;

- Nearly half of those who became teachers through alternate routes state that if these alternate routes had not been available, they would not have entered the teaching field;

- Being able to teach while getting certified and receiving a teacher's salary and benefits were the most important variables in choosing alternate routes to teaching; and

- Teaching full time as a teacher of record during the program far outranked any other variable as the most beneficial aspect of the alternate route program in developing their teaching competence ("Alternative Teaching Statistics and Facts," para. 1).

Administrators often veer from traditional questionnaires when interviewing alternatively certified teachers; instead, they ask probing questions intended to move the conversation beyond the applicants' obvious lack of pedagogical training. As a result, school administrators are often surprised to find fundamentally sound pedagogical slants on classroom instruction coming from middle-age, second-career applicants. In addition to the fact that a large number of teachers with alternative certifications have applied the concepts they will be teaching within the work environment, many of these professionals come to the classroom as practitioners with life experiences that equip them with problem-solving skills not always found in recent traditional college graduates.

Different Paths to Alternative Certification

As a non-traditional, 30-year-old entering freshman in the early 1990s, I was somewhat of an anomaly in my college classes. But today a growing number of adults are beginning or returning to colleges of education after having worked in one or more careers. Similar to the way in which traditionally trained teachers graduate and begin teaching at different points in their lives, alternatively certified teachers arrive at our schools having traveled different paths.

From college to the classroom. Alternative teacher certification programs are not new to the landscape of education. Decades ago, the Ford Program, the National Teacher

Corps, and the New York City Teaching Fellows worked to attract the best and the brightest college graduates to teach in our classrooms. Unlike its predecessors, TFA rejects university-based teacher preparation programs and instead works from the ideology that the "combination of character, elite education, and personal qualities" are sufficient to equip recent graduates to teach in hard-to-staff schools (Blumenreich & Rogers, 2016, p. 7).

   Teach for America. In 1989, while completing her undergraduate program at Princeton University, Wendy Kopp wrote a thesis that would later lay the foundation for Teach for America. TFA's mission is to furnish under-resourced schools with highly motivated, well-educated students from America's most selective colleges who are willing to commit 2 years of service to schools with staffing challenges (Heilig & Jez, 2014; Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014). In many regions of the United States, TFA teachers, or corps members as they are often referred to, are the poster children for alternative certification. Recruiting thousands of corps members each year, TFA promises eager graduates the opportunity to strengthen their leadership skills while teaching in some of America's most underserved schools. Labaree (2010) describes TFA as "one of the most successful efforts at social entrepreneurship in recent history. TFA managed to tap into the social altruism of a generation that had been frequently dismissed as materialistic and self-centered . . . containing a strong dose of noblesse oblige" (p. 49).

   A recent study conducted by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance reports that 82% of schools employing TFA teachers are eligible for Title I funds, with 89% of the schools' students described as either Hispanic or Black

(Clark et al., 2013, p. ES-6); yet, the same study describes TFA corps members as less likely to be from an ethnic or racial minority as compared to other teachers and more likely than other alternatively certified teachers to have graduated from a more selective college (p. ES-6). It is important to note that this problem is not exclusive to TFA, but even if it were, only 0.002% of the nation's teachers are TFA placements (Heilig & Jez, 2014, p. ii). Research indicates that a significant number of teachers entering the classroom through non-traditional paths hail from privilege, and therefore feel distant from the students with whom they work (Foote et al., 2011, p. 401). Proponents of TFA, perhaps the most popular path through which recent college graduates obtain alternative teaching certificates, point to a rigorous application process as one of the components that sets them apart from other nontraditional pathways to the classroom.

TFA applicants complete an online application which includes a resume, letter of intent, and an original essay. If applicants make it past the initial application process, they are invited to an interview which typically involves prospective corps members participating in some form of preparing and teaching a lesson.

TFA bases their selection of candidates on a model that accounts for multiple criteria that

> they believe are linked to success in the classroom, including achievement, leadership experience, perseverance, critical thinking, organizational ability, motivational ability, respect for others, and commitment to the TFA mission. (Dobbie, 2011, p. 2)

In short, TFA asserts that if a college graduate is intellectually capable of successfully navigating society's norms and mores, then he or she can teach. Opponents

of the fast track from college to the classroom assert that "without prior preparation in pedagogy, curriculum, child development, learning theories, or pedagogical content knowledge, it is unlikely that a novice can effectively teach children" (Kavanagh & Dunn, 2013, p. 49). While the chances of making a swift and effective transition from the college classroom to the public PK-12 classroom has its share of naysayers, philanthropic foundations, corporate sponsors, and even federal monies continue to pour into programs like TFA each year.

Second career alternatively certified teachers. Not all alternatively certified teachers are recent college graduates. Increasingly, teachers with alternative certifications are second-, third-, and even fourth-career teachers who either grew up in the community where they teach, or live in close proximity to the school system and have a clear understanding of the culture and the politics at work in the district. Like TFA corps members, second-career teachers come to education with no formal preparation in pedagogy or curriculum; however, Simmons (2016) found that second-career teachers transition many first-career skills into teaching. In addition to a greater content knowledge, Simmons found that career changers bring communication, organization, and problem-solving skills, as well as life experiences that equip them with valuable insight that a 22-year-old recent college graduate cannot bring to a new teaching position. Simmons asserts,

> In many cases, enlisting second-career teachers is a much smoother transition than employing first-career teachers . . . This is often seen in the area of vocational education when a move from a first career into teaching is viewed as a continuation of the previous career. (pp. 39–40)

In 2009, Wiehe explored the perceptions of career choice among second-career teachers. She described this unique set of educators as a group ". . . molded in with the rest of the teaching force and seldom studied as a separate subgroup of the population" (p. 5). Wiehe studied three elementary and four secondary teachers' perceptions regarding their decisions to be teachers. She found the participants in the study turned to teaching as a second career for a variety of different reasons, ". . . most of them altruistic and not self-serving" (p. 9). Many second-career teachers value teaching children in much the same way Catherine Beecher's "missionary teachers" welcomed the opportunity to influence the lives of young students (Goldstein, 2014). Yet, despite a fervent desire to make a difference, second-career teachers face many challenges. The culmination of all their life experiences, in most situations, can be considered a viable asset, but in some instances these experiences may also encumber the individual with feelings of frustration, doubt, and despair (Powers, 2002, p. 305).

The challenges facing a second-career teacher are unique, in part due to the social and administrative structures at work within a school building. For example, cynical veteran teachers can heighten any new teacher's insecurities, but alternatively certified teachers are especially susceptible to this type of treatment. Faculty members many times look at them as outsiders, as interlopers who manipulated the system, who circumscribed the path on which *real* teachers spent 4 years. When treated with disdain or indifference by colleagues, it is difficult for alternatively certified teachers to develop identities that will support them in their new careers.

Second-career alternatively certified teachers typically arrive at the classroom with little or no understanding of how to deliver a content that they may or may not recall having studied in a college class taken at some point in their distant past. This in and of itself can lead to feelings of uncertainty and a lack of confidence that ultimately breeds feelings of inferiority and self-doubt. Frustrated and unfulfilled, many second-career alternatively certified teachers, who have a great deal to offer our students, ultimately leave teaching.

As the number of second-career educators and TFA corps members entering and leaving teaching grows, proponents for and opponents of alternative certification debate its short and long-term effect on education. While most researchers admit that findings surrounding alternative certification are inconclusive, research continues to yield significant data that provide new and useful insight into this nontraditional pathway to teaching.

Empirical Research on Alternatively Certified Teachers

With the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, the government figuratively and literally opened America's school doors to all college graduates. Controversy surrounding the change in policy was minimal in the 1980s and 1990s due to the significantly low numbers of teachers entering the profession through alternative routes. However, with the turn of the century, a growing number of empirical studies has been released, in part because of the innovation and the multiplicity of the routes into teaching. In the following subsections, I will discuss four broad areas of investigation.

Variation in Teacher Preparation

In 1998, in an effort to improve hiring procedures, the New York City Board of Education commissioned a groundbreaking research survey to determine if a connection existed between the teacher preparation programs from which the city's new teachers were arriving and teachers' feelings of preparedness (Silvernail, 1998). Of the almost 3,000 respondents, over half had entered teaching through a pathway other than a traditional 4- or 5-year teaching program. Four years later, Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow (2002) extended Silvernail's research by working to determine if graduates from traditional teacher preparation programs would rate their feelings of preparedness significantly higher than teachers completing alternative certification programs. Not surprisingly, Darling-Hammond et al. found that traditionally trained teachers felt significantly better prepared across most dimensions of teaching than did teachers with alternative certifications, but cautioned that "recruits' perceptions of their preparedness may or may not be related to their actual teaching effectiveness" (p. 293).

Interestingly, almost a decade later in 2010, Darling-Hammond wrote that an "undeniable" relationship exists between alternatively certified teachers' previous experiences and their effectiveness in classrooms (p. 37). It is therefore plausible that the "previous experiences" referenced by Darling-Hammond, among other things, encompass a teacher preparation program, since 2 years later in an interview with *Educational Leadership* she stressed the importance of preparation programs by saying, "We know that teachers who are fully prepared stay in teaching at much higher rates than those who lack key elements of preparation" (as cited in Scherer, 2012, para. 10).

A 2010 report published by the National Research Council compared different programs leading to teacher certification. Of specific interest to the council was whether traditionally trained teachers who completed most of their training *before* beginning to teach full-time felt better prepared than alternatively certified teachers who completed their training *after* beginning to teach. Findings revealed little or no difference between the feelings of preparedness for alternatively and traditionally trained teachers. However, first-year teachers who completed fewer educational courses and had abbreviated or no student teaching experience felt less prepared than those who graduated from traditional education programs (Kee, 2012). The report concluded by stating, "First year teachers in fast-track alternative programs where summer training is followed by additional coursework . . . feel relatively better prepared than others" (p. 63).

Grossman and Loeb (2010) remind us that the existence of multiple routes into teaching is "not so much an innovation as a return to an earlier period in our profession during which teachers were prepared locally" (p. 24). With growing frequency, states and local school systems are harkening back to policies that work to deregulate the process of teacher certification. This was especially evident in 2006 when Florida's Governor, Jeb Bush, bypassing college- and university-based programs, signed into law a bill giving individual schools the authority to certify teachers. While certification is undeniably an important first step to a career in teaching, it is only the first among many on the road to a beginning teacher's transitioning to the role of successful practitioner.

Induction Policy and Practices

Those who work in alternative certification programs rarely argue that their graduates enter teaching fully prepared to effectively navigate the challenges of managing a classroom. Instead, programs acknowledge candidates' lack of preparation based upon the rationale that schools will have support systems in place once alternatively certified teachers begin their teaching careers.

To evaluate the induction and general supports provided in New York City's (NYC) secondary schools, Foote et al. (2011) surveyed 167 first-year alternatively certified teachers and asked about their experiences of induction into teaching. The primary focus of the study centered around mentoring since it was thought to be the most substantial support system for new teachers. It is important to note that both NYC and the state of New York required that every beginning alternatively certified teacher be assigned a mentor. Yet close to three in ten first-year alternatively certified teachers surveyed in the Foote et al. study reported having no mentor assigned, and of those who were assigned mentors, 19% reported receiving "no help" from them (Foote et al., 2011, p. 412).

Casey, Dunlap, Brister, Davidson, and Starrett (2013) discuss the "sink or swim" design of induction programs that are ill-equipped to meet the needs of nontraditionally trained teachers (p. 289). Attempts to ensure adequate support systems are in place for new teachers are complicated by the varied preservice backgrounds and experiences of alternatively certified teachers. Mentor support is widely practiced among schools, but as was the case with new teachers in NYC as reported by Foote et al. (2011), mentoring is

not the cure-all for the type of on-the-job training required of new alternatively certified

teachers. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) determined that effective induction programs such

as mentoring were only helpful to new teachers if the mentor and new teacher taught in

the same content area, and were given the opportunity for routine collaboration and

lesson planning.

A common point of contention among alternatively certified teachers is the lack

of accountability demonstrated by mentors and the absence of any discernible

administrative follow through when the need for supplemental supports is warranted

(O'Connor, Malow, & Bisland, 2011). Whether real or perceived, the absence of

administrative oversight and ownership for the induction and subsequent development of

new teachers is a difficult obstacle to overcome when attempting to build a strong

teaching faculty. To create a culture in which teacher growth leads to teacher

effectiveness, school administrators must take responsibility for ensuring professional

relationships are developed among colleagues and that new teachers, whether they are

traditionally or alternatively certified, receive the support they need to be successful.

Teacher Effectiveness

The amount of research conducted on the effectiveness and/or ineffectiveness of

alternatively certified teachers has grown in proportion to the increase in the number of

teachers working with alternative certifications. Findings that compare the effectiveness

of alternatively and traditionally trained teachers continue to be inconclusive and widely

debated between factions supporting and opposing alternative certification. Significant

evidence exists which shows certification status is a less reliable indicator of a teacher's

effectiveness than is classroom performance during his or her first 2 years (Kane,

Rockoff, & Staiger, 2008, p. 615). In addition, multiple studies indicate that among

teachers with the same certification status, there are large and persistent differences in

teacher effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, Newton, & Wei, 2013; Darling-Hammond &

Youngs, 2002; Oakes, Franke, Quartz, & Rogers, 2002; Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth,

2014; Sass, 2015).

One of the earliest studies comparing the effectiveness of traditionally and

alternatively trained teachers was conducted by Boser, Wiley, and Pettibone (1986).

Public school administrators in Tennessee were asked to evaluate the preparation of

teachers. Based on the advanced age of most alternatively certified teachers,

administrators reported teachers with alternative certification demonstrated more general

knowledge and professional preparation than their traditionally trained counterparts. Two

decades later, Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2006) measured teacher

effectiveness of alternatively certified TFA corps members and Teaching Fellows against

that of traditionally trained teachers. Researchers accessed over a million student

mathematics achievement assessments and more than 900,000 English language arts

(ELA) assessments. When analyzing the data, Boyd et al. explored whether traditionally

trained teachers were more effective than alternatively certified teachers as measured by

student performance on math and ELA standardized tests. In considering the data, the

team considered the differences both in the students that teachers taught and in the

schools in which teachers were employed. "Different pathways into teaching lead

teachers into schools with different characteristics and different students. Thus, we must

account for these differences in matching teachers to schools and students if we are to accurately assess the effect of pathway" (Boyd et al., 2006, p. 187). Ultimately, the results indicated relatively small differences in student achievement when measured by the certification of the teacher of record. The only notable effect of certification on student performance was found when comparing data for first-year teachers.

While the amount of empirical research on the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers continues to grow, it remains limited in part because of the differences between programs that range from emergency summer certification programs to intensive 2-year programs resulting in full licensure. Casey et al. (2013) write about what they describe as a "ridiculous" debate over teacher effectiveness:

> Although, the notion that a traditional preparation program is essential to teacher effectiveness is seductive, debate over the relative effectiveness of traditional or nontraditional teacher preparation programs is really pointless. The reality is that increasing numbers of students in urban schools urgently need teachers and the teachers who will teach them are likely to come from alternative certification programs. (p. 303)

As the number of students in urban schools continues to grow, so does the demand for teachers with both traditional and alternative certifications.

Retention Rates

Enrollment in teacher preparation programs dropped from 691,000 in 2009 to 451,000 in 2014, a 35% decline (Heim, 2016, para. 2). To effectively fight the shortage of teachers entering our schools, we must find ways to better address teacher turnover and attrition; yet, research on retention rates for alternatively certified teachers has remained inconclusive over the last decade. For example, Schonfeld and Feinman (2012)

studied the frequency with which alternatively certified teachers and traditionally certified teachers encountered job-related difficulties. Researchers anticipated that new teachers who had not received any type of pedagogical training prior to beginning teaching would encounter more classroom management issues than their traditionally trained counterparts, and therefore would be more likely to leave teaching. Their findings were inconclusive, indicating that while alternatively certified teachers experienced a significant higher number of stressors related to classroom management, "traditionally certified teachers were far from immune to such problems" (Schonfeld & Feinman, 2012, p. 235).

A relatively new approach in studying teacher retention has been to examine the relationship between new teachers' prior education and preparation and whether those teachers are likely to leave teaching after the first year. Ingersoll, Merrill, and May (2014) focused on the experience of first-year teachers and whether the effects of pre-service preparation influenced the likelihood of their leaving the profession. The team found that while differences in education and preparation are positively associated with a teacher's staying or leaving the profession, the type of college, degree, or certificate has a relatively insignificant relationship to attrition. Beginning teachers who attended more selective colleges and universities were not more or less likely to leave teaching after their first year. However, the substance of new teachers' pedagogical preparation did have a significant relationship to their leaving teaching; teachers with more pedagogical training were significantly less likely than alternatively certified teachers to leave teaching after their first year (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014, p. 23).

In a national sample of alternatively and traditionally trained teachers, Grissom (2008) found that while attrition rates for alternatively certified teachers are higher, the differences are relatively small with 82.3% of alternative route teachers and 85.6% of traditionally trained teachers staying in teaching over a one-year period. The research conducted by Humphrey and Wechsler (2007) remains one of the most widely accepted in the area of retention rates for alternatively certified teachers. The team asserts that it is a combination of factors and not one overriding component that ultimately determines the success and retention of alternatively certified teachers (pp. 522–523).

Reflections on Empirical Research

While research surrounding alternative certification for teachers is broad in scope, teacher preparation, teacher induction, teacher effectiveness, and teacher retention are seldom studied in isolation. Instead, each area extends to the next and resonates through previous and more contemporary literature. Almost cyclical in nature, the four areas ultimately work together to provide insight into how teachers' pre-service and professional experiences shape and influence their effectiveness and longevity in an educational setting.

Understanding the dynamic nature of how the preparation, induction, effectiveness, and retention of alternatively certified teachers influence one another was important as I crafted interview and focus group questions and when listening to the discussions and subsequent exchanges during the sample's interviews and focus groups.

The Impact of Personal and Professional Experiences on Teaching:

A Gap in the Research

Teachers with alternative certifications do not enter our school buildings as blank slates. Instead, they bring with them personal and professional experiences as well as challenges that will affect their performance. Recent college graduates as well as second-career teachers often come to the classroom ill-prepared to teach unmotivated, disengaged middle and high school students. Allen (2005) suggests that new and/or struggling teachers be given time to reflect on their life histories, allowing them to "adapt to the profession to properly form a new identity, rather than the traditional baptism by fire that is common to most beginning teachers" (p. 13). The fire, as described by Allen (2005), is often followed by teacher flight. "Nationally, on average, close to 16% of teachers leave the school at which they teach each year" (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 40).

It is vital that we begin to identify the characteristics of teachers who stay in teaching and attempt to identify and understand the strong identities and experiences they can bring to the profession—experiences that can help to facilitate a successful navigation through the socialization process and evoke a sense of belonging in schools. As far back as 1996, Zumwalt argued for research on teacher choice and decisions made in the workplace. He claimed there was little to no evidence that alternatively certified teachers were less likely or more likely to leave teaching. "Much depends on their personal histories and the nature of their abbreviated preparation programs" (as cited in Jorissen, 2003, p. 42). Yet, over a decade later, little research has been conducted on how alternatively certified teachers' personal experiences shape their decisions to leave or stay

in teaching. Chin and Young (2007) write of the need for a better understanding of alternatively certified teachers and the commitments and dispositions they bring to teaching. They feel it important to measure "how they as persons engage with other teachers and students [and how they] interpret and make sense of their initial experiences in schools" (p. 82).

Ng and Peter (2010) claim that understanding how teachers' relational, personal, and biographical considerations affect their decisions is an area that remains "relatively unexplored" in terms of educational research (p. 123). Yet still, the literature on how the personal experiences and identities of second-career alternatively certified teachers affect their staying in teaching remains limited. Through traditional and nontraditional paths, teachers are making their way to our classrooms. The question of how to keep them there is one that remains unanswered, and when dealing specifically with second-career alternatively certified teachers, it is one that is seldom asked.

Summary

Much has been written about the growing teacher shortage in the United States. Few experts would question that the shortage is real, but the Department of Education insists that when both traditional and alternative certification programs are considered, America's institutions are currently producing enough teachers to meet total classroom demand across the country (Partelow & Baumgardner, 2016, para. 2). But as I illustrated in this review of literature, we are not meeting our demand for teachers, especially in struggling schools; issuing alternative certificates to non-traditional teaching candidates has not proven to be a sufficient solution to our problem. At least as often as traditionally

trained teachers, teachers working with alternative certificates are leaving. Some researchers explore why alternatively certified teachers leave the profession (Humphrey & Wechsler, 2007; Redding & Smith, 2016); few research why they stay. I have found no study to date that asks why second-career teachers with alternative certifications stay in teaching. This gap in the research lead me to this dissertation research.

I began and now end this review of literature by highlighting the national teacher shortage that America is experiencing in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Prior to the last decade, the effects of the shortage were manifested more adversely and on a larger scale in poor, urban schools. Now states like South Carolina, Oklahoma, Indiana, and South Dakota have begun reporting record numbers of teacher vacancies left unfilled each year (Burnette, 2016). Due to the unprecedented need for K-12 teachers, there is now, and will be into the foreseeable future, a need for teachers with alternative certifications. Given this need, it is imperative we not only work to secure the quality of new teachers entering the classroom, but just as importantly, that we identify ways in which to support and retain them.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In this qualitative study, I explored why second-career alternative certified teachers stay in teaching. Several studies focus on the reasons teachers leave (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2008; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). In contrast, I was interested in why successful alternatively certified teachers stay in teaching. In this study, I explored the experiences of second-career teachers who began their careers through alternative routes, both their earlier career experiences and their experiences while teaching. I hoped to uncover common personal and professional experiences shared by these teachers that helped shape their decision to remain in teaching and that could potentially help beginning alternatively certified teachers become successful educators.

Research Questions

I designed my study to answer three guiding research questions:

1. What professional experiences are shared by successful second-career alternatively certified teachers in their career(s) prior to teaching that contribute to their transitioning to a professional license?

2. What professional experiences are shared by successful second-career alternatively certified teachers in their first 4 years of teaching that contribute to their transitioning to a professional license?

3. What personal life experiences are shared by successful second-career alternatively certified teachers who teach for a minimum of 4 years and transition to a professional license?

Setting

The setting for this study was a primarily rural North Carolina public school system. For anonymity purposes, I call this Anywhere County School System to mask the school district's identity. The system is home to almost 40 schools and serves over 20,000 students in grades PK-12. I selected the district in part due to my acquaintance with the superintendent, but more importantly because, like many districts in North Carolina, I knew the district has come to increasingly rely on hiring alternatively certified teachers. In addition to the superintendent's willingness to participate in the study, the size of the school system was important as I searched for a district where there was a sufficient number of second-career alternatively certified teachers to qualify them to participate in the study.

Sample Selection

I used purposeful criterion-based sampling for this study. That is, I established specific criteria that each participant had to meet to qualify him or her for the study (Creswell, 2015). Using this process to identify participants, I targeted key areas while still ideally providing for diversity within the sample (Hatch, 2002; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

The criteria for participation in this study were

1. Each participant must have been a second-career teacher. For purposes of this study, I defined a second-career teacher as one who holds a 4-year degree in an area other than education and has worked a minimum of one year in a position other than education.

2. Each participant must have had a minimum of 4 years teaching experience in a public school system.

3. Each participant must have possessed a professional teaching license.

4. Each participant must have been a successful teacher as defined in the following section.

In studying how alternatively certified teachers' personal and professional experiences influence retention rates, I asked teachers to share personal details about their life decisions and the subsequent effects of those decisions on their profession life. The qualitative research I conducted has what Creswell (2015) describes as a "sense of realism to it. This type of inquiry actually involves people" (p. 110). Empirical studies examining the personal stories and transitional experiences of second-career teachers have typically used purposeful, criterion-based sampling (Goldhorn, 2005; Simmons, 2016; Wiehe, 2009).

"Successful Participant" Criteria

For the purposes of this study, I determined whether commonalities existed among a sample of second-career alternatively certified teachers that educators can draw upon to increase retention rates for alternatively certified teachers. In addition to

beginning teaching through an alternative route and as a second career, I considered

longevity in the selection process; however, limiting the criteria to only these three areas

would have severely limited the study's findings. Instead, I used a more complex

selection process to identify a pool of potential participants who were successful

classroom teachers.

In a meeting with the Human Resource Director and the Supervisor of

Alternatively Certified Teachers of Anywhere County School System, we worked to

define a "successful" second-career alternatively certified teacher. Before deciding the

characteristics of successful teachers, we agreed upon what they did not look like. First,

teachers working under an action plan would not be considered successful for the

purposes of this study, and neither would teachers whose contracts would not be renewed

for the upcoming school year. Conversely, to be assessed as a successful second-career

alternatively certified teacher, I asked the teacher's building level principal to confirm

that the teacher was a model/master educator. At the end of this process, I identified 63

potential participants.

Participant Demographic Profiles

I emailed each of the 63 potential research participants a request for participation.

The correspondence included an explanation of the purpose of the study and a tentative

timeline outlining when I would conduct individual interviews and the subsequent focus

group. I received 16 responses from teachers who agreed to participate. Teachers (Table

1) had differing demographic profiles. Ten were female and six were males. Ten worked

in Anywhere School System high schools, five in middle schools, and one worked in the
system's central office.

Table 1

Request for Participation

Pseudonym	Gender	School	Content
Hannah	F	High School A	Social Studies
Maggie	F	Middle School A	Special Education
William	M	Middle School C	Math/Science
Cynthia	F	Central Office	Special Education
Haley	F	Alternative Setting HS	English
Dan	M	High School C	Engineering
Todd	M	High School C	Science
Celia	F	High School A	Business Education
Beatrice	F	Middle School B	English Language Arts
Wilma	F	High School C	Family & Consumer Science
Kate	F	Middle School B	Social Studies
Bertha	F	High School B	Math
Larry	M	High School B	Special Education
Anthony	M	High School A	Math
Richard	M	High School D	Business Administration
Tom	M	Middle School A	Science/Social Studies

In addition to the gender and grade level, I also felt that teachers' content areas
were important. Career and technical teaching positions are conducive to second-career
teachers converting more specific job-related tasks to the classroom than non-career and

technical positions. It is important to note that 100% of those responding to the request for participation were White. Approximately 85% of teachers working in the Anywhere County School System are White.

From the list of 16, I selected eight teachers who were representative of the larger group. One of the eight failed to respond to multiple invitations to schedule an initial interview and was therefore removed from the sample. The remaining participants are listed in Table 2. Of the seven, three worked in middle schools and four in high schools. I selected two female and two male high school teachers and two female and one male middle school teacher. In addition to securing a balance between the male/female and middle/high school demographics, I chose participants who would represent teachers from each of the four core academic classes as well as special education and career and technical courses.

Table 2

Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	School	Content	First Career
Hannah	F	High School A	Special Ed/Social Studies	Sales/Marketing
William	M	Middle School C	Math/Science	Engineer
Haley	F	Alter. Setting HS	Special Ed/English	Collections
Beatrice	F	Middle School B	English Language Arts	Architect
Kate	F	Middle School B	Social Studies	Teaching Assistant
Larry	M	High School B	Special Education	Factory Worker
Richard	M	High School D	Business Administration	Airline Employee

Haley's teaching in an alternative high school influenced my decision to include her among the seven. I was curious to see if her experiences would reflect those of the larger group or if her desire to teach and/or her placement in an atypical environment would produce a different set of data, even as I realize that the experiences of one individual are never representative. All participants and all people associated with them in the study were assigned a pseudonym for confidentiality purposes.

Second-Career Alternatively Certified Teachers

The popularity of programs like Teach for America (TFA) and Teaching Fellows attracts the attention of notable researchers and those who fund their studies. Second-career teachers, as a group, receive less attention in the research community. As opposed to an altruistic TFA corps member signing a 2-year contract to bring about a positive change in the world (Labaree, 2010, p. 49), a second-career teacher may simply find him or herself unemployed and ready to make a midlife career change. Regardless of the reason for becoming a teacher, in my experience (which is confirmed by narratives in the research), I have found that the passion and commitment second-career alternatively certified teachers have for their students, their schools, and their communities is singular—they want to make a difference. Many of the second-career alternatively certified teachers with whom I have worked left small communities to attend college and seek employment in metropolitan areas. For a variety of reasons, they make their way home with a desire to give back to the people and institutions that helped them find whatever margin of success life has afforded them. Toward this end, I feel a personal and professional obligation to work toward uncovering the reasons why some of these

teachers flourish and remain in teaching while others leave feeling ineffective and unproductive.

Data Collection

I used a variety of techniques in collecting data for this basic qualitative study. A basic qualitative study is one in which researchers provide an in-depth view of a problem or issue and construct rich narratives of participants' experiences with this issue (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 23). The open-ended nature of the qualitative method helped me understand how second-career alternatively certified teachers' personal and professional experiences influenced their career decisions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). My data collection entailed observations, document analysis, interviews, and focus groups.

Observation of Induction Process

Virtually all new teachers attend some type of induction workshop(s) prior to the beginning of their first year of teaching. This study's participants were no different. In my initial round of interviews, I asked teachers about their experiences with these types of sessions. In addition, I anticipated the topic of new teacher induction would emerge as a point of conversation during the focus groups. Anticipating these conversations, I thought it would be helpful for me to experience firsthand the process and inter-workings of Anywhere County School District's new teacher orientation sessions. Therefore, prior to the beginning of the school year, I attended a new teacher professional development workshop at one of the system's secondary schools. While there, I interacted with and asked questions of new teachers as well as the educators conducting the workshops. I

took field notes that helped create a context from which I generated questions to use during the two focus groups.

My expectation that the induction process and professional development experienced during the transitional phase from participants' first careers to their second would be a significant point of reflection proved to be unfounded. Most of the seven had few if any memories of having attended such workshops, and of those who did recall participating in sessions like the one I attended, they expressed neither positive nor negative takeaways from the experience. Indeed, they could barely recall any details from the sessions, which should not be that surprising since the workshops had taken place at least 7 years earlier. Nonetheless, observing this session helped me to better understand the induction process in Anywhere County School District.

Interviews

I conducted, recorded, and transcribed semi-structured interviews with each of my seven participants. Using a semi-structured protocol, I asked all participants a broad set of questions and used follow-up questions specific to each participant when I felt more extended explanations were needed. In a qualitative study, interviews are necessary when the researcher is interested in events that occurred in the past (Creswell, 2015, p. 127; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 108). After completing the interviews, as a means of providing clarity and to enhance my understanding of specific topics, I emailed two of the seven participants follow-up questions, to which they promptly provided answers.

Pilot interviews. As I was beginning to develop ideas for this study approximately 2 years ago as a means of completing the requirements of a graduate

course, I interviewed two alternatively certified teachers. I wanted to understand the

personal and professional experiences that influenced their decision to begin teaching.

The first of the two respondents was an English teacher with whom I had worked closely

over a 12-month period. As a result of interviewing her, I learned that prior knowledge

of, and experiences with, the person you are questioning matters. I found myself wanting

to finish her sentences and correct her when she demonstrated what I considered to be

selective memory loss. The experience solidified my decision not to use teachers with

whom I had worked as participants for the study. I also decided to interview participants

from a different district than the one where I currently work.

Following the two interviews, I realized the need to craft my questions in a more

open-ended and conversational style, while at the same time remaining focused and

oriented toward the key topics and issues I learned through my experiences and current

literature on second-career alternatively certified teachers. In addition, I learned that I

would need to evaluate all questions as to whether they served the goal of answering my

study's research questions. The pilot interviews I conducted helped to shape the interview

protocol I used in this study.

Interview questions. Interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Theories influencing questions. Career development theorists assert that a

notable change occurs in one's personal identity when transitioning from one career to

the next. Using interview and focus group questions, I sought to identify what types of

changes occurred with the participants and if or how during their transitions, those

experiences influenced their decision to stay in teaching. I asked participants to explain

what, if any, institutional supports they found within the school environment and how those support systems influenced participants' decision to stay in teaching.

In their experiential and transformative learning theories, Kolb and Mezirow stress the importance of an individual's reflective process in the interpretation and ultimately the shaping of his or her experiences. In each of my study's three research questions, I focus on how the personal and professional experiences of second-career alternatively certified teachers influence their decision to stay in teaching. Therefore, I asked questions of participants that required them to reflect upon and describe how their previous experiences shaped their decision to continue teaching.

Focus Groups

After completing the seven interviews and the subsequent review of transcripts, I arranged two focus groups during which time the second-career alternatively certified teachers had the opportunity to participate in a group discussion with their colleagues. Krueger and Casey (2014) describe a focus group as "a carefully planned discussion planned to obtain perceptions of a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" ("The Focus Group is a Special Type of Group" para. 3). Focus groups use personal interactions to produce new insights that otherwise would remain untapped (Farquhar & Tesar, 2016, p. 262).

Farquhar and Tesar (2016) report on a focus group study in which they observed new teachers discussing their first-year teaching experiences. The reasons they conducted focus groups mirrored my rationale; they used focus groups as a means for exploring group processes and interactions. Farquhar and Tesar sent invitations to recent graduates

of two early childhood education programs. The first 12 participants to respond were selected as participants. Over a span of 9 months, Farquhar and Tesar conducted three focus groups that enabled participants to convey and elaborate on stories that were dependent upon the kind of spontaneous interactions that likely could only be derived from a group experience. In addition, Farquhar and Tesar stressed that information gathered during a focus group may not have been otherwise considered in other types of data gathering. This was true of the focus groups I conducted as well.

Initially I intended to hold one focus group in which the participants would engage in a discussion designed to extend our initial conversations during the seven interviews. However, after transcribing and coding the individual sessions, I realized that even within the small group of participants in my study, two distinct subgroups had emerged. The span of Hannah, Larry, and Haley's first careers had been so short that any commonalities between their first-career experiences and those of the other four would most likely be insignificant. Alternatively, my other four participants had been in their previous careers for at least 10 years. While my intent was not to compare the two subgroups, I believed the natural separation might produce additional data that otherwise would not have been available.

I eventually scheduled two sessions assuming that if the differences in interview data between the two groups of participants did turn out to be significant, holding two separate focus groups would prove useful. Therefore, the titles Group A and Group B are used periodically throughout the remainder of the study to mark the distinction of the two sects of teachers. Group A participants included Kate, Richard, William, and Beatrice,

who had worked 10–26 years in a first career. Hannah, Larry, and Haley, having worked

only 1–2 years in a previous career, were placed together to form Group B.

Table 3

Years Spent in First and Second Careers

Pseudonym	Gender	School	Years in 1st Career	Years in 2nd Career
Hannah	F	High School A	1	18
Larry	M	High School B	1	17
Haley	F	Alternative Setting HS	2	14
Kate	F	Middle School B	10	12
Richard	M	High School D	14	16
William	M	Middle School C	16	16
Beatrice	F	Middle School B	26	7

In comparing the focus group transcripts when analyzing my data, I do not feel

that conducting the two sessions was especially helpful. The only notable differences in

the data produced from the two focus groups was what could logically be expected based

upon the difference in the years spent in first careers. For example, teachers in Group B

were younger when they began teaching, but the data did not indicate that their ages had

any impact on their personal and professional experiences while and after transitioning to

their second careers in teaching. As expected, Group A had more first-career experiences

from which they drew comparisons to those in teaching, but overall this appeared to have

no effect upon their decisions to stay in teaching. In retrospect, holding the two smaller

focus groups, as opposed to the one larger session, may have limited the richness of the

data that I might have collected with all the participants engaging together. Alternatively, it may have allowed me to hear more from the individual participants.

The discussions among the four teachers in Group A were rich in detail and extended into areas that produced insightful data that added to the depth of the study. However, when meeting with the three teachers in Group B, I did not observe the same degree of openness and transparency. Their responses to my questions were shorter and comments regarding their colleagues' experiences or thoughts came, on many occasions, only after I prompted or asked them to respond. When planning the two groups, it escaped my attention that there being only three teachers in the second of the two sessions could affect the group dynamics; it apparently did. If I were to conduct a similar future study, I would not divide the participants into two groups, as it did not seem to be useful in my study.

During the focus groups, I used a semi-structured guide that was based primarily on the study's three research questions. However, spontaneous discussions initiated by participants, especially in Group A, added an unanticipated depth to the sessions. The focus groups worked particularly well in evoking thoughts and feelings that did not emerge during the interviews. In our focus groups, participants were introduced to and interacted with colleagues who had traveled similar paths to reach a common destination. Each of the focus group discussions lasted approximately 2 hours.

Distinction Between Interviews and Focus Groups

I conducted, recorded, and transcribed individual interviews with each of the seven participants. The 13-question semi-structured interview guide is provided as

Appendix A. While I basically followed the interview protocol, I also asked follow-up

questions specific to each participant when I felt extended explanations could add to the

richness of the data. Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, and Ormston (2013) describe why the

qualitative researchers would choose the semi-structured interview above other formats

available to him or her.

> The structure is sufficiently flexible to permit topics to be covered in the order most suited to the interviewee, to allow responses to be fully probed and explored, and to allow the researcher to be responsive to relevant issues raised spontaneously by the interviewee. (p. 141)

During the two focus groups, I also used a semi-structured guide (Appendix B),

but unlike the longer format used during interviews, the one I used during the focus

groups contained only three guiding questions that I created to mirror my three research

questions. Because I wanted the focus groups to evolve into more than just a second

round of interviews, I did not develop the guide until I finished transcribing, coding, and

analyzing the seven interview transcripts. After analyzing the interview data, I had a clear

understanding of the teachers' perceptions regarding their experiences before and after

beginning their second careers in teaching. What I was still lacking was specific personal

and professional events that would provide a cohesive and complete picture of whether a

commonality existed among the participants' experiences. This gap in the data prompted

me to generate questions that could only be answered by participants citing specific

incidents.

In addition to gaining additional data through targeted questioning during the

focus groups, I was surprised to find that in the first of the two sessions, participants, on

more than one occasion, worked to initiate conversations and even asked probing questions of their colleagues to make connections in an attempt to pinpoint commonalities. Only a few minutes into the discussion in which I asked Focus Group A participants about first-career experiences, Richard unexpectedly asked the group, "Did you ever work as a teenager?" to which everyone in the room responded that they had. I was so curious about the implications of the question and its answer that I quickly made a note to be sure to include the question in the follow up session. I was surprised to find that everyone in both focus groups had begun working as a teenager, some as early as 12 years old.

Document Analysis

I collected several documents as part of the research process. Yin (2009) concedes the need for direct interaction with participants when conducting qualitative research, but stresses the importance of artifacts and archival records in the data collection process. Patton (2015) asserts, "Documents prove valuable not only because of what can be the learned directly from them, but also as stimulus for paths of inquiry that can be pursued only through direct observation and interviewing" (p. 294). Documents used in this study include email responses, teacher lesson plans, and teacher handbooks. I used the documents to supplement data obtained through my observation of the school system's new teacher orientation and subsequent interviews and focus groups.

Lesson Planning

Danielson (2013) asserts that lesson planning requires teachers have a clear understanding of local, district, and state expectations for student learning. Furthermore,

teachers must possess the skills to translate these into a coherent plan (p. 15). By asking

participants to share lesson plans, I could evaluate a teacher's management of time,

knowledge, and emphasis of the North Carolina Common Core learning standards, and

his or her differentiation of instructional strategies. Given my experiences as a school

administrator, I have systematically evaluated these types of documents frequently. While

studying the plans, I gained insight into how the participants brought their previous life

and career experiences into the classroom in a meaningful way. My 20 years of

experience in educational administration facilitated my evaluation of a participant's

effectiveness or ineffectiveness in lesson planning.

Teacher Handbook

Each of the study's participants was employed by the Anywhere County School

System and therefore worked under a common set of school board policies. These, as

well as building level policies and procedures, were outlined in the school system's

teacher handbook. In addition to the handbook provided to each of the school system's

teachers, in talking with the Assistant Human Resource Director for Recruitment and

Retention, I discovered the system used a Beginning Teacher (BT) Program handbook.

Below is a list of the handbook's sections with the original source located to the right of

each. When the BT handbook was the only place the information was available, I

distinguished the entry as one that was "Original to Document."

- Mission and Vision Statement   *School System Website*

- School Calendar   *School System Website*

- Central Office Directory   *School System Website*

- Absence/Leave Information   *School System Handbook*

- Use of Annual Leave   *School System Handbook*

- Use of Personal Leave   *School System Handbook*

- Use of Sick Leave   *School System Handbook*

- Employee Assistance   *School System Handbook*

- Voluntary Request for Extracurricular Duties   *School System Handbook*

- BT Requirements for Year 1, 2, and 3   **Original to document**

- Internet Policies   *School System Handbook*

- Standards of Professional Conduct   *NORTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION Policy Manual*

- Teacher Evaluation Information   *North Carolina DPI Website*

- EVAAS   *North Carolina DPI Website*

- Terms and Acronyms   **Original to document**

Acquiring both handbooks in advance allowed me to become familiar with policies to which teachers might refer. During interviews and focus groups, I asked participants about the usefulness of one or both handbooks. Most were unaware of the Beginning Teacher Handbook, which is telling since it was not likely something that they consulted often in the first years of teaching. All said that they rarely, if ever, referenced the system's teacher handbook, but were aware that is was available on the school system's website. As noted above, the only original information provided in the Beginning Teacher Handbook was the terms and acronyms referenced in the document and the meetings, paperwork, and evaluations required of new teachers.

Email Responses

Prior to and after teacher interviews and focus groups I communicated with participants using email. While this format did not allow for valuable non-verbal communication such as one's use of tone and/or body language to relay straightforward logistical information (e.g., times and locations of meetings), the use of email was convenient and appropriate. In addition, I used emails on two separate occasions to ask participants follow-up questions to clarify points of uncertainty I had after listening to and reading through their transcripts.

Data Representation

In Chapter IV, I provide narrative profiles constructed from interviews and focus group data to illustrate how the personal and professional experiences of second-career alternatively certified teachers influence their decision to stay in teaching. In Chapter V, I present a thematic analysis of the data. From the narrative profiles, I examined the collective experiences of the seven alternatively certified teachers in a holistic manner. Like Simmons's (2016) study on how new teachers transition first-career skills into second careers in teaching, I examined the influence that personal and professional experiences have on the reasons second-career teachers stay in the profession. Simmons found that in constructing narrative profiles, he could identify the skills and experiences acquired in first careers that helped participants successfully transition to their new career in teaching (p. 61). As with Simmons, it was important for me to acquire an authentic understanding of participants' personal and professional experiences. Creating narrative profiles helped me accomplish this.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is emergent and recursive and occurs simultaneously with data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 195). In conducting the analysis for this study, I recorded, transcribed, and reviewed the interview transcripts while using a transcription service for documenting the transcripts of the two focus groups. Stake (1995) writes of the importance of transcribing an interview within a few hours of completion to capitalize on important impressions. While I was unable to complete the transcription process within a few hours upon completing each of the interviews, I began transcribing them within 24 hours. In most cases, it took two to three sittings for me to complete the process. I contracted with a service to have the two focus groups transcribed. I triangulated the data using information gathered through interviews, focus groups, and a collection of documents. Through a process of coding, I identified broad categories of information and reflected on these in relation to the literature to develop themes. I then drew from these themes to answer my three research questions.

Coding Transcripts

The first step in data analysis is to create a text database (Creswell, 2015, p. 153). I organized transcripts of audio-recorded interviews and focus groups within a set of Google and Box documents and folders. I transcribed each interview. Personal experience has taught me that by listening to an interview a second time, as I transcribe it, at the very least I will come away with a better understanding of the conversation, and at best I will discover additional perspectives that eluded me during the initial interview. However, as the study progressed, time became a precious commodity. Because of

commitments within and outside the perimeters of the study, it became apparent that

using a transcription service was the logical choice when preparing to transcribe the

contents of the two focus groups.

Next, I coded the interview and focus group transcripts to provide the groundwork

for identifying patterns, categories, relationships, and finally organizing my findings into

three themes that emerged from the data. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) describe coding as

a mystifying term that has unfortunately complicated an already "mysterious" process (p.

199), while Creswell (2015) is almost deceptive in his simplistic description of coding:

> Coding basically involves reviewing the transcript, bracketing a segment of text, and then assigning a code label to the text segment to indicate what the participant is saying. From this point, the qualitative researcher aggregates the codes into a small number of themes, writes a theme passage, organizes the themes into a sequence to tell a story, and then writes an overall narrative for the study. (p. 165)

After coding interview and focus group transcripts, I created a profile for each

participant and documented how his or her responses fell within the broader scheme of

themes. The profiles functioned as a visual aid in my identifying patterns in the data. In

addition, the profiles contributed to my deciding to contact participants via email to

obtain additional information to answer questions that remained unanswered.

Theories influencing coding. Career development theorists study how transitions

from one career to the next affect one's personal and professional identities and

decisions. In addition, they explore the importance of how an employee transitions and

assimilates from one work environment to the next. On the other hand, Kolb and

Mezirow, as part of their experiential learning theory, stress the importance of frames of reference and perspective in defining an individual's experiences.

   Career development theory. While reviewing and coding transcripts, I looked to see if the school environment worked to support the success of second-career alternatively certified teachers. Using the career development theory, Wilkins and Comber (2015) explored teachers' experiences in moving from "established experts to beginning teachers" (p. 1013). Using the career development theory that emphasizes the work environment, I sought to understand how the professional experiences involved in making the transition to a second career in teaching affected alternatively certified teachers' decision to stay in teaching.

   Kolb and Mezirow's learning theories. Learning theorists assert the importance of experience and perspective in learning and growth. Kolb stresses the influence that an individual's "space" or learning environment has on his or her interpretation of new experiences (Kolb et al., 2001, p. 231). Mezirow (1997) discusses how our frames of reference create assumptions from which we understand our experiences (p. 5). In coding transcripts, I explored whether a second-career teacher's lack of an educational frame of reference influenced his or her understanding of new experiences that arose within a new learning environment.

Ethics and Trustworthiness

   I have acted in an ethically responsible manner when conducting my research. I waited until granted IRB approval before engaging in any type of data collection. After receiving approval and prior to meeting with teachers, I communicated the purpose of my

study and my responsibility to them as participants and made sure they all received and signed an informed consent for describing the goals of the study and my expectations of them as participants.

I worked to establish trustworthiness in a variety of ways. First, I triangulated three different types of data: interviews, focus groups, and collected documents. I used member checking to ensure accuracy of all interview transcripts. I met systematically with a debriefer, and kept a reflective journal to keep track of emerging analysis and to identify oversights and blind spots inherent to all researchers. Finally, to increase the trustworthiness of the study, I worked with teachers with whom I had no previous personal or professional interactions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Triangulation of Data

Triangulation of data involves comparing and cross-checking multiple sources of data to discover whether the same themes continue to emerge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 245). Patton (2015) explains, "Triangulation increases credibility and quality by countering the concern that a study's findings are simply an artifact of a single method, source, or investigator's blinders" (p. 674). For example, the theme addressing the assets second-career teachers bring to education was supported across multiple data sources. For instance, I expected participants to spend more time during interviews and focus groups discussing their first careers and how skills gained during those careers translated to the classroom. I based my expectation around alternatively certified teachers being hired in part upon their having earned a degree in an area other than education. It only made sense that knowledge and experience in another field would be an asset upon entering the

classroom. Yet, my questioning the sample about their earlier experiences and knowledge bases yielded very little discussion during both the interviews and focus groups.

I was also surprised to find absent from participants' lesson plans any instructional methodologies that drew upon first-career experiences. The only exception was when Beatrice drew upon her 26 years of experience in architecture and design to discuss text structure when teaching middle school students. Cross-checking data from interviews, focus groups, and lesson plans enriched my understanding of how insignificant first-career experiences were in the success of this group of select second-career teachers.

Member Checking

I implemented member checking into all phases of gathering and analyzing the data to ensure accuracy of my transcriptions and to gain feedback on my initial analyses. Lincoln and Guba (1985) write that member checking is "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" within a research study (as cited in Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008, para. 4). To ensure accuracy, I offered participants access to transcripts, giving them the opportunity to clarify points of concern and/or provide additional information to fill in gaps I may have overlooked during the interview. Only one participant was interested in reviewing her transcript. After reading it, Hannah responded, "Encouraging leaders like you are the reason that folks like me stay the course. Bless you! I have no doubt that your dissertation will be influential. I hope our paths will cross again."

Debriefer

I engaged in periodic peer debriefing sessions with a colleague with whom I have a close personal and professional relationship. He was familiar with my study and watched it develop from its inception. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the process of using a debriefer as one with the purpose of "exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308).

My debriefer understood the history and complex nature of my work with alternatively certified teachers. On more than one occasion he alerted me to areas of potential bias into which I might be venturing. He cautioned me at one point to consider whether my work as an instructional coach might be affecting my analysis of the seven participants and their apparent effectiveness and ineffectiveness as classroom teachers. As an instructional coach, I am responsible for helping to improve the teaching abilities of new teachers who come to the classroom with alternative certifications. Because of my encounters with inexperienced alternatively certified teachers, he urged me to question whether I might be inflating the abilities and accomplishments of the more experienced second-career alternatively certified teachers with whom I was working in this study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) talk about the power a debriefer has to offer a researcher the opportunity for catharsis. Throughout the course of my study, I became passionate about ensuring it reflect the findings accurately and ultimately contribute to a larger body of knowledge. My feelings became heightened and inexplicably linked to the ebb and flow of the research; I needed an emotional outlet. My debriefer intentionally and consistently provided me with an opportunity for catharsis. He not only allowed the

catharsis to occur, but often created a safe space in which it could happen. He allowed me

to express and release my emotions which in turn paved the way for me to continue down

the path of inquiry with a renewed sense of resolve and determination.

Journal

I teach literature; the written word is especially important to me. Reading a

reflective document has the power to remind me of a stance, a feeling, or an inclination I

held at a certain point in time. As a researcher working to be reflective during this

process, maintaining a journal was an important tool in a variety of manners. Ortlipp

(2008) encourages qualitative researchers to engage in the use of journals. She asserts,

> Keeping and using reflective research journals can make the messiness of the
> research process visible to the researcher who can then make it visible for those
> who read the research and thus avoid producing, reproducing, and circulating the
> discourse of research as a neat and linear process. (p. 704)

While I anticipated and hoped that my reflective research journal would be a point

of reference for my questions, ideologies, and next steps, in large part it became more of

a digital placeholder. I recorded the details of when and with whom I conducted

interviews, where and when the interviews would take place, and myriad other important

details and events that occurred throughout the course of the study. In short, the journal

became a working document from which I gained insight as I reflected and acted upon

notes taken during critical points in the research.

An example of how using a journal proved to be an important part of this process

occurred when I received approval, on the 25th of April, from UNCG's Institutional

Review Board (IRB) to begin my research. I documented the date in my journal along

with the notation, *See Modification of Information: Submit Focus Group Questions*. I had

intentionally not included the questions in the original application. I had, however,

explained to the board that, based upon the intent and purpose of the focus group, the

questions could only be generated after the seven participant interviews had been held.

The IRB accepted my explanation, but stipulated, as noted above, that after the interviews

were concluded, the application should be modified to include the focus group questions.

During the next two months, I conducted and transcribed the seven interviews. In

anticipation of the two upcoming focus groups scheduled for August and September, I

began crafting the semi-structured interview guide. It was only after searching through

my journal for an unrelated entry that I noticed the April 25 notation: Modification of

Information. Had I not documented this important note in my journal, I would have

forgotten to submit the questions and would therefore have conducted the focus groups

while in violation of the terms set forth by the IRB.

In addition to reminding me of important tasks related to my research, the journal

served as a catalyst in collecting important data. I felt exhilarated after interviewing

Hannah. She spoke clearly and passionately about why she had stayed in teaching for

almost two decades. Arriving home, I was anxious to begin transcribing our conversation,

but as a procedural matter, I pulled the document that contained her history and logistical

information (see Appendix C). It was then I was reminded that Hannah was a nationally

board-certified teacher; I could not believe that I had forgotten to address this during her

interview. When I realized my omission, and not wanting to stop and type a lengthy

email, I quickly added an entry to my journal: ASK HANNAH ABOUT NBCT! Weeks

later, in reviewing entries, I noticed the notation. In a rush to transcribe the interview, I had forgotten to reconnect with Hannah. I emailed her immediately asking specific questions about when and how she completed the certification process. I closed by asking her to feel free to share anything about the process and/or its relationship to a second-career teacher. She responded by writing, "Maybe, subconsciously, I wanted to feel 'validated,' but I knew plenty of great teachers who did not immediately pass. I fully understood the subjective nature of the scoring . . . I like a challenge." Hannah's response triggered my including two important areas during the focus group. Both the words, *validated* and *challenge* were descriptors other participants had used when describing themselves, and therefore became significant in subsequent coding, and eventually the semi-structured protocol used in focus groups.

Researcher Positionality

Working as an instructional coach, I have gained an insider's view of the challenges faced by alternatively certified teachers as they attempt to become successful practitioners. These professional experiences helped shape my interest in studying the reasons second-career alternatively certified teachers choose to stay in teaching. However, in working closely with the same type of population that served as participants in my study, I was diligent to avoid bringing an insider bias to my study. Chavez (2008) writes about how an insider bias can be ". . . overly positive or negligent for those who share a common knowledge or experience with participants manifesting as a rose-colored observational lens or blindness to the ordinary" (p. 475). Likewise, Labaree (2002) asserts,

> The advantage [insiders] have in knowing the community may be weakened or strengthened based on the ways in which our various social identities may shift during interaction with participants, or based on the degree of perceived or real closeness to participants as a result of shared experience or social identities. (p. 117)

As an insider, it was important to me that I conduct my research in such a way that my previous and current working relationships with alternatively certified teachers would not facilitate a "blindness to the ordinary." Working toward this goal, I established strict perimeters in two areas of the research. First, I excluded teachers with whom I had any professional or personal knowledge of or experiences from the original list of potential candidates forwarded to me from the Anywhere County School System. Second, I was intentional and guarded in the language I used in creating interview and focus group questions. Certain words and phrases target predictable reactions from this population. For instance, the phrases "real-world," "project-based," or "inquiry-based" send teachers down a predictable path in which they feel compelled to explain the relevance of what they have done, are doing, or will do in the foreseeable future in their classrooms. It would have been easy for me to have worded questions in a manner that would have led to predictable outcomes when asking participants to describe specific aspects of their professional experiences. In working with teachers with whom I had no familiarity and by operating from a carefully worded protocol, I was intentional in my attempts to remain as objective as possible while collecting data. It was of paramount importance to me that I allow my previous experiences and knowledge to help instead of hinder me from uncovering rich detail about the experiences of alternatively certified teachers.

Pope, Ziebland, and Mays (2000) write, "At its heart, good qualitative analysis relies on the skill, vision and integrity of the researcher doing that analysis" (p. 116). With vision and integrity, I attempted to find answers to why second-career teachers with alternative certifications stay in teaching. I believe the personal and professional experiences of these educators are key in helping to establish best practices that will facilitate smooth transitions to successful careers for incoming alternatively certified teachers. I hope this study's findings will add significantly to the limited body of knowledge available on the retention of alternatively certified teachers.

Limitations

The main source of data for this study came from the interviews of seven participants and two subsequent focus groups in which they participated. Therefore, a limitation of the study was the sample size. Although I constructed extensive narrative profiles for each, the number of participants is relatively small. A second potential limitation was using 4 years as a mark of longevity. After I selected the participants, 7 years was the shortest span, and Kate's experiences, the 7-year teacher, did not seem to differ in any significant way to those of teachers with relatively longer tenures; yet, 4 years remains a relatively short period of time to use for this type of research. Finally, I conducted the study in North Carolina where an alternatively certified teacher has 3 years to advance from an alternative teaching certificate to a professional one. During the past 7 years spent working with alternatively certified teachers, my experience has been that a successful transition from an alternative to a professional license has, without exception,

been an indicator of an alternatively certified teachers' commitment to remain in the profession.

Perhaps the most significant limitation of this study is the subjective nature of how success was determined in the selection of participants. The human component (in this case, the administrative team from the Anywhere County School System and myself) could have been replaced with objective, measurable data. For instance, I could have chosen to determine a teacher's success by evaluating his or her students' standardized test scores. However, Boyd et al. (2006) remind us that "different pathways into teaching lead teachers into schools with different characteristics and different students" (p. 187). In a district as large as the Anywhere County School System, there are significant differences in the composition of student populations and therefore a substantial difference in student performance as measured by a single, state-mandated test. To determine teacher success using a standard that is equal but not equitable would be problematic and contrary to my better judgement.

Summary of Methods

At the beginning of this chapter, I introduced the seven second-career alternatively certified teachers who participated in this study. The telling of their personal and professional journeys provided rich qualitative data that served as the foundation of this study. As the chapter progressed, I explained the sources in which I collected supplemental data and subsequent parameters that I set and procedures that I followed to ensure the content was coherent and the integrity consistent throughout the research process.

In Chapter IV, I begin by presenting a detailed profile for each of the seven second-career alternatively certified teachers with whom I worked during this study. As a result of their interviews and focus groups, I discovered patterns from which I identified nine categories and three encompassing themes. I use the middle portion of the chapter to provide insights into the data analysis process that I used to arrive at my conclusions. I end the chapter with a brief introduction of the findings that I explore in greater detail in Chapter V.

CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANT PROFILES AND DATA ANALYSIS STRATEGIES

Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of a sample of successful second-career alternatively certified teachers who stayed in teaching beyond the 4 years required to obtain a professional license in North Carolina, and to determine if commonalities existed that could assist efforts to increase retention rates for alternatively certified teachers. I begin Chapter IV with a profile of each participant. I follow this with a more detailed discussion of my data analysis than I provided in my methods chapter, including the processes I used in coding and the subsequent categories that I identified. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief introduction of the three key themes that I discuss at length in Chapter V.

Participant Profiles

In this section, I provide background information about the seven second-career alternatively certified teachers who participated in this study. I assigned each teacher a pseudonym for maintaining the confidentiality of individuals as well as that of the Anywhere County School System. The participants' journeys are unique and provide data to help me answer the research questions I posed in this study. In looking for commonalities among their narratives, I strove not to lose sight of the individual nature of each of their stories as they unfolded and eventually coalesced to provide answers as to

why second-career alternatively certified teachers, at least the group of them that I studied, stay in teaching.

Hannah

Hannah earned her undergraduate degree in communication disorders. As an audiologist, she hoped to someday work with adolescents. As part of the program of study for her undergraduate degree, Hannah was assigned an internship at the university speech clinic where she occasionally assisted college athletes who needed help preparing for interviews; however, most of her time was spent with Asian American students as they worked to acclimate themselves to the English language. With plans to become an audiologist, she began applying to graduate schools, but when Hannah met her future husband on a blind date during her senior year in college, her focus quickly changed.

During college, Hannah worked as a telemarketer, so when she returned home the summer after graduation, her taking a job at a family member's company seemed to be a natural fit. The business handled damaged and recalled products for retail manufacturers. Hannah began working in customer service and then moved to a position in the sales department. As an undergraduate, she had taken many communications classes that proved to be helpful when corresponding with customers over the phone and at trade shows, but she missed working with those who struggled to effectively communicate. Hannah had been employed by the family business for just a little over a year when she realized the job was not what she envisioned as her life's work.

When Hannah considered her career options, she remembered that in high school, friends had compared her to one of their favorite teachers. So, while planning her

wedding, she began contacting local universities to inquire into programs that would allow her to begin teaching. Unlike most of the participants in this study, Hannah began taking courses to earn her certificate and licensure prior to beginning her teaching career. She attended summer classes before being hired at a middle school the following fall where she taught students with special needs in a self-contained classroom. The Title I magnet school where she taught served a majority population of low socioeconomic, minority students. After 2 years at the middle school level, Hannah moved to teach social studies at a high school where two of her colleagues had transferred at the beginning of the previous school year. She stayed for only a year before moving to a school closer to her home. After teaching and coaching the swim team for 4 years, she landed at a large high school in the Anywhere County School System where she remained.

Hannah earned her master's degree in a liberal studies program with a global concentration at a prestigious local, private university. Hannah is nationally board certified and at the time of this study, taught advanced placement psychology at Anywhere County High School as well as online courses for the North Carolina Virtual Public-School Systems. Hannah was 41 years old, married, and had two children ages 17 and 14.

William

In 1980, North Carolina State University was the only institution in the United States that offered an undergraduate degree in industrial engineering, specializing in furniture manufacturing and management. Coming out of high school, William was a self-described home-boy and was thankful that he would only have to travel a few hours

to earn his unusual, yet highly valued degree in a state known for its production of quality furniture. But after spending 16 years in the furniture business, he decided it was time for a change.

At 38 years old, William shared with his sister that he was considering a change in career; she suggested teaching. His sister taught at a middle school where one of her colleagues was preparing to take an extended maternity leave. William's sister insisted that if he didn't like the experience, he would be under no commitment to stay; he could always return to furniture. After finishing the school year teaching eighth grade, the principal suggested that William consider returning in the fall under the lateral entry program. He began taking classes that summer and entered a sixth-grade classroom the following August where he has taught for the last 16 years.

For 15 of the 16 years, William taught either science or a combination of science and math classes. Although he earned his national board certification in middle school science, at the time of this study William was completing his first year exclusively teaching math classes. He was transferred to the math position based upon his students' exceptionally high scores on the state's end of the year standardized math assessment. In addition to teaching, William officiates many of the county's sporting events. He served as a middle school football and basketball coach before beginning graduate school. After spending a decade in education, he earned his master's degree in educational administration.

William attributes much of his success to his sister who taught next door to him for most of his 16 years. In addition to his having a guiding hand teaching next door to

him, located down the hallway was William's sixth-grade math teacher who remains

devoted to his success. Education has turned out to be a family business; both William's

daughter and daughter-in-law teach in the Anywhere County School System. His

daughter followed in her father's footsteps earning a double degree in math and science

education, and his daughter-in-law teaches at a K-5 elementary school. At the time of this

study, William was 54 years old, married, and had two children ages 29 and 27.

Haley

When Haley began working toward earning degrees in both nursing and English,

her undergraduate advisor discouraged her. She was told that nursing was too demanding

and the class load too structured to be paired with an English major, so Haley turned her

attention to earning an undergraduate and master's degree in English. With a strong

desire to write, Haley joined the team at Bank of America where she hoped to quickly

work her way into a division where she could put her English degree to use—writing

manuals and even teaching courses on how to compose important documents was Haley's

end goal.

After spending over a year in Bank of America's collections department, she

became bored. Considering a move away from the company, the business offered her the

option of working four 10-hour days, which in turn would allow her to teach a Friday

morning freshman English class at a local university. Another year came and went with

no change at Bank of America. In what she described as a somewhat abrupt manner,

Haley decided to leave the company, at which point she began substitute teaching in local

public schools.

A long-term maternity leave allowed Haley to begin teaching in January where she remained until early May. She went into the classroom thinking that if it worked out for her, she would begin the process of earning an alternative teaching certificate. The stability of a nine-to-five job and the benefits that teaching would offer were appealing after her unsuccessful attempt to find a home at Bank of America. In the long run, the teacher she was filling in for chose not to return to teaching at the end of her maternity leave, and Haley was offered the position.

When applying for her alternative certificate, Haley had her heart set on working with second or third graders, but because her undergraduate degree was in English, her eligibility required that she teach at the sixth-grade level or above. Haley's first full-time position was teaching English and social studies to sixth graders. Thirteen years later, as her oldest child prepared to begin kindergarten in the school system in which her family lived, Haley decided that it was time for a change. In the summer of the same year, she accepted a position teaching ninth grade at a high school in the Anywhere County School System.

The high school at which Haley began teaching was an alternative setting from the traditional ninth through 12th-grade schoolhouse. The students with whom she worked were all either rising eighth graders who at some point had been retained or eighth graders who were not scheduled to be promoted to the ninth grade. She spent the first semester providing remediation in the four academic core subjects, and the second semester she taught a stripped-down version of the ninth-grade curriculum. Haley's move

to the new school coincided with its inaugural year. At the time of this study, Haley was 44 years old, married, and had two children ages four and six.

Beatrice

After graduating with a degree in communications, Beatrice's father convinced her to return to school and obtain her licensure in architecture. For the next 26 years, Beatrice was part of a tight-knit family business where she worked in architecture and design. While much of her time is now spent working on lesson plans to teach her seventh-grade English language arts students, she still takes on small design jobs for special clients.

Beatrice is quick to share that had there not been people in her life who supported and encouraged her to complete her studies to earn an undergraduate degree, she would never have had her first, let alone her second career. While she was never passionate about working in design, she found that she was especially good at paying attention to the smaller aspects of architecture. Beatrice found her niche working in what the business refers to as divisions eight and ten. It was here that she specialized in working with windows and doors.

Beatrice's sister avoided working in the family business after high school and became a registered nurse. Nearing the end of her career in medicine, it was she who suggested the two sisters consider teaching. Encouraged by a friend who taught in a neighboring school district, the two decided to substitute teach. After only two months, Beatrice and her sister began the process toward earning their alternative teaching certificates.

Beatrice admits that having to play the role of new-kid-on-the-block during her first year was a challenge; she was accustomed to being the boss. Knowing what to do in the case of a fire drill, adapting to learning to use an outdated copying machine, and planning lessons were all challenges for Beatrice during her first months of teaching. But, by year two, she was ready to move beyond the basics. As a matter of fact, in grade level meetings, Beatrice began pointing out inconsistencies in how her team was functioning and started asking hard questions regarding why her fellow teachers seemed unwilling to take the initiative to move students beyond what she described as an average and mediocre performance in learning.

Her perseverance paid off. Since joining the Anywhere County School System, Beatrice and her team's students have consistently achieved some of the highest scores on the school district's end-of-year standardized tests. At the time of this study, Beatrice was working toward earning her master's degree in educational leadership. She was 56 years old, married, and had two adopted children ages 23 and 26.

Kate

As a child, when Kate's father would pull the family's atlas from the bookshelf, she would begin to cry; she knew they were moving—again. After attending three different high schools as a teenager, Kate spent the summer between her senior year and college as a foreign exchange student in France. Her plan was to begin law school immediately after graduating from college with a degree in political science. But as school loans started to mount, Kate realized she would need to take time off between her undergraduate and graduate studies to begin paying back school loans.

It was a friend who invited Kate to apply for what was advertised in the local newspaper as a High Management Position at the city's high school. Although she didn't get the job, one of the elementary principals who sat on the interview committee later called Kate to offer her a position as a teaching assistant. The individual whose position she would fill was scheduled to be out of work through November, just long enough for Kate to decide if working in an elementary school was something she would enjoy. The assistant never returned and 3 months turned into 10 years.

For 6 years, Kate worked in the same third-grade classroom as a teaching assistant. Her next 3 years were spent in second grade, and then she was asked to return to third grade to train a new teacher who had been hired the semester after graduating from college. The school's administrative team was concerned that he might face some difficulty with classroom management. Working with a 4-year degree, Kate was paid a teaching assistant's salary for a total of 10 years.

It was at the 7-year mark in working as a teacher's assistant that Kate's principal began telling her that she needed her own classroom. It finally began to ring true when Kate's father broke the numbers down and showed her how the difference in what she was making as an assistant and what she could make as a teacher would more than pay for her to return to school and earn a teaching certificate. It was finally a neighbor who encouraged Kate to apply for a teaching position in the school where she taught. She was so convinced that Kate would get the position that she promised to carpool with her for the first year. Kate was not only offered a job on the spot, but because of the 10 years of classroom experience that Kate was bringing with her, the principal allowed her to

choose which class and which grade level she would like to teach. It was here that Kate spent the next 5 years teaching fourth graders.

Kate's love of travel and passion for teaching has opened doors for her to teach for extended periods of time in different countries. At the time of this study, she was back in the United States teaching seventh-grade social studies in the Anywhere County School System. In her 50s and single, she still has several countries in which she would like to teach and was quick to point out that she has never completely ruled out the idea of returning to school and earning a degree in law.

Larry

Larry's dream of becoming a medical doctor began to unravel as early as his freshman year in college. While he spent his afternoons in a biology lab, his friends played ultimate frisbee. The decision seemed a simple one to make at the time; by his sophomore year, he had switched his major to psychology. An internship during Larry's senior year placed him at an alternative school that served approximately 120 students in grades six through 12. He was assigned a handful of students as a quasi-caseload, and was given access to students' academic and personal records. It was during this time that Larry first considered a career in counseling, a position he thought might include his working within a larger academic setting.

The internship was intended to run through the fall semester of Larry's senior year. He enjoyed the work so much that he requested to stay on with the school through the end of the school year. Upon graduation, Larry knew that he would need to pursue a master's degree to work in most of the areas in which he was interested. Not certain that

he was ready to commit the next 2–4 years to academia, he gave himself a year to explore what career opportunities were available. The following year found Larry spending his days working in a furniture factory and his evenings thinking about the students with whom he had grown so attached during his college internship.

Larry's mother retired as a teacher from the Anywhere County School System. It was she who was approached on a summer afternoon in the local grocery store by a friend who worked in the school system's Human Resource department. There were multiple positions for special education teachers open at both middle and high schools. As a personable, eager, young man with a degree in psychology, the red carpet was rolled out for Larry. He ultimately decided on a middle school position from which four teachers had resigned during the previous school year. In a self-contained classroom, Larry worked primarily with students diagnosed with behavioral disorders.

At the time of this study, Larry had concluded his 17th year in teaching. He now teaches science and math as an inclusion teacher in one of the system's high schools. His wife also works in the school system as an assistant principal at an elementary school; her mother was the school receptionist at the middle school where Larry was first hired in 1999. He and his wife have a 7-year-old son and a 2-year-old daughter.

Richard

Most of us recall where we were and what we were doing on Tuesday, September 11, 2001, but our memories are most likely not as vivid as Richard's; he was working for a major airline on the day the twin towers collapsed.

A well-known airline company hired Richard a month after he graduated from college with a degree in business administration. He thought his future was set. Richard and his wife traveled extensively. With each passing year, he became more convinced that he would put in his 30 years with the airline and begin drawing retirement while still a young man. But, 14 years and two children later, much had changed within the airline industry. The company Richard worked for had streamlined its service centers to facilitate an unpublicized yet imminent merger with a larger company. Richard was now working every holiday, every weekend, and most evenings.

In the spring of 2001, convinced he needed to make a career change, Richard became aware of what was described to him as a lateral entry program in which individuals with college degrees were being hired to teach in public schools. During his time spent with the airline, one of Richard's most enjoyable experiences had been working as a training instructor for new employees. The move to teaching seemed to be a logical change and one that he began actively pursuing. An interview with the principal of a local high school in mid-July went well, but the position was offered to a certified teacher.

Monday morning, September 10, 2001, Richard had put his two sons on the school bus, sent his wife to work, and had just laid his infant daughter down for her nap when the phone rang. It was the principal of the school where he had interviewed earlier in the summer. There had been a problem with the new hire, and the principal was calling to offer Richard the job. He was to report to the Human Resource department at the Anywhere County School System on Tuesday and show up for work the next Monday. It

was the following morning, while on his way to complete his paperwork that Richard

first heard the reports of the terrorist attack over his car radio.

In the ensuing 16 years, both of Richard's sons have graduated from college, and

at the time of this study, his daughter was beginning her senior year of high school. His

oldest son teaches math for the Anywhere County School System, and 2 years ago,

Richard's wife, a registered nurse, began teaching as a second-career alternatively

certified teacher.

Grouping of Participants

When selecting participants for this study, I used purposeful criterion-based

sampling. I targeted four key areas as a guide in the selection process. The first was that

each participant be a second-career alternatively certified teacher. For purposes of the

study, I defined a second-career teacher as one who holds a 4-year degree in an area other

than education and had worked for a minimum of one year in a position other than

education. Each of the study's seven participants met the criteria, but the years of

experience in their first careers varied from Beatrice's 26 years to Larry and Hannah

spending less than 2 years working in a position prior to their coming to teaching.

I was unaware of this difference until I sat with the teachers and began to ask

questions. After the seven interviews, the data indicated a very distinct gap that separated

the teachers; four of the seven had worked from 10 to 26 years in a first career while the

remaining three had worked only 1–2 years in a prior position. This unanticipated

difference in length of first careers led me to question whether it would affect their

perceptions about teaching as a second career and their subsequent responses to questions during the upcoming focus group.

In considering whether to break the group of seven into two groups based upon the gap in their years spent in a position prior to teaching, I weighed the pros and cons of holding two focus groups as opposed to one. Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008) write,

> The composition of a focus group needs great care to get the best quality of discussion. There is no 'best' solution to group composition, and group mix will always impact on the data, according to things such as the mix of ages, sexes and social professional statuses of the participants. (p. 237)

I ultimately decided scheduling two sessions would have very little to no negative outcome on the data, and if the difference in data between the two did turn out to be significantly different, the advantage of holding a second focus group would render important implications for this study.

Prior to the focus groups, participants were unaware of the identities of the other six teachers. Because all were employed by the same school system, it was likely that they might have been acquainted and/or have worked with one or more of the other participants. It was not imperative that their identities remain anonymous prior to the focus groups, but not having the opportunity to discuss potential issues or questions with one another ahead of time facilitated a greater likelihood of an organic and rich exchange of ideas and experiences.

Data Analysis: Codes and Categories

The first step I took in my data analysis was creating a portrait of each participant. I thought these were important because understanding the unique personal and professional characteristics of each teacher is essential to appreciate the commonalities that emerged because of their individual interviews and the two succeeding focus groups. It was also useful to simply provide a snapshot of some of the people who decided to pursue teaching as a second career. I used data collected through individual interviews, focus groups, and document analysis in the coding process. When writing about the role that patterns play in coding, Saldaña (2016) asserts, "A pattern suggests a multiplicity of elements gathered into the unity of a particular arrangement . . . As qualitative researchers, we seek patterns as somewhat stable indicators of humans' ways of living" (p. 6). As patterns surfaced while reading transcripts of the seven interviews and two focus groups, I began a process that supported a triangulation of my data collection. In Table 4, I provide an overview of the nine codes that I used in this study and examples of direct quotes made by the participants during interviews and focus groups to support those codes.

After cross checking multiple readings of interview and focus group transcripts, I collapsed the codes into three central categories to organize my data: working environment, professional experience, and personal mission (Table 5). While not intentional, it is also not surprising that the three categories correspond in number and logic to the study's three research questions since the questions I asked during both the

interviews and focus groups were structured to solicit data that would provide meaningful

answers to my questions.

Table 4

Codes

Codes	Examples of Supporting Evidence
Self-identifiers	I'm very much an idealist; I'm old school; I still don't consider myself a real teacher; and, I'm not someone who is afraid to ask for help.
Path to teaching	I worked as a teaching assistant for 7 years; my sister asked, *Why don't you come try teaching*; and, a teacher friend said, *Hey come sub for us?*
First experiences in teaching	That bed was on fire and I had to lay down on it; nothing prepares you for that first day, I mean nothing; and, okay, we've got books, we've got pencils and paper; now what?
Classroom management	If you're not going to survive, it's because of classroom management; and, teaching has everything to do with classroom management.
Mentoring	She would literally teach me what I was going to teach them the next day; I didn't have a good one, but I knew that was what I needed; and, let's be honest—mentoring doesn't work.
Colleagues	I was 40; they were 22. I already felt out of place; and, there was no talking, there was no sharing.
Mission / Purpose	I want what I do to have enough of an impact that they want to continue to learn; and I want to be better every day and, I want to help the kids do the same.
Alternative certification	You're asked to wear a lot of hats very quickly; and, alternatively certified teachers find out that what they were doing before was easier and they ask, *Why am I doing this?*
Teaching as a second career	If you can afford to do it, why not? and, it all depends on a person's background and why they're interested in doing it.

Table 5

Categories

Categories
Working Environment
Professional Experience
Personal Mission

Themes and Findings

To begin to understand why second-career alternatively certified teachers remain in the profession, I asked teachers to share personal and professional experiences to determine if commonalities existed among their narratives. As the participants reflected on their journeys, I identified three themes that seemed consistent across their experiences (see Table 6).

In examining the themes that I saw in the participants' stories, it became apparent that the professional and personal aspects of the teachers' lives were interconnected to the point of their not being able to discuss the personal without the professional bleeding into the account of the experience and vice versa. For example, in studying the second of the third themes, *Personal temperament shapes reaction to first-year professional experiences,* I had my first glimpse into how the decision of the group of second-career alternatively certified teachers to stay in teaching had little to do with the positive or negative nature of personal and professional experiences had during their first years in teaching. Rather, it reflected the lack of a specific type of personal and professional

experiences during the first career, namely experiences that provided a sense of personal meaning and fulfillment.

Table 6

Themes

Themes	Findings
The working environment simultaneously supports and dissuades teachers.	Mentors are varied but essential for longevity. The stigma is less than anticipated.
Personal temperament shapes reaction to first-year professional experiences.	Experiences are unique. Stumbles are common during year one Challenges range in extremity and nature.
The assets second-career teachers bring to education are counterintuitive to what logic suggests.	An absence of meaning and purpose are present in teachers' first careers. Search for fulfillment drives teachers to second career.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a framework from which I will expand upon and develop the themes and findings I presented in Table 6 in the following chapter. I used a large portion of this chapter to provide a descriptive profile for each of the seven participants. Understanding the nature of their personal and professional experiences helps to provide a foundation from which I can answer my three research questions. The latter part of the chapter was devoted to explaining the process I used to analyze the data, expanding upon the brief discussion of data analysis I presented in my methodology chapter. Understanding the approach I used for the analysis is equally as important as

comprehending the nature of the participants' experiences. The two together work to

facilitate the findings I present in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

Overview

In this chapter, I discuss the three themes I identified after analyzing the data from my interviews, two focus groups, supplemental documents, and observations. Each speaks to the question of why second-career alternatively certified teachers stay in teaching past the 4 years required to obtain a professional teaching certificate. While my intent was not to uncover reasons explaining why alternatively certified teachers leave the profession, the stories of how the seven participants survived the difficult first years of teaching and decided to stay in the classroom potentially serve to shed light on why so many decide to leave. I end the chapter by presenting a list of notable characteristics shared among the seven.

Themes

In the sections that follow, I discuss the three themes that correspond to the categories listed in Table 5. Creswell (2015) writes that only after codes have been aggregated into categories is the qualitative researcher ready to report themes (p. 165). In the subsections, I support the themes by introducing findings that were common and/or representative of the participants' personal and professional experiences that occurred before and after beginning teaching. Much of the content within the following pages is drawn from direct quotes provided by the participants. Ritchie et al. (2013) encourage the

practice of using direct quotes, or what they refer to as "the structure of an account as in discourse or conversation" in the analysis of a theme(s) in qualitative research (p. 202).

Theme #1: The Working Environment Simultaneously Supports and Dissuades Teachers

As is the case for many second-career employees, upon transitioning to a new career in teaching, the seven participants found themselves moving from positions of established experts (in some cases) to ill-prepared novices. This was especially true for the participants from Group A who each had spent over a decade in his or her first career. A school building, by nature, should provide a nurturing environment for its inhabitants; yet, the stories told by the participants portray a polarizing picture. In the subsections that follow, I discuss how the school environment both supported and dissuaded the seven participants through the support or absence of colleagues and mentors, as well as the stigma that is inherent to second-career alternatively certified teachers.

Colleagues. Among the sample, their combined experience in the classroom exceeded 100 years. They had worked with dozens of principals, lead teachers, mentors, custodians, and hundreds of friendly and some not-so-friendly colleagues. The metamorphosis that career development theorists believe an individual undergoes while transitioning from one career to the next is shaped, in large part, by the support or lack thereof demonstrated by the colleagues with whom he or she finds him or herself surrounded (Jorissen, 2003, p. 43).

Hannah, the veteran among the group, began teaching in 1999 when alternative certification was a relatively new phenomenon for schools in North Carolina. Few

teachers had heard of the practice, let alone felt qualified or inclined to approve or accept

it as sound educational policy. Haley recalls her colleagues thinking she was somewhat of

an anomaly: "There were a couple of teachers that were a lot older than I was who had

been doing it forever. It took a little for them to see that I wasn't just there for a year and

gone."

Perceived as an outsider by many of the teachers in his building, William

remembers having to learn that there were some things that colleagues didn't appreciate

hearing. For instance, when during the course of a regular school day teachers would

discuss how difficult their jobs were, initially William felt compelled to explain that

compared to his experiences in the furniture business, teaching was physically a much

easier job.

> Teachers would ask, "Isn't this hard?' and I'd say, "Actually no. Not compared to what I'm used to doing. This is physically a lot easier job" . . . for instance, there were a couple of days when our custodians were out and so we needed to empty our own trash cans. When teachers complained about that not being *their* jobs, I told 'em they needed to go to the real world and see what the real world did and then they'd appreciate what they had.

Working as a high school inclusion teacher, Larry's first teaching assignment was

to co-teach with the regular educator science teacher. But, as he remembers it, co-

teaching rarely, if ever, happened.

> My first year, the teacher was not willing to give me any rope. This was before everybody had smart boards and all that stuff, but she had a 30-foot cord and a USB, and I would just sit there and click the slide show . . . I had back-to-back biology classes with her, and so for three hours, I would advance slides.

During both Kate's interview and then again during our focus group, she discussed how early in her career she had learned that not all colleagues were willing to help a bewildered, second-career alternatively certified teacher. "You grab your help from people that are willing to give it. I learned who to direct my questions to and it usually wasn't the people I worked with. It ended up being people who were welcoming in their personalities."

When discussing their interactions with colleagues, there were no stories of teachers refusing to help the participants during their first years in teaching; however, outside the assistance provided by their mentors, there were few instances of support systems found in the work environment or within their community of colleagues to help ensure their successful transition into teaching.

The sample's collective experience in finding little to no support in place to meet the specific needs of alternatively certified second-career teachers was reflected in supplemental data gathered from my examination of the Anywhere County School System's Beginning Teacher Handbook and observation of the induction process held prior to the beginning of the school year. The agenda for the Beginning Teacher Training was heavily weighted in departmental specific information. For example, the Supervisor of Special Services discussed the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of Individualized Education Plans and the protocol for attending meetings during which time the plans were created. The system's technology coordinator explained policies and procedures which addressed the appropriate nature of websites as well as how to report cyber bullying. At no point during my observation of the induction process was the issue

of alternative certification and/or second-career teachers broached. The agenda seemed perfunctory in nature and somewhat overwhelming in content for the group of beginning teachers, likely even more so for those without a formal background in education.

As I read the school system's teacher handbook, the absence of any mention of formal or informal support systems at the system or building level was glaring. It did, however, contain a section on how interactions between beginning teachers and their mentors should be documented. This suggests that the school system perceives the mandated alliance established between mentor and beginning teacher as a special type of collegial relationship.

Mentors. Without regard to certification, North Carolina assigns all new teachers at least one mentor each of their first 3 years in teaching. When asked to talk about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of their mentors, there was no middle ground with the participants. Among the group, their perspectives were polarized concerning their mentors' impact on their first years in teaching; they were either very supportive or unhelpful. When I asked Beatrice if she remembered her first mentor, she responded flatly, "Yes, and it was horrible." Not that I needed clarification, but I continued by asking her if she was assigned a good mentor. "Nope, but I knew that was what I needed."

During the focus group, I asked teachers if there was anything specifically that helped shape their first years in the classroom. Almost instantly Richard responded, "Without a doubt, the lady that I started working with in the business department; that made all the difference in the world for me." In his interview, Richard spent a great deal

of time discussing the significance of the time he spent with his mentor. "She was right next door to me. At the end of the day, she would literally teach me what I was gonna do the next day. She would show me and teach me. I would stay one day behind her." Yet, as important as the instructional component was to the participants, the trust and ultimately the friendships that developed between them and their mentors may hold even more significance when measuring their successes in the long run. Richard ended by saying, "She and I would laugh, and we would cuss; we would laugh and do whatever we had to do to get our minds right."

Hannah described a good mentor/mentee relationship as having an "us" mentality. "It's like, we're going to do this together." Kate, who taught overseas for an extended time, agreed. She stressed that mentoring in its purest form is more organic than bureaucratic. In describing the experiences of a new teacher in one of her overseas teaching assignments, she offered that the country ". . . had no mentors, none of the things that we have set up. And yet, Joe was successful because we were his support system; people just stepped in. They weren't paid or called a mentor."

William questioned the fundamental structure of mentoring programs. He felt strongly that they are designed for young, not second-career teachers. William had three mentors in 3 years. He described his first as helpful. His second mentor was a head football coach who was more interested in collecting the hundred dollars for serving in the position than he was in helping a new teacher. "He would send stuff over for me to sign with dates that we hadn't even met. When I asked him about it, he would just say, 'Sign it.' I didn't want to make waves. I was the freshman." It was well into William's

third year of teaching when the Anywhere County School System inadvertently found out

that he had not been assigned a mentor that year. One was quickly named near the end of

the school year, just in time to complete 10 months' worth of meetings in a few weeks.

William, like other participants, found his true mentors in the form of peers who invested

in him as a person, not a name assigned and handed down through two levels of

administration. In addition to his sister who taught next door to him, a professor of

technology took William under his wing. His description of his experience with this

professor is telling.

> I didn't know how to turn the computer on. All the kids in class were looking at
> me like I was a jokester, but there wasn't anything funny about it . . . It was a one-
> hour class, but I would spend three hours every day (in the summer) with the
> professor. He had another class come in after me and he would let me stay and
> listen to the class again.

Larry's mentor materialized in the form of a teaching assistant. Larry was

assigned five mentors during his first 3 years. "The last mentor they gave me was new to

the school; I actually mentored her . . . My mentor, the person who took care of me, was

my teaching assistant. She knew what I needed before I asked." Larry's assistant and all

the mentors who the participants spoke of as true heroes were those who actively sought

ways to support and encourage the new teachers. One of the many things that the

sample's mentors provided was advice and support on how to overcome the stigma that is

often attached to alternatively certified teachers.

Stigma. In an ideal setting, a beginning teacher is surrounded by supportive

colleagues. In a less than perfect setting, a lack of support lowers a teacher's self-

confidence which in turn amplifies a stigma that is typically inherent to second-career

alternatively certified teachers. These teachers enter the building with no student teaching

experience. Unless it was a tool used in a previous career, most had never even operated a

copier much less a laminating machine. They are also often unfamiliar with education

jargon and organizational structures and operating procedures in schools. This obvious

lack of experience, with what traditionally trained teachers see as fundamental in

performing the arts of their craft, enhances the stigma conveyed upon alternatively

certified teachers. Middle-age, second-career teachers look as though they should know

how to laminate letters for a bulletin board. When they don't, and then ask for help, they

are often met with unspoken, yet undeniable judgement. Beatrice remembered,

> I didn't want everyone to think I was struggling right off the bat. We don't feel
> comfortable with anyone coming in our rooms, much less our going out into the
> school. Nothing prepares you for the first day, I mean nothing . . . There's no
> playbook; there's no rule book. You're winging it. You're just winging it.

Haley recalled the day her professor of education began handing out student

teaching assignments.

> I got so excited, and I'm like, 'I'm going to get to student teach? This is
> awesome!' And she's like, "No. You don't get to. You're lateral entry. You
> already have a class, don't you?' And I thought, so the people that have been
> taught how to do this get to practice. The rest of us, not so much.

William admitted that even after 16 years of teaching, he still walks around with

what he described as a chip on his shoulder related to not being able to overcome the

stigma. "I'm not a real teacher. I have to prove every day that I [deserve] to stand beside

of you," he said, nodding in my direction during a focus group. But William was quick to explain that his negative attitude about his entry into teaching didn't necessarily stem from the attitudes of other teachers regarding his ability, or lack thereof. "I say it of myself; I'm not a real teacher, y'all went through 4 years of High Point or [Appalachian] and I didn't." When I pointed out that because he was a nationally board-certified teacher and he ranked among the top 3% of teachers in the country, he responded, "I didn't pass it the first time."

Theme #2: Personal Temperament Shapes Reaction to First-Year Professional Experiences

Second-career alternatively certified teachers find their way to education through numerous different pathways. The teachers in my sample who interacted with the public during their first careers seemed to have somewhat of an advantage entering the classroom over those who did not, yet middle and high school students behave much differently than the public at large. Many students take great delight in evoking reactions from their teachers, and when they do, it is important for teachers to remember that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. In the following subsections, I describe some of the threatening experiences and first-year stumbles the seven participants encountered during the early stages of their teaching careers and how they eventually found ways to navigate and ultimately overcome their challenges.

Threatening experiences. Student teachers are told to expect the unexpected as they begin their on-the-job training. Second-career teachers, on the other hand, have no concept of what is expected or unexpected. This seems to have worked as an advantage

for the participants in this study as they instinctively reacted to what could have otherwise proven to be unsafe or even dangerous situations.

Larry recalled running into his high school golf coach while walking into the building for his first interview. "He looked me straight in the eyes and asked, 'What the hell are you doing?'" His coach explained to Larry that during the previous school year, four teachers had come and gone from the position that he was getting ready to apply for and ultimately be hired to teach. The class served students who had been diagnosed with behavioral disorders. During Larry's second week of teaching, a male student named Sam broke the rule of coming to the room for an escort before going to get breakfast. As Larry walked toward the cafeteria, he could hear Sam cursing at the top of his voice. Once in the crowded room, Larry tried to redirect Sam, but to no avail. After several attempts, Larry lifted him off the ground, threw him over his shoulder, and carried Sam out of the cafeteria. "For some reason," Larry chuckled as he retold the story, "this really impressed the teachers on breakfast duty. I just did what needed to be done."

With teenagers challenging their authority on what seemed to be every possible front, the second-career teachers were surprised to discover a variety of new and unanticipated reactions springing from their typical calm demeanors. Haley recalled the first time she felt what she described as a "very real sense of defiance" rise inside of her. She told the story of how a seventh-grade boy became irritated with her and picked her up and threw her against the whiteboard. She explained, "I called the assistant principal, and she said that she was on the way but never came." When I asked Haley what she had

done when no one showed up to help, she said, "I just kept teaching. I wasn't gonna let a 14-year-old student determine my career."

Hannah remembered there being a staircase in the first school at which she taught. She told how she was very deliberate in where she stood in proximity to the students and the stairwell. "I never knew when someone was going to shove me, and these were sixth graders . . . Classroom management was hard, but not impossible. I think I liked the challenge."

For William, his sixth graders, in his word, "tried" him at the beginning of the year. He survived by talking to the students about what they wanted to do in life and who they wanted to be. He laughed saying, "They related to what I was saying and it worked out. But now, it could have gone the other way and I might not be a teacher now." He remembered finding a surprise waiting for him in his classroom on the first day of school.

> When I walked into my room, there was a sofa there. And two or three guys and girls were just sprawled out over the sofa, and I'm like, 'No. Get a seat.' They tried to say their teachers let them, but I'm old school. I'm sorry. That sofa, that evening, went out into the hall, and I got rid of it.

As the seven recalled challenges faced during their first years, they described them with disbelief, with humor, and often a sense of defiance. But when I asked them to discuss mistakes or avoidable stumbles, their tone changed. Especially evident during the focus groups, some teachers were almost ominous in their frustration over what was still a very real conflict for them; they struggled to resolve the incongruity between their unavoidable ignorance at the onset of their journey into their second careers and how their first careers seemed to have done nothing to prepare them for it.

First-year stumbles. Early mistakes made by second-career alternatively certified teachers are likely to have an even more profound effect on them than on the traditionally trained teacher. Student teachers make mistakes under the watchful eyes of supervising teachers who can quickly intervene to keep a situation from escalating out of control. Not only do second-career alternatively certified teachers not have the benefit of having someone at their side to assist and advise, but they have the added weight of knowing that, in many cases, their livelihood and that of their families depend upon their success in the classroom.

When describing his first year in teaching to a focus group, Richard encapsulated the beginning experiences of many alternatively certified teachers: "You don't know what you're doing. You don't even know what you don't know." Richard was hired well after the school year had begun. Upon arriving, his students bragged about how they had run off five substitute teachers during the first three weeks of school. "That bed was on fire, and I had to lay down on it!" Richard said. He had trained adults during his first career with the airlines. "I was used to teaching employees that were paid to sit there . . . They loved me. They came to see [my] show." It was clear from his stories that students weren't willing to pay to see Richard's "show." In his words, "This blew my mind! I couldn't figure it out! Those students are like dogs—they sense fear, and they will attack you if you run!"

Larry, whose golf coach met him at the door on the day of his interview to ask what the hell he thought he was doing, agreed with Richard's assessment of the naivety that second-career teachers bring to the classroom.

[Alternatively certified teachers] don't really understand what it means to run a classroom. It's not just, 'Okay kids. Take out your books. Open up to page such and such and answer the questions.' You've got to be able to manage the classroom first before any amount of instruction can take place . . . I think that's the thing that drives [alternatively certified teachers] out the door. If they're not prepared and they don't have the skill set to manage the classroom, I think that's the nail in the coffin.

Haley remembered a day during her first year when she walked into the principal's office and said, "I'm gonna get in my car, and I'm gonna drive as far away from this place as the gas in my car will take me." She recalled the principal telling her to go home, get some rest, and that he would see her the next day. So, she did, and he did.

Haley had the fortitude to get back up after she stumbled, after she was knocked down. But for many second-career alternatively certified teachers, the stumbles go unnoticed and unattended by an administration and faculty members who don't realize the extent the injury has taken on well-intentioned, but often ill-equipped teachers.

Overcoming challenges. A staggering 50% of new teachers leave the classroom within the first 5 years (Hanson et al., 2015, p. 11). The percentage is at least as high for alternatively certified teachers (Cochran-Smith et al., 2010). So how did these seven participants overcome the odds when half of their counterparts did not? When I posed the question to the focus group, the silence was deafening. I couldn't tell if they were afraid their answers might sound arrogant, or if they truly didn't know the answer.

Hannah finally broke the silence. "I think a lot of times folks come in and think they can do it on their own. They don't look for that support and that help. They don't know what they're getting into and it's too much." Larry agreed. "I think that some people underestimate how much work does have to go into it, how taxing it can be

physically, emotionally, mentally." Beatrice seemed almost angry as she added, "This is the hardest job I've ever had . . . You're asked to wear a lot of hats . . . I mean it's harder than what I did for 26 years, but I don't fail. I try hard not to fail."

All seven participants "try hard not to fail." Each was driven by a different force, but each possessed a lust for success: some by the success of their students, others by personal success. Richard was honest in his explanation of what motivates him to teach. "I don't do this for altruistic reasons like, 'Oh, I just love people!' Nuh-uh. When I'm teaching and ask a question and somebody raises their hand, and I know I'm the one that taught them that, that's my reward." In much the same way, William finds his fulfillment in the end result. "I love end of the year testing. I know everybody else hates it, but it gives me a chance to prove, 'Hey, I can teach this if you'll let me.'"

Hannah described the biggest challenge during her early years in teaching as her being too trusting.

> I'm very much an idealist from as far back as childhood . . . I've been told I'm too idealistic. I try to see the good in people. I can be too trusting, but I see the possibilities, or I, at least I see the potential in most people . . . There are kids with a need for direction, and I want to be there. I want to be there for the kids.

The first-year experiences for the seven participants were challenging and in hindsight sometimes amusing, but not that dissimilar from the stories of any new teacher. What makes the encounters noteworthy is the temperaments, the personal dispositions of the second-career alternatively certified teachers who lived them. The seven were determined and resilient in their commitment to finding the support they needed to help themselves and their students succeed.

Theme #3: The Assets Second-Career Teachers Bring to Education is Counterintuitive to What Logic Suggests

Traditionally trained new teachers arrive in their classrooms with an abundance of pedagogical and content-specific training. Second career alternatively certified teachers also bring content knowledge to the classroom as well as an in depth understanding of the relevance of their subject matter obtained during their first careers. Therefore, it stands to reason that what the alternatively certified teacher lacks in pedagogical experience, he or she makes up for in his or her expertise of the content area. Rhetorically speaking, if I needed a ninth-grade biology teacher, and a medical doctor applied for the position, would I pass on hiring a doctor simply because he or she had no background or experience in teaching? Wouldn't his or her expertise in the area be the most important asset a candidate could possibly bring to the classroom?

Contrary to what common sense would seem to dictate, data from this study suggest that expertise is not the most valuable asset that our second-career alternatively certified teachers bring to teaching. In the first subsection that follows, I discuss how experience and content knowledge contributed to the participants becoming effective in their classrooms, but other factors also influenced the success of the group of second-career teachers in my study. Next, I explore how the desire to make a difference is a powerful asset for teachers. I close the section by sharing how negative encounters experienced by the sample during their first careers eventually drove them to search for something positive in their second.

Experience as an asset. When interviewing a traditionally trained teacher, unless the teacher is a recent graduate, I begin by asking the applicant to explain his or her experience in the field of teaching. *What grades have you taught? Which subjects? For how long?* When interviewing an alternatively certified teacher, I inquire about content-related experiences he or she would bring to the classroom. For instance, if applying for an English teaching position, the applicant might have worked as a journalist or an editor. If I'm unable to hire a certified teacher, the traditional line of thinking is that the most valuable asset an applicant can bring to teaching is experience in the area in which he or she is applying to teach. Experience equals knowledge, but unfortunately, knowledge alone isn't enough to be successful in the classroom; a teacher must be able to transfer that knowledge to a classroom of students.

Larry's father is an example of someone who tried transferring a body of knowledge to a group of students. After retiring from Pepsi, his father began a second career in teaching. Larry's mother, who had worked for the Anywhere County School System for 30 years, thought her husband's experience in "working with numbers" while at Pepsi would make him an excellent math teacher. It did not. Larry struggled to explain why his father was unsuccessful in his attempt at teaching.

> He retired and wanted to do something else. He taught at Anywhere Middle for a while and it just wasn't, well, he's very good at math, but as far as teaching math, he just wasn't able to manage it, so it just didn't work out . . . If it's not in somebody's DNA or personality, it's going to be a challenge.

Kate agreed that knowing is not teaching, but went a step further in saying that she had observed how the experience component that second-career teachers bring to the

classroom has sometimes worked against them. "I worked with a first-year teacher who thought he knew everything . . . was very unwilling to take advice or ask for advice. And then on top of it, expected veteran teachers to do what he thought was right." Kate continued by describing another second-career teacher who had previously worked in the health profession. "She thought that she knew it all." Kate suggested that second-career teachers who are accustomed to being successful in the workplace find it difficult to ask for help. "They think it is a weakness," she said.

During the first focus group, I asked teachers in Group A, "How many lateral entry teachers have been hired to work in your building since you arrived?" William was the first to speak up sharing that during his 16 years, he could remember maybe six or seven. I continued by asking him how many had made it, meaning, how many of the six or seven had become successful classroom teachers, to which he responded, "Zero." I followed by asking William why he thought he had made it, but before he could answer, Beatrice broke in and explained, "When you're new, you grab support wherever you can get it. We were smart enough to go out and find it and get it."

Despite asking them directly about this, none of the seven identified how an experience or a skill used in their first careers had worked as an asset upon entering their second careers in teaching. Conversely, they expressed the negative effect that could result from a beginning teacher not embracing their lack of experience, which in turn could prevent them from asking for and receiving help from more experienced colleagues.

A call to do something more. Without exception, each of the seven participants attributed his or her remaining in their second career to the purpose and the fulfillment that teaching brought to his or her life. The following are snapshots from some of the stories the seven shared about their inherent need to contribute to the lives of others. This need for a sense of fulfillment was among the most telling findings in my study.

Traveling and education are Kate's two passions; she has traveled to over 40 countries. Single, with no children, she finds meaning in life through sharing the opportunities she has been afforded with her students.

> Being able to look at kids and say, 'Guess what. That's just not a picture in a book. I was there—flip to a picture—that's me near the Eiffel Tower. That's me at the Coliseum. Because I've been to [these] countries.' Being able to say, 'I lived in Northern Africa when talking about current events of politics of the types of governments; I lived in in the Kingdom of Morocco.'. . . I'm happy for this experience . . . it's kind of like you feel rejuvenated.

Kate worked 10 years as a teaching assistant before beginning a second career in teaching with an alternative certificate. I almost didn't include Kate among the initial pool of potential participants because of the close association between her two careers; however, I ultimately decided that the possibility that her unique perspective might add an additional layer to the research warranted her inclusion. I don't regret including Kate, but her contribution was not what I anticipated. Of the seven, Kate was the only participant who was explicit neither in her interview nor in the focus group about her desire to make a difference in the lives of others; her desire can be inferred from comments regarding her students and colleagues, but was not articulated in any one statement.

An internship in college placed Larry in a school for middle and high school students who needed an alternative placement from the traditional school setting. Reflecting, he realized that the experience was the first time he had considered working in a school.

> I drove a beer van, worked with an irrigation company, installed sprinkler systems, worked in a furniture factory for a while. I felt that I could do whatever job I showed up for. And then I interviewed for and did a 24-hour stay at a wilderness camp, one of those therapeutic treatment things way out in the middle of nowhere with kids who have no choice but to survive with you . . . I really enjoyed being with the kids. I was looking for something to latch onto . . . that experience gave me the affirmation that I was looking for.

Among the seven, Larry expressed the least amount of dissatisfaction in his work-related experiences prior to teaching; in his words, "[He] could do whatever job [he] showed up for." In listening to Larry's professional experiences in serving the needs of students with behavior disorders, it became apparent that his easygoing demeanor was one of his greatest assets as a teacher. In the larger scope of his world and this study, I believe the personal and professional encounters Larry experienced prior to beginning his second career played a lesser role in his decision to stay in teaching than did his inherent desire to play a positive role in the lives in those with whom he finds himself surrounded.

When I asked Richard whether he would recommend teaching as a second career to a friend or family member, he reminded me that his wife, a registered nurse, had quit her job and begun teaching 10 years after he started his second career. But in reference to conversations had with friends about teaching as a second career, he explained that his advice to them is simple:

> Don't do it unless you can get something out of it like I get out of it. I get a sense of making a difference in people's lives that I did not get in my other job . . . I have not forgotten those 14 years of airline work where I was just making a living and not fulfilled at all in my career . . . Knowing that what I [am] doing matters, I [feel] a sense of satisfaction from my job that I never experienced [in] the years prior.

Richard articulated at several different points in his interview and again in the focus group that his knowing that he is making a difference in the lives of his students not only brings a sense of fulfillment that was missing during his first career, but is also the fuel that sustains him through days that he does not see and feel the immediate impact his teaching has on students.

Despite the success that Beatrice experienced while working as an architect, her job left her lacking a sense of meaningfulness that Beatrice said she needed in her life.

> I knew I never fit in the architecture world. Yeah, I was successful. Yeah, I made a lot of money, but it wasn't like, I told my husband, teaching makes me feel like I've got a purpose, like to get up in the morning. I feel a purpose every morning to get up and go even when I'm sick because I feel like if I drop the ball, I'm gonna miss one of 'em. I was such a poor student that I want to be a different teacher for them.

Beatrice was the baton-twirling, fun-loving high school student who all the teachers loved, but that none of them could find a way to reach academically; she graduated high school with a 2.5 GPA. Instead of investing the time to teach her, Beatrice's teachers found odd jobs for her to do which meant that she spent very little time in the actual classroom studying. Her determination to be a "different" type of teacher to her students became obvious to Beatrice's colleagues early within the second year of her transition to teaching.

My first year, I stayed quiet and watched . . . but, my second year, I started saying, 'we just can't be those kinds of teachers. There's got to be accountability or we need to go home . . . We can't take excuses anymore. We got to hold their feet to the fire; they've got to do the work. If you let 'em get by, they're just gonna keep getting lazier and lazier' . . . I never had a teacher tell me that I could be on the A honor roll or ask me what my plan was . . . I never had that. I want to be that kind of teacher.

Career development theorists assert that because altruistic motives often drive teachers, they can significantly improve the schools in which they teach. Beatrice shared how she was called to the office on more than one occasion to discuss her interactions with colleagues. "I can be a little bit, you know, pushy . . . coming from the public sector, [I was] used to being the boss." During one of Beatrice's trips to the office, the principal told her, "You need to tread a little bit softer. You're ruffling some feathers," to which Beatrice replied, "Well, I'm gonna ruffle them some more." Beatrice's resolve to help shape her school into one that is conducive to learning for all children worked to elevate the overall work environment.

After working for 2 years in the collections department at Bank of America, Haley knew that she needed to make a change to a career that would provide a sense of purpose, something that sitting in a cubicle with a phone had not brought her.

Even if you screw a lesson up, reaching the kids where they are and letting them know that you care about them, they're going to learn . . . Going back to collections, that was part of my problem; I was too caring. I can't put people in the corner and tell them that they either have to pay us money or you're out of your house. Oh, it drove me nuts. I felt sorry for the people. I was not a good collector. I'm too compassionate; I want to help you too much.

Haley was the participant who spent the most time talking about the care and the compassion she had for her students. Therefore, I didn't find it surprising at all that after spending almost two decades in a second career in teaching, that at the time of this study, she was working with a population of students that requires extra attention and additional care from their teacher to ensure they successfully complete their education.

Working as a substitute teacher prior to beginning his career in teaching, William remembered making $50 a day and spending twenty of it in the cafeteria feeding students who were hungry.

> [Students] come back all the time . . . I was umpiring the other night and after I was done there was a guy who walked up, a big ole guy with a beard, and I'm thinking, 'He's coming to yell at me for some kind of a call I've made.' He says, 'You don't remember me. You was my science teacher and I just want to thank you.' And when that happens, you just get cold chills.

Learning theorists emphasize how personal experiences help define professional lives. William attributed his need to give back to the way in which his parents brought him up. On several occasions during his interview and the focus group, William would drop his head and talk about how employees in the furniture business were treated by colleagues while working in his first career. Haley was vocal about her compassion for her students, but William's body language spoke volumes of his deep-seated desire to improve the lives of his students.

"Humanitarian" and "idealistic" were two of the ways Hannah described herself. Like William, she expressed a deep sense of obligation to help those who cannot help themselves.

> [There were] so many students who didn't have support . . . I had one student who had been shot in the head, and so he was behaviorally and emotionally disturbed. He was late, late, and late. He was not going to make it through that year in school because he couldn't get to school on time. He didn't have anybody at home. He was missing the bus because he wasn't waking up. That was back when I could stop and pick him up, so that's what I did. It was an endearing experience.

At the time of this study, Hannah was beginning her 19th year in teaching, yet I could still see the pain in her expression as she talked about an elementary child she had taught almost two decades before who had been left emotionally disturbed after being shot. She didn't go out of her way to meet the physical needs of her student because she learned from a class or a textbook that good teachers transport children in their private vehicles; Hannah drove the child to school each morning because she had the heart of a teacher well before she had the credentials of one. These seven participants made their way to teaching not because they found an easy road to a second career, but because they were looking for purpose, fulfillment, for meaning—something that, up to that point, had been missing from their careers and their lives.

Negative experiences drive the search for positive. The sample's search for something more was often preceded and always heightened by negative first-career encounters. While it took some of the participants a relatively short period of time, it took others decades to acknowledge and accept that remaining in their professional positions would never produce the types of experiences needed to find personal fulfillment.

When Haley quit her position with Bank of America, she didn't have another job. She remembered thinking, "I needed to completely change the frame of what I was doing, I knew there was something I could do that would help people rather than make their

lives more difficult. I knew, this is not for me." In listening to the stories, the journeys of

the seven teachers, it became apparent that their need to leave their first careers was a

driving and sustaining force in discovering their second career.

Hannah recalled the confusion she felt while working in customer service for her

family's company.

> I couldn't tell you what I was doing. They did recalls and sold to treasury markets
> and worked for wholesale in the middle. Then I started working for the sales team
> and still, I was like, "What are you selling?" I didn't really understand. I did
> understand that this was just not my life path, so I started reflecting on what I
> liked, and teaching was just obvious.

Richard talked about how during his 14 years with the airlines, he would stay in a

position for 2 or 3 years and then move to something else. In hindsight, he said that he

realized the changes were a sign of his looking for something that would fulfill a need

that wasn't being met. "In everything I did during those nearly 15 years, I never felt a

sense of personal satisfaction or fulfillment. I just, didn't feel it. I felt like I could be

doing more, and what does this matter? This doesn't matter."

Beatrice described how the success she experienced in her first career left her

wanting something more.

> I've had much success in my career, but those years, you lack sort of a personal
> relationship with what you're doing. I'm helping the aesthetics of Charlotte or
> wherever I happen to be building, but you don't leave a lasting, I mean, yeah, you
> leave a lasting building that is gonna have your name on it, but it's not important.
> It's a material thing, and I wanted more interaction with making a difference in a
> child's life that I wasn't getting on the job.

William shared how he struggled for 16 years working as an engineer in the furniture business. He tried to explain how he would hear a voice inside his head saying, "'This is not the way you were raised. You weren't raised that money is the only thing at the end of the day. You were raised to treat people with respect.' We just didn't treat people with respect." William went on to explain that morally it became difficult for him to remain in his first career. He concluded his remarks by clearing his throat, and with a tear in his eye he mumbled, "My parent didn't raise me like that."

Notable Issues: Shared Personal Characteristics of Sample

In addition to the three themes I described above, there were many other issues and topics that came up in my data collection. The following information is notable, but it is hard to say how meaningful it is since I don't have sufficient data to support clear findings or make broad claims. Yet, as I studied how the personal and professional experiences of the sample influenced their decisions to stay in teaching, I chose to include all aspects of the research that could contribute in any way to answering the question. In cross-checking interview and focus group transcripts, I found the following:

1. Each of the seven had a previous experience prior to taking over their first classroom in which he or she was responsible for teaching a group of individuals. These experiences came in the form of substitute teaching, training employees, or college internships;

2. Each of the seven had immediate family members who worked as teachers;

3. Each of the seven began working during their teenage years, some as early as 12 years old;

4. Each of the seven participant's biological parents remained living and in the same household up to and through the participants' graduation from college;

5. While all meet the requirements handed down by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, none of the seven served as mentors;

6. Six of the seven made explicit statements in which they described themselves as confident. The exception was William, who was one of only two participants who was nationally board certified;

7. Six of the seven made explicit statements in which they described the importance of their work making a difference in the lives of others. The exception was Kate who was the only participant whose first career was in education. She served as a teaching assistant for 10 years before applying for an alternative teaching certificate;

8. Four of the seven had fathers who served in the military;

9. Each of the four teachers in Group A (10-26 years in first career) was encouraged by someone in the teaching profession to apply for an alternative teaching certificate;

10. Three of the four teachers in Group A faced a tragic, life-changing event prior to their beginning a second career in teaching (I discuss these three events in Chapter VI);

11. Each of the three teachers in Group B began college with intentions of working in a medical related field;

12. Each of the three teachers in Group B began teaching population of students with behavioral disorders; and,

13. Each of the three teachers in Group B experienced major physical altercations with students during his or her first 4 years.

Notable Differences in Group A and Group B

Data gathered from the two groups was, for the most part, what could logically be expected based upon the difference in years spent in first careers. Teachers in Group B were younger when they began teaching, but the data do not indicate that their ages had a significant impact on their personal and professional experiences while and after transitioning to their second careers in teaching. Group A had more first-career experiences, but overall this appeared to have no effect on their decisions to stay in teaching.

In comparing the transcripts, I don't feel that holding the two separate focus groups was especially helpful. While the two groups were as evenly divided as possible, four teachers in Group A and three in Group B, the four participants in Group A were much more engaged with one another than the teachers in the second group. This is evident by there being fewer comments made and questions asked by me, the facilitator, during the focus group with Group B. Because of the increased amount of interaction among members in Group A, it ran for a longer period than did the session with Group B.

The most obvious explanation for the difference in levels of engagement for the two groups is the composition, specifically the number of participants in each group. Therefore, in retrospect, dividing the group of seven into two smaller groups may have

resulted in an overall negative outcome on the amount and the quality of data I was able to gather.

Summary of Findings

In this chapter, I discussed the three themes that correspond to the categories identified in Chapter IV: working environment, professional experiences, and personal mission. The motivation and belief system that drives the third of the three themes significantly impact and shape the first two. In their search to find and do something more, something positive, the participants used their fortitude to shift and refashion what could have otherwise proven to be career-ending obstacles.

At the conclusion of this chapter I listed notable, shared characteristics among the seven participants. My research doesn't provide sufficient data to support broad claims; yet, in my attempt to identify personal and professional characteristics that influence the decision of second-career alternatively certified teachers to stay in teaching, I feel the issue is noteworthy and significant when considering future research.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Overview

Using a qualitative method of research, I studied the personal and professional characteristics of successful second-career alternatively certified teachers who stayed in teaching for at least 4 years after acquiring a professional license. During interviews and focus groups, the seven participants shared their personal and professional experiences that directly and indirectly influenced their career decisions. I begin this chapter by answering my three research questions. Next, I provide a discussion section in which I place my research and findings within the larger context of literature. I then present lessons learned from the study. Following lessons learned, I provide recommendations for research and recommendations for policy and practice. Finally, I close with a section on closing thoughts where I discuss what I learned during the study, the limitations I realized upon its completion, and what I would do differently were I to conduct the research again.

Research Questions Answered

Career development theory and experiential and transformative learning theories influenced how I interpreted the findings of this study. Career development theorists address the importance of an individual's transition from a previous career to the next as well as the induction into the employee's new work environment. Theorists assert that

career changers, in general, have the potential to make valuable contributions to second-career work environments. More specifically, Wilkins and Comber (2015) found that because a change to a career teaching is often driven by altruistic and intrinsic motivations, the potential for improving the existing work environment into which the second-career teacher moves could hold significant value.

Noted learning theorists Kolb (Kolb et al., 2001) and Mezirow (1997) emphasize how an acquired body of personal experiences works to define our professional lives. In describing transformative learning theory, Mezirow asserts that learning is a process altered by one's perspective when encountering new experiences. As I listened to the seven participants respond to questions during interviews and focus groups, observed the induction process, and examined data from supplemental documents, I drew upon career development and experiential and transformative learning theories as a way of making sense of patterns that I coded, placed into categories, and then classified into three themes. As a result of this process, I could begin to articulate answers to the three research questions that drove this study.

Research Question 1

What professional experiences are shared by successful second-career alternatively certified teachers in their career(s) prior to teaching that contribute to their transitioning to a professional license?

For purposes of answering the first research question, I interpreted professional experiences to include any work-related experience my participants had prior to teaching. Here I broadened the parameters of my original question as I realized that their work

experiences in general, not just those that came from their previous career, affected how they transitioned into their new roles as classroom teachers. In answering the first question, I focus on a shared work ethic and a similarity of work-related positions held prior to teaching.

Strong work ethic. An ethic of hard work was at the core of each of the seven participants' previous work experiences. All four members in Group A were working 20 hours a week by the time they were 12 years old. William and Richard worked at furniture factories, Beatrice at a shoe factory, and Kate at an ice cream stand. Kate believed that working at a young age helped provide her with a sense of independence.

> I rode my bike [to the ice cream stand.] I grew up in a small town where there were sidewalks so I would ride my bike . . . I got myself there and got myself back. That was at the sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade years. My parents didn't haul me in cars like people do now . . . Oh, I just remembered, I had a paper route . . . I passed it down to my brother, you know, when I was twelve I moved up to be the ice cream person.

The four attributed much of their work ethic to the philosophy with which they were reared. Richard shared, "My parents grew up knowing they had to work; they didn't expect anything to be handed to them, and they instilled that in us. You know, you gotta work for something." William, who in addition to teaching works part-time as an umpire and referee, remembered how important his working during high school was for him. "I played everything until my senior year, and because I needed money for college, I gave up all sports and worked full time."

Six of the seven agreed that, comparatively speaking, their first-career jobs were much easier overall than teaching. Beatrice, who was as an architect for over a quarter of

a century, said that she encouraged friends to consider teaching as a second career, but

she first offers a stern warning:

> I always tell them, "it's not easy." This is the hardest job I've ever had. I mean,
> it's harder than what I did for 26 years . . . Nothing prepares you for that first day,
> I mean nothing. They're all looking at you like, "say something," and you're like,
> "Whoa." I looked like a teacher, but I didn't sound like one. There's no playbook;
> there's no rule book. You're winging it; you're just winging it.

In our focus group, William recalled his son asking him, "What do you want me

to be?" He explained that his response to his son was honest and direct. "I just don't want

you to work in factories." He went on to explain to us, "That's what I chose to do, to

work in the factory, but I wanted better than that for my son." Richard related to William

and shared, "I may not have done everything right in raising my three, but one thing that I

am very glad that I did was have them get a job . . . to teach them responsibility."

Substitute teaching and internships. At the end of Chapter V, I noted that prior

to teaching, each of the seven participants had an experience in which he or she was

responsible for instructing a group of individuals. Kate worked as a teaching assistant and

Richard as a corporate trainer during their first careers, positions that afforded both

participants extensive opportunities in which they provided individual as well as group

instruction. Three of the remaining seven chose to substitute in classrooms prior to

entering the field, while the other two worked with school-age children in undergraduate

internships.

After retiring from the family's architect firm, two of Beatrice's friends, who

taught in a neighboring county, invited her to substitute at their school. "You have health

insurance, right?" they asked. For the next two months, Beatrice worked in what she

described as, "not the best of jobs." She remembered,

> I mean one place, I couldn't even sit down it was so nasty, dirty. He had brought a
> Lazy Boy chair and put it behind his desk; it was nasty. I don't even know what
> some of them stains were on that thing . . . One teacher had literally, I'm talking
> maybe 20 stacks along a table. One little kid came up and said, "She doesn't
> know where anything's at. We don't hardly do anything in here 'cause she can't
> find anything."

William also spent two months substituting prior to beginning his second career.

He explained that he could see how the furniture industry was losing ground. As a result,

he began considering alternatives to a career which he had dedicated most of his adult

life. It was during this time that his sister invited him to substitute at her school; a teacher

was preparing to take an extended maternity leave. Haley also began working as a

substitute for a teacher who was out on maternity leave. She recalled, "I had some

experiences that should have deterred me from teaching, but I think it made me even

more determined."

Pursuing an undergraduate degree in communication disorders, Hannah explained

that she had always held the thought in the back of her mind that she would one day work

with children. While interning at the university speech clinic, she worked primarily with

Asian American students who were becoming acclimated to the English language. When

Hannah first began considering working as a teacher, she explained,

> I really thought my niche was going to be middle school . . . My most difficult
> time in school was middle school, but it was junior high then. To me, that was just
> a hard age. I thought, you know, if I'm going to make a difference, I should
> probably go into that age group.

Larry's internship took him to an alternative school serving approximately 120 middle and high school students.

> Very, very rough clientele there. A lot of inner city issues . . . I had never seen anything like that . . . They gave me a handful of kids as a kind of case load, so I went through their files; I read all their individual education plans. I got to see their histories through their psychological reports, and I even got to meet with them and talk about how their classes were going. That was the first time I really ever thought about working in a school.

Working with a group of individuals with whom they were the solely responsible for conveying a specific message was not a new phenomenon to the participants prior to beginning teaching. While their audiences were varied and their messages considerably different in some instances, each had experience in delivering instruction in some form prior to becoming alternatively certified to teach.

Research Question 2

What professional experiences are shared by successful second-career alternatively certified teachers in their first 4 years of teaching that contribute to their transitioning to a professional license?

Hannah, the veteran among the group, had been teaching for over 18 years at the time of this study. Asking her and the other six participants to recall specific professional experiences from their first 4 years of teaching was asking them to sort through, in some instances, decades of memories. In listening to their recollections during the focus groups, but especially as I read through the transcripts, I began to understand the important role that perception played during their first 4 years. I discovered that not only

were their perceptions regarding the culture and the people around them important, but probably more important was their perception of self.

Perception of principals as mentors. In Chapter V, I addressed the area of mentoring in the first of the three themes. I offered examples of how six of the seven participants experienced a successful relationship with one or more mentors. During the discussion, I referenced Kate's elementary school principal playing an important role in her transitioning from teaching assistant to teacher. As she discussed their relationship during our focus group, I realized that I had neither broached the topic of school administrators during the seven interviews, nor, except for Kate, had any of the seven mentioned their principals or assistant principals as having played a role in mentoring them. So, I used the opportunity to ask how or if they felt their principals had affected their first years in teaching.

Richard and William reminded me that they had both earned administrative certificates and, at the time of this study, Beatrice was working on a program of study that would lead to her certification. In addition, much less significant, but worth noting, Larry's wife was an assistant principal at an elementary school in the Anywhere County School System. Altogether, four of the seven participants had an insider's understanding of the principalship. In a less than enthusiastic manner, the entirety of both focus groups agreed that their principals had, in some way, served as a mentor during their first 4 years in teaching. Haley described her first principal as "really stable." Richard said his first principal was "okay," but remembered more about his second principal.

His major mistake was that he tried to make everybody happy. He was trying to make all the teachers happy; he was trying to make all the parents happy; he was just trying to make everybody happy and there is no way to keep all those balls in the air.

Haley recalled her first principal being, as she described it, "run off" by the parents in the building. "He wanted to make sure his teachers got what they needed and were able to do their jobs, and sometimes, that made the parents mad." Hannah described her first principals as "Having her back." She explained, "They supported me, and I'm sure that they would have told me if I was wrong, or something."

Interestingly, none of the seven shared a time that their principals told them that they were "wrong, or something." As a matter of fact, there was no mention at all of a principal evaluating the seven second-career teachers or even visiting their classrooms. Instead of sharing stories about how their building level principals mentored them, the teachers spoke in broad generalities about the way in which they had affected the overall morale of the school's faculty. Richard explained his view on the principals with whom he had worked by saying, "They had an effect, not so much on my experience, not directly on what happened in my classroom, but the, well, on the entire building and on the faculty."

Perception of self. While the seven seemed to struggle with remembering specific encounters they had with their principals, they easily recalled the doubts and fears they experienced during their first years in the classroom. In Chapter V, I outlined how each of the seven faced enormous challenges and grappled with whether they were

what one participant referred to as a "real" teacher. Richard remembered the "shell-

shocked" look on his face at the end of his second week:

> Julie [his mentor] came in, and she could tell by the look on my face. I told her, "I have not turned in my resignation at the airline, and I'm not gonna!" She went and got Marvin and they had a come-to-Jesus with me . . . I can't really tell you now, all these year later, why I went ahead and quit the airlines . . . [Had he been furloughed as he requested,] I have no doubt that I would have gone back the next year when they started recalling people . . . [The following semester,] when I started on day one with a new group of students, that made all the difference in the world. Now, it was still a burnt batch of cookies, but it was so much better.

During the focus groups, we laughed as each teacher took a turn recalling what, so

many years earlier, had seemed to indicate an impending doom. The stories were only

funny because they had survived and lived to fight another day: William removed the

couch from his room; Hannah avoided being pushed down the staircase; and Larry was

able to throw his student over his shoulder, like a sack of potatoes, and carry him out of

the cafeteria. Richard offered his idea of why the seven had survived those early years.

> I think we all had a strong sense of who we were. We might not have known exactly what we were doing as far as teaching, but we at least knew what we expected of the students, how we expected them to behave . . . The number one thing is you've got to have an idea and you've got to know what you're gonna do in there the next day. Your self-confidence carries over; they've got to trust that you know what you're saying and doing.

Haley agreed with Richard and shared with the focus group, as she had with me

during her interview, her story about being thrown against a whiteboard by a seventh-

grade student. But this time, in the company of her colleagues, she included a

conversation that had followed the incident. She explained,

> I guess any other time he had done something [like throwing me against the board,] he had been transferred out of the class or something like that. I wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of thinking he had won; I made him sit in that class the rest of the year . . . Maybe a week before we got out of school, he asked, "Why'd you keep me in here?" I just looked at him and said, "Because I'm your teacher. This is where you're supposed to be." And he looked back at me and said, "But you're not supposed to do that. I'm supposed to be moved someplace else." I said, "No. I'm still your teacher, and you're supposed to be in my class."

Richard was right. From the earliest days in their classrooms, the seven had a strong sense of who they were. To use Haley's words, they were teachers, but they were more than just teachers; they were second-career teachers who had brought with them a great deal of confidence.

Research Question 3

What personal life experiences are shared by successful second-career alternative certified teachers who teach for a minimum of 4 years and transition to a professional license?

In exploring the life experiences of the seven teachers, I uncovered some unanticipated and unusual data. It is hard to make much meaning of this data, but it may be something other researchers might want to consider. First, all seven participants grew up in households in which they lived with both biological parents. The parents of Haley and Hannah separated when the two were in their 20s, well after they were living independent of their parents. The remaining five participants' mothers and fathers were married at the time of this study or until the death of a spouse. Second, each of the seven had at least one immediate family member who worked as a teacher. Richard and William had children who taught; Kate and Beatrice had siblings who were teachers;

Larry and Hannah's mothers were teachers; and Haley's mother-in-law was her senior

English teacher.

In addition to similarities connected to family related issues, the data revealed that

each of the seven demonstrated a great deal of self-confidence. In the next subsection, I

provide direct quotes from the seven interviews and two focus groups that reflect their

levels of confidence. In the final subsection, I discuss the topic of adversity in relation to

the two subgroups. I explain how three of the participants have dealt with adversity, how

three others were drawn to helping those in adverse situations, and how one participant

seemed to be stuck somewhere in between the two.

Self-confidence. Notable among their shared experiences was the common thread

of self-confidence that pervaded the teachers' personal and professional experiences.

Except for William, each, unsolicited, described him or herself as a confident person

during his or her interview. The closest William came to admitting to having any sort of

confidence in himself was his saying, "Well, I do some things well."

Table 7 provides a brief list of direct quotes illustrating the self-confidence each,

including William, displayed in his or her personal and/or professional lives. When

referencing confidence, neither knowledge of the subject areas they taught nor knowledge

or skills transferred from first careers were introduced as explanations for their high

levels of self-confidence. Instead, the characteristic seemed inherent to who they were as

individuals, not who they had become as teachers. Yet, in looking collectively at the first

careers of the seven participants, the positions in which they worked were not necessarily

ones that would lend themselves to individuals seeking authority and/or ones that
required a great deal of self-confidence.

Table 7

Self Confidence

Kate	I'm a confident person. I'm not someone who is afraid to ask for help. I would ask any question to anyone and not be embarrassed.
William	When I ran the furniture plant, I put out fires on a daily basis; it's just what you did.
Richard	I know the answers to questions that they don't know. They don't know who they're going to marry, where they're going to live, what they're going to earn. I know what I'm going to be when I grow up, and there's a lot of peace in that.
Haley	I was sitting through those classes when they were trying to teach us thinking how much better it could be, how much different I would do it if I were doing it.
Beatrice	When I was substitute teaching and would see other teachers, I would think to myself, "I can do a lot better than this with one hand tied behind my back."
Hannah	When I met resistance, I didn't back down from my ideology.
Larry	I don't focus on whose job it is to do what. I just see what the job is that needs to be done and do it.

Survivors of adversity: Group A. The final question I asked teachers during the focus group involved their describing a personal experience(s) that had helped define who they were as individuals. Group B's responses were somewhat generic in nature; however, three of the four participants from Group A responded quickly and precisely with stories that were unique in content, but common in theme: they were survivors.

When I posed the question to the four members in Group A, without a moment's hesitation, Kate responded, "I can give a quick example. This is personal; most of the people at Anywhere County Middle School have absolutely no idea about what I am getting ready to tell you." She began,

> I was healthy my entire life; I had never been in the hospital . . . I was 30 years old and called 911. I went in, I'm not lying, the man that walked in the room in the emergency room, after seeing my chest scan, had tears in his eyes. He said, "You have a mass that's the size of ten grapefruits all around your lungs. It's pressuring your heart." I had no idea what he was talking about . . . They immediately got me in and did biopsies. It was non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. I went through the chemo and the radiation and was like, "I'm gonna fight this." . . . And bam, a year and a half later when it came back, they looked at me and they were like, "We can't even tell you a stage. This is gonna be a long process" . . . I'm 50 years old while this is happening . . . They took me down as close to death as possible and then re-infused my cells. So, when I get stressed out and frustrated now, which I do, I have to say to myself, "How big is this really?" It's something that makes me want to live every day to the fullest.

Richard didn't wait for me to respond; he didn't wait for me to ask Kate a follow-up question. He just began,

> At a very early age, we had a difficult family situation. My brother died when I was 17 . . . Two years after his death, my brother-in-law and his twin brother were working for my father, and my brother-in-law's twin brother was killed. There was a lot of conflict and a lot or personal struggles . . . [It was] life altering, very difficult situation to live through and come out the other side.

Again, without waiting for me to comment, without waiting for a follow up question, Beatrice began,

> I had a happy childhood. I mean an extremely happy childhood. My dad would get out and play monsters on the road with half the neighborhood. Everybody wanted him to be their daddy. I mean, he was just wonderful . . . In 1971, that all

changed . . . We were leaving Florida, we had already bought a place in North Carolina, and we were on our way there. My dad gets a phone call at the hotel that his daddy had been murdered: shot by three men. He ran a pawnshop . . . and they had come in and shot him to death . . . My grandmother lay on the floor and watched him die. They caught the guys. We had the death penalty in North Carolina. They ended up dying. From that moment on, I didn't recognize my daddy.

As we sat in silence, Richard finally spoke for the group, "A commonality here, you know, is persevering through something and knowing that there's better days . . . being a survivor."

As I read through the focus group transcript, I wasn't sure if the three stories, although compelling, were relevant to the research. As a matter of fact, this subsection didn't make it into the first draft of this study. It was not until after an additional round of coding that I began to see where the adversities faced by three of the four members from the first focus group fit into an overall interpretation of the data and could help to answer my broad research questions.

Drawn to adversity: Group B. Each of the three teachers in Group B began college with intentions of working in the field of medicine. Larry earned his degree in psychology and Hannah in communication disorders. Haley initially planned to become a nurse, but after 2 years changed her major and eventually earned both an undergraduate and master's degree in English. After finishing college, each of the three took fulltime positions in jobs completely unrelated to medicine, yet it took only 1–2 years for them to find their way to the classroom: a place each has remained for almost 20 years. I speculate that based upon their decisions, not to just become teachers, but teachers of students with special needs, they found ways to fulfill their original desires to provide

care to those in need. I believe their attraction to teaching was secondary to the primary opportunity of working with students with special needs: education served as the vehicle to a destination.

As the three teachers discussed their experiences in working with a specific population of students, they stressed the importance of establishing authentic relationships that would enable students with special needs to flourish in their classrooms after failing in others. Larry talked in our focus group about the struggles he encountered with his first class of students as he sought ways in which he could teach them to effectively interact with their classmates and ultimately with him.

> The years before I came [to the class] had been, you know, kind of chaotic. I had to settle everything down first, so there was a whole lot more of the counseling and the coaching and teaching them to interact without, you know, not killing each other.

The three teachers from Group B shared a deep desire to effect change in the lives of their students. Larry explained, "I've just always wanted to help people, you know, do the best they can with what they've got." Haley nodded in agreement and added, "I want to help too much. The worst time of the year is when they're taking the End of Grade [assessment] and you can't help them." Haley described her students at the alternative schools as,

> The ones that nobody expected to do well in the other classes . . . A lot of them struggle with interpersonal relationships . . . I have two that, really, academically were fine, but could not get along with traditional setting teachers, students, that sort of thing . . . I think it [is] just building those relationships with the kids and knowing they [trust] you. The whole point is to bring them in here and set the reset thing.

Hannah understood the importance of hitting the reset button. Her first teaching assignment was to a group of students in a self-contained classroom who she was responsible for teaching during the entirety of the school day. "I [wanted] students to want to learn and to want to continue to learn," Hannah said. She described her first class to our focus group.

> [It] was very small . . . I did some good. I was able to move some students out of there that needed to be in a less restraining environment that nobody had really picked up on. Math was their thing. That was not their discrepancy. So I was able to move them into some [regular education] math classes.

Larry was going to become a doctor, Haley a nurse, and Hannah an audiologist; therefore, it is not surprising that they worked with students with special needs. As second-career alternatively certified teachers, they discovered ways to meet not only the educational needs of their students, but possibly more importantly, their students' emotional and even physical needs.

Anomaly: William. William neither teaches students who deal with adversities as did the teachers in Group B, nor did he have a story of how he had faced a great adversity in his life as did his colleagues in Group A. After listening to Kate describe her battle with cancer, and Beatrice and William tell stories of the tragic deaths of close family members, he broke the silence with what I thought was a strange comment coming from a man I had grown to deeply appreciate. He said, "I don't have anything like that. Mine is actually selfish."

I was taken aback by William's description of himself as selfish. We had first met a few months earlier on a Saturday morning for his interview. I began that morning by

making small talk about the weather. William said something about hoping it didn't get too warm because he and his wife were moving into a new home. I was shocked and asked, "Today? Now?" When he chuckled, then responded with, "Yeah, as soon as I finish here." I quickly asked if he wanted to reschedule the interview since the date had been set weeks earlier, most likely before he knew he would be involved in such an undertaking as moving into a new home. William smiled, shook his head, and said he was happy to help. This and every encounter I had experienced with him since that time painted him as anything but a "selfish" man. Nevertheless, he looked at his colleagues in the focus group and continued.

> I loved my sister, but I always wanted to at least be her equal, and I could never get there. She was the homecoming queen, and I was just an average boy . . . My parents were great parents, they loved me and supported me, but in my own mind, I never measured up.

When listening to William, I interpreted his description of himself and memories of his youth as those of a modest, middle-age man who preferred not to share his most intimate secrets with a group of strangers he barely knew. But when I began to look at the categories into which comments made during his interview and focus group fit into, I realized the power that William had given to his sister. He repeatedly talked about her coaching and mentoring him during his first years in teaching. He even said of their relationship at one point, "She could tell me anything she wanted and she knew I was going to respect it." And it was she who first had suggested his moving into teaching.

Based upon the short time I had spent with him, it was easy to see that William had wanted to please people all his life. He described his time working as an engineer in

the furniture business as having ". . . wasted 16 years of my life . . . doing the right thing for the wrong person." William began teaching because in his words, he "always wanted to at least be [his sister's] equal, and could never get there." It appears that teaching next door was as close to getting there as he could possibly get.

Three of the four teachers in Group A suffered great adversities and through those hardships decided that by making a difference in the lives of others they could make the most of their own. The three teachers in Group B were unable and/or unwilling to successfully navigate their way to the medical field, but quickly pursued second careers in an area of teaching that placed them in classrooms with students who were medically diagnosed as having special needs. William, who ironically, based upon both objective and subjective data, was probably the most accomplished of the seven teachers, began a second career in teaching because in doing so he thought he could finally measure up to the person next door—literally.

Discussion

The inability to recruit and retain public school teachers has reached crisis proportions in the United States. By 2018, the predicted shortage of teachers across the country will extend beyond 100,000 (Heim, 2016, para. 3). Educators hoped that alternative certification might be the solution to the teacher shortage, but alternatively certified teachers are leaving the profession at the same rate or at rates higher than traditionally trained teachers (Cochran-Smith et al., 2010). Little research has been conducted on the retention of second-career teachers who enter the classroom with an alternative certificate. Over a decade ago, Powers (2002) wrote, "The culmination of all

[second-career teachers'] life experiences, in most situations, can be considered a viable asset" (p. 305); however, the literature to date remains limited. By identifying the ways in which personal and professional experiences shape the decisions of second-career alternatively certified teachers to stay in teaching, I hope to provide answers to how we can support and retain this valuable group of teachers.

Ng and Peter (2010) suggest the personal predispositions of alternatively certified teachers may foster the growth of professional commitments, which in turn reduce teacher attrition (p. 124). Of the seven participants, only Richard had a short-lived plan for leaving teaching during his early years in the classroom. Hannah, on the contrary, said of her teaching experience, "I felt needed. I never looked back; I really didn't. Once it started, there was nothing else I was gonna do." Six of the seven participants expressed an explicit desire to make a difference in the lives of others, and six also expressed a great deal of confidence in their abilities to bring about change. The data from studying this group of seven begins to confirm Ng and Peter's findings regarding the effect an alternatively certified teachers' predisposition can play on his or her commitment to staying in teaching.

At the conclusion of Chapter V, I included a list of 13 shared personal characteristics of the sample. When comparing the case studies of seven alternative teacher certification programs presented by Humphrey and Wechsler (2007) to my research, the findings are very consistent. My findings are more specific and limited to a smaller sample, but the second and seventh of Humphrey and Wechsler's findings are notably similar in nature to what I found in my study. They reported that large numbers

of alternatively certificated participants had prior experience working with children in classroom settings. I found that each of the seven participants in this study had a previous experience in which he or she was responsible for teaching a group of individuals, with six of the seven situations involving children. Humphrey and Wechsler cited in their seventh finding that while mentoring was an important component of all programs studied, most exerted little control over the mentoring that occurred. In this study, I found that all seven participants were assigned mentors, but the accountability component and overall successful nature of the mentoring process was inconsistent and in some cases, nonexistent.

Chin and Young (2007) wrote of the need for a better understanding of alternatively certified teachers and the commitments and dispositions they bring to teaching. The researchers felt it important to assess "how [alternatively certified teachers] as persons engage with other teachers and students [and how they] interpret and make sense of their initial experiences in schools" (p. 82).

In addressing the third of my research questions, I worked to answer the need to which Chin and Young speak regarding research on studying the commitments and dispositions that alternatively certified teachers bring to teaching. I found that each of the seven participants possess and demonstrate a high degree of self-confidence. Table 7 provides a brief list of direct quotes from the sample illustrating directly and indirectly the self-confidence each possess. While it is hard to say how and where they developed that self-confidence, and the role of previous work experiences in cultivating self-confidence, it is nonetheless a notable finding. In addition, I found that my participants'

perceptions of self and of their colleagues, particularly school administrators, speak to their commitment to their second careers in teaching as demonstrated by their longevity in teaching.

Chin and Young (2007) continue by asserting the importance of understanding how alternatively certified teachers engage with other teachers and students and how they interpret and make sense of their initial experiences in schools. As my first two research questions, I ask what professional experiences are shared by successful second-career alternatively certified teachers in previous careers as well as their first 4 years of teaching. I found that in addition to previously having worked as interns and as substitute teachers, a strong work ethic was present among the sample. I also found that three of the seven teachers in Group A, teachers who worked in a previous career for a period of 10–26 years, experienced more difficulty in managing the classroom behavior of students than did teachers in Group B, teachers who worked in a previous career for a period of 1–2 years and indicated their initial intentions of studying and working in the field of medicine. There could be a range of reasons why the less experienced teachers had an easier time with classroom management, including being closer in age to the students. This might be something worth exploring further.

Lessons Learned

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of a sample of successful second-career alternatively certified teachers who stayed in teaching beyond the 4 years required to obtain a professional license in North Carolina and to determine if

commonalities existed that could assist efforts to increase retention rates among alternatively certified teachers.

The seven teachers who participated in this study shared multiple personal and professional experiences as discussed in my findings. As an educator who not only works with alternatively certified teachers, but often interviews and offers recommendations regarding hiring, I believe these common experiences help create a portrait of a second-career alternatively certified teacher who is likely to experience success and longevity in teaching.

Some of the more identifiable shared characteristics among the sample that could be used in the evaluation of prospective second-career candidates include, but are not limited to, the candidates having:

- Experiences in which he or she have taught or instructed a group of individuals;

- Immediate family members who work as teachers;

- Begun working at an early age;

- Made explicit statements in which they described themselves as confident;

- First careers in a service industry field; and most notable,

- Made statements in which they described the importance of their work making a difference in the lives of others.

One of the notable shared characteristics of the sample that I listed at the end of Chapter V is that each of the four teachers who worked from 10 to 26 years in a first career was encouraged by someone in the teaching profession to apply for an alternative

teaching certificate. The responsibility of soliciting and recruiting potential teachers should not be limited to building and system level administrators. Teachers have at least as much awareness of those in their communities who overtly express and exhibit a desire to make a difference in the lives of those around them. Larry's mother was approached by a colleague while shopping in a local grocery store regarding the possibility of his working with students with special needs; two members in Richard's Sunday School class asked him about his interest in teaching; and it was William's sister who saw potential in an engineer who would ultimately become a successful math teacher. These connections are important and worth cultivating, especially to bring potentially good candidates into the classroom.

As important as recruiting prospective teachers is the formidable task of retaining them. Again, much of this responsibility rests with a school's faculty. The "us" mentality that Kate referenced when describing a successful mentoring program is essential when creating a culture within the school that communicates the message, "It's okay to ask for help." While the participants in my sample didn't always have good experiences with formal mentoring programs, there were typically people in their schools who they could turn to for guidance and support.

Recommendations for Research

During this research, the participants expressed high levels of self-confidence. They described themselves as determined, unafraid, and driven; yet surprisingly, the descriptors were unrelated to skills learned or abilities acquired during their first careers. Based upon my conversations with them, the confidence within and among the seven

appears to have been inherent or at the least, gained as a means by overcoming personal challenges. Because the number of participants in this study was limited, further research could either confirm or deny whether a correlation exists between high levels of self-confidence and successful second-career alternatively certified teachers who stay in teaching. In addition, an attempt to answer the question, *Are high levels of self-confidence found in successful second-career alternatively certified teachers related to first careers, and if so, what is the correlation*? would add to the limited body of knowledge associated with second-career teachers. By answering the question of whether a correlation exists between self-confidence and longevity in second-career teachers and how their first careers contribute to building self-confidence, school administrators could begin to look for specific attributes and experiences held by alternatively certified second-career teaching applicants.

The research conducted by Humphrey and Wechsler (2007) remains one of the most widely accepted in the area of retention rates for alternatively certified teachers. They assert that it is a combination of factors, not one overriding component, that ultimately determines the success and retention of alternatively certified teachers (pp. 522-523). While the design of my study was limited to self-reported interview and focus group data of seven successful second-career alternatively certified teachers, my findings support the Humphrey and Wechsler study conducted almost a decade ago. Specifically, both our findings indicate that alternatively certified teachers who had prior work experience in classroom settings or environments that facilitated teaching or training a group of individuals are likely to stay in teaching. I believe additional research that looks

specifically at whether this type of personal interaction in a first career serves as an indicator of success in teaching as a second career would provide educators targeted and measurable data when evaluating the potential of second-career teaching candidates.

In my study, I focused on why second-career alternatively certified teachers stay in teaching. Research on why they leave could potentially provide educators with valuable information on changes that would enhance the likelihood of this population of teachers continuing in the profession. It would be interesting to know if the profile of second-career teachers who leave the profession is significantly different than those who stay. And finally, my research is only a snapshot of seven successful second-career alternatively certified teachers who stayed in teaching. A longitudinal study of alternatively certified teachers would provide a plethora of information that a study such as mine, limited by the sample size, the number of encounters with the participants, and the short period of time over which the research was conducted could not provide.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

At the conclusion of Chapter V, I listed 13 shared personal characteristics of the seven successful second-career alternatively certified teachers. As a matter of policy, I recommend that school districts seek out and recruit second-career individuals who match this profile. Some of the characteristics such as having immediate family members who are employed as teachers, and the participants having begun working at an early age are easily identified. Others are more personal in nature. For example, six of the seven made explicit statements during interviews and focus groups in which they described the importance of their work as a teacher making a difference in the lives of others. The

exception was Kate, who worked as a teaching assistant in her first career. I maintain that by implication, her choice of first and second careers in the field of education signifies her drive to make a difference.

After recruiting second-career individuals who share similar characteristics of those in my study who stayed in teaching, as a matter of practice, administrators can alter their interview protocol (as noted in Chapter II of this study) in a way that would allow them to move the conversation beyond the applicants' obvious lack of pedagogical training. In doing so, administrators might find that negative experiences have driven the applicants to search for the positive, and that the applicant possesses a strong desire to do something more, both characteristics discussed in Chapter V as assets that successful second-career alternatively certified teachers bring to teaching.

Closing Thoughts

In this final section, I conclude by reflecting on the process I underwent while identifying the personal and professional experiences that influenced seven second-career alternatively certified teachers to stay in teaching. I begin the section by discussing what I learned during this study and how the findings are logical given my experiences in education and from a personal perspective, gratifying to me as an educator. Next, I outline the limitations surrounding the study. As I progressed through the research process, I became aware of how I would be unable to draw broad, general conclusions based upon the restrictive parameters and design of the study. Finally, I close with a discussion of how, if given the opportunity to conduct this or a similar type of research in the future, I would approach it differently.

What I Learned

Counterintuitive to reasoning and difficult to measure, the most important asset second-career alternatively certified teachers bring to teaching may be negative, unfulfilled experiences from first careers. If an individual leaves a first career in search of an intangible that a second career can bring, the probability of his or her finding satisfaction and longevity in a new career is extremely likely. For example, at the end of Hannah's interview, she stressed, "I think I just missed my calling the first time." It may be that many second-career alternatively certified teachers just missed their calling the first time, and now, in search of greater fulfillment, they show up in classrooms across the country for the most noble of reasons—they simply want to make a difference.

In studying, watching, and listening to second-career alternatively certified teachers, I learned that what attracted them to teaching, the desire to make a difference in the lives of others, also works to keep them in the profession. Beatrice's closing remarks at the end of our focus group discussion provided a clear and direct answer to my research question: "How do personal and professional experiences influence second-career alternatively certified teachers' decision to stay in teaching?" She explained, "I stay in teaching because there is something to be said about molding human beings; that makes me go back every day."

Limitations

I worked with only seven second-career alternatively certified teachers; therefore, a limitation of this study is the sample size. A triangulation of the data resulted in findings that were surprising (in that these teachers didn't draw much subject area content

or experience from their first careers into their teaching practice) and subsequently

provide new information, new insight for those conducting research in the field; however,

because of the small sample size, I lack sufficient data to support major findings or to

make broad claims with a high degree of certainty.

In many ways, the sample was homogenous with the teachers working in the same

district in the same state. The Anywhere School System serves over 20,000 students in

grades PK-12 in approximately 40 schools. I selected the district in part due to my

acquaintance with the superintendent who worked for the school district at the time of

this study. In addition to her willingness to provide me access to the system's data and

resources, the size of the school system was important as I searched for a district where

there was a sufficient number of second-career alternatively certified teachers who met

the criteria to participate in the study.

In comparing the decision-making processes of alternatively certified teachers in

general, to this specific group of seven, it is important to note that students and teachers

in the Anywhere County School System are predominantly White and middle class; the

sample from my study reflect this demographic. Therefore, the decision made by these

seven to stay in teaching can neither support or refute the findings of studies like those of

Sutcher et al. (2016), who reported that alternatively certified teachers are less likely to

stay in schools serving high poverty and minority students (p. 59).

And finally, this study does not produce data on second-career alternatively

certified teachers who left teaching. It is possible, even likely, that those who left share

some of the same characteristics of those who stayed. During my 20-plus years serving as

an educator, it has been on the rarest of occasions that I've found either a new or veteran teacher whose motives in working with students are not related in some way to his or her wanting to advance the well-being of those he or she has been charged to teach. A study comparing and/or contrasting how the personal and professional experiences of second-career alternatively certified teachers influence their decision to stay or leave teaching would add significantly to this field of inquiry.

What I Would Do Differently

If I were to research the same topic a second time, I would begin by increasing the sample size. Specifically, I would include participants from different school systems located across different states that would represent a cross section of society. With an increase in the number and diversity of the sample, I could begin to make broader generalities concerning how participants' personal and professional experiences influence their staying in teaching.

At a time when approximately half of traditionally trained teachers are leaving the classroom within the first 5 years, these second-career teachers with no pedagogical training not only stayed in teaching, but after what is almost a quarter of a century for some, continue to show up every day with an infectious passion for education that changes the lives of their students. It was only by using qualitative research methods that I could explore and document the journeys of the seven teachers. Therefore, if I were to conduct my research again, it would be important that I keep the qualitative aspect of the study intact; however, in retrospect, I believe that by adapting my design to facilitate a mixed methods approach, the rich and complex data that came about as a result of this

study would be extended in breadth and depth by adding a quantitative survey to gather the perspectives of a much larger population.

Finally, were I able to know then what I know now, I would have honored my participants more than, however unintentionally, I demonstrated during our time together. As I reread the interview transcripts, I was shocked to see how often I felt a need to comment or add to what a teacher was sharing. There was no need for my interjections, for what in retrospect sometimes seemed like a demonstration of arrogance. Their stories were compelling, their journeys in some cases were heroic, and their truths quite capable and worthy of speaking for themselves. If given the opportunity to research or study a group of teachers in the future, I will do so with an understanding that by meeting whatever criteria that qualifies them to participate, this singularly makes them worthy of my respect, my gratitude, and my deference. I would show this by drawing their stories out even more, without my commentary on their stories, something I only realized by reflecting back on the interview transcripts as much as I did.

As my research ends, I find myself wondering whether the invitation extended to readers at the beginning of this study is as whimsical as I had originally thought. *Are you between jobs? Not sure what to do with your college degree? Do you enjoy spending time with children and want to make a difference in someone's life? If so, then teaching may be for you!* Teaching is not for everyone; it is not for most. But for those who leave a career in search of something more, in search of a way to make a difference in the lives of children and adolescents, teaching can most definitely be for them.

REFERENCES

Allen, S. (2005). The missing link in alternative certification: Teacher identity formation. *Language, Literacy & Culture Review, 5*(1), 3–14. http://norssiope.fi/norssiope/ mentoring/aineistot/pdf_materials/allen_missing_link_alternative_ certification.pdf

Alliance for Excellence in Education. (2004). *Tapping the potential retaining and developing high-quality new teachers.* Retrieved from http://chalkboardproject.org/sites/default/files/ment-15.pdf

Blumenreich, M., & Rogers, B. (2016). TFA and the magical thinking of the "best and the brightest." *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 24*(13), 1–30. doi:10.14507/epaa.24.1926

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Boser, J. A., Wiley, P. D., & Pettibone, T. J. (1986). *A comparison of participants in traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, Memphis, TN. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED278648.pdf

Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2006). *How changes in entry requirements alter the teacher workforce and affect student achievement.*

NBER Working Paper 11844. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic

Research. retrieved from http://www.nber.org/papers/w11844.pdf

Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2008). *Who leaves? Teacher attrition and student achievement*. NBER Working Paper 14022. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. retrieved from http://www.nber.org/papers/w14022.pdf

Burnette, D. (2016, February 9). Teacher shortages put pressure on governors, legislators. *Education Week*. Retrieved from https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2016/02/10/ teacher-shortages-put-pressure-on-governors-legislators.html

Casey, P., Dunlap, K., Brister, H., Davidson, M., & Starrett, T. M. (2013). Sink or swim? Throw us a life jacket! Novice alternatively certified bilingual and special education teachers deserve options. *Education and Urban Society, 45*(3), 287– 306. doi:10.1177/0013124511408075

Chavez, C. (2008). Conceptualizing from the inside: Advantages, complications, and demands on insider positionality. *The Qualitative Report, 13*(3), 474–494. http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol13/iss3/9

Chin, E., & Young, J. W. (2007). A person-oriented approach to characterizing beginning teachers in alternative certification programs. *Educational Researcher, 36*(2), 74– 83. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4621077

Clark, M. A., Chiang, H. S., Silva, T., McConnell, S., Sonnenfeld, K., Erbe, A., & Puma, M. (2013). *The effectiveness of secondary math teachers from Teach for America*

and the Teaching Fellows programs. Princeton, NJ: Mathematical Policy

Research.

Cochran-Smith, M., Cannady, M., McEachern, K. P., Piazza, P., Power, C., & Ryan, A.

(2010). Teachers' education, teaching practice, and retention: A cross-genre

review of recent research. *Journal of Education, 191*(2), 19–31.

http://www.jstor.org/stable/42744203

Creswell, J. W. (2015). *30 essential skills for the qualitative researcher.* Thousand Oaks,

CA: Sage.

Danielson, C. (2013). *The framework for teaching: Evaluation instrument.* Princeton, NJ:

Danielson Group.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). Teacher education and the American future. *Journal of

Teacher Education, 61*(1-2), 35–47. doi.org/10.1177/0022487109348024

Darling-Hammond, L., & Baratz-Snowden, J. (2007). A good teacher in every classroom:

Preparing the highly qualified teachers our children deserve. *Educational

Horizons, 85*(2), 111–132. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ750647.pdf

Darling-Hammond, L., Chung, R., & Frelow, F. (2002). Variation in teacher preparation:

How well do different pathways prepare teachers to teach? *Journal of Teacher

Education, 53*(4), 286–302. doi:10.1177/0022487102053004002

Darling-Hammond, L., Holtzman, D. J., Gatlin, S. J., & Heilig, J. V. (2005). Does teacher

preparation matter? Evidence about teacher certification, Teach for America, and

teacher effectiveness. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 13*(42), 1–51.

doi:10.14507/epaa.v13n42.2005

Darling-Hammond, L., Newton, S. P., & Wei, R. C. (2013). Developing and accessing

    beginning teacher effectiveness: The potential of performance assessments.

    Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability, 25(3), 179–204.

Darling-Hammond, L., & Youngs, P. (2002). Defining "highly qualified teachers": What

    does "scientifically-based research" actually tell us? *Educational Researcher,*

    31(9), 13–25. doi:10.3102/0013189X031009013

Di Carlo, M. (2015). *Update on teacher turnover in the U.S.* Retrieved from

    http://www.shankerinstitute.org/print3306

Dobbie, W. (2011). Teacher characteristics and student achievement: Evidence from

    Teach for America. Unpublished manuscript, Harvard University.

Every Student Succeeds Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2015,

    Pub. L. No. 114-95 Stat.

Farquhar, S., & Tesar, M. (2016). Focus groups as temporal ecosystems for newly

    qualified early childhood teachers. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*,

    17(3), 261–274. doi:10.1177/1463949116660949

Feistritzer, C. E. (2005, September). *State policy trends for alternative routes to teacher*

    certification: A moving target. Prepared for the Conference on Alternative

    Certification: A Forum for Highlighting Rigorous Research, Washington, DC.

    Retrieved from http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?

    doi=10.1.1.420.25&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Feistritzer, C. E. (2011). *Profiles of teachers in the U.S. 2011.* Washington, DC: National

    Center for Education Information.

Feistritzer, C. E., & Chester, D. (2000). *Alternative certification: A state-by-state analysis.* Washington DC: National Center for Education Information.

Fong, A. B., Makkonen, R., & Jaquet, K. (2016). Projections of California teacher retirements: A county and regional perspective. REL 2017-181. *Regional Educational Laboratory West*.

Foote, M.Q., Brantlinger, A., Haydar, H., Smith, B., & Gonzalez, L. (2011). Are we supporting teacher success: Insights from an alternative route mathematics teacher certification program for urban public schools. *Education and Urban Society, 43*(3), 396–425.

Fox, A. G., & Peters, M. L. (2013). First year teachers: Certification program and assigned subject on their self-efficacy. *Current Issues in Education, 16*(1). Retrieved from https://cie.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/cieatasu/article/viewFile/1117/434

Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E., & Chadwick, B. (2008). Methods of data collection in qualitative research: Interviews and focus groups. *British Dental Journal, 204*(6), 291–295.

Glass, G. V. (2008). *Alternative certification of teachers*. Education Policy Research Unit, Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, College of Education, Arizona State University. Retrieved from http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.601.6173&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Goldhaber, D., & Cowan, J. (2014). Excavating the teacher pipeline: Teacher preparation programs and teacher attrition. *Journal of Teacher Education, 65*(4), 449–462. doi:10.1177/0022487114542516

Goldhorn, J. L. (2005). *The impact of an alternative certification program on teacher retention in selected Texas public school districts as reported by personnel in Education Service Center, Region 20, Texas* (Doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University).

Goldring, R., Taie, S., & Riddles, M. (2014). *Teacher attrition and mobility.* Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014077.pdf

Goldstein, D. (2014). *The teacher wars: A history of America's most embattled profession.* New York, NY: Penguin Random House.

Gorman, N. (2016). *Report provides numbers for just how bad teacher shortage really is.* Retrieved from http://www.educationworld.com/a_news/report-provides-numbers-just-how-bad-teacher-shortage-really-1448683841

Grissom, J. A. (2008). But do they stay? Addressing issues of teacher retention through alternative certification. In P. Grossman & S. Loeb (Eds.), *Alternate routes to teaching: Mapping the new landscape of teacher education* (pp. 129–156). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Grossman, P., & Loeb, S. (2010). Learning from multiple routes. *Educational Leadership, 67*(8), 22–27. http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may10/vol67/num08/Learning-from-Multiple-Routes.aspx

Hansen, M., Backes, B., & Brady, V. (2015). *Teacher attrition and mobility during the Teach for America clustering strategy in Miami-Dade County Public Schools.* National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research. Working paper #139. Retrieved from https://caldercenter.org/sites/default/files/WP%20139.pdf

Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Heilig, J. V., Cole, H. A., & Springel, M. A. (2010). Alternative certification and the Teach for America: The search for high quality teachers. *Kansas Journal of Law and Public Policy, 20*(3), 388–412.

Heilig, J. V., & Jez, S. J. (2014). *Teach for America: A return to the evidence.* Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved from http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/tfa-return_0.pdf

Heim, J. (2016). *America has a teacher shortage and a new study says it's getting worse could get worse, study finds.* Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/america-has-a-teacher-shortage-and-a-new-study-says-its-getting-worse/2016/09/14/d5de1cee-79e8-11e6-beac-57a4a412e93a_story.html

Heineke, A. J., Mazza, B. S., & Tichnor-Wagner, A. (2014). After the two-year commitment: A quantitative and qualitative inquiry of Teach for America teacher retention and attrition. *Urban Education, 49*(7), 750–782. doi:10.1177/0042085913488603

Hui, T. K. (2016). *NC schools facing teacher recruitment and retention challenge.* Retrieved from http://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/education/ article63660742.html

Humphrey, D. C., & Wechsler, M. E. (2007). Insights into alternative certification: Initial findings from a national study. *Teachers College Record, 109*(3), 483–530.

Ingersoll, R., Merrill, L., & May, H. (2014). *What are the effects of teacher education and preparation on beginning teacher attrition?* Research Report (#RR-82). Philadelphia, PA: Consortium for Policy Research in Education, University of Pennsylvania. Retrieved from http://www.cpre.org/sites/default/files/ researchreport/2018_prepeffects2014.pdf

Ingersoll, R., Merrill, L., & Stuckey, D. (2014). *Seven trends: The transformation of the teaching force.* CPRE Research Report # RR-80. Philadelphia, PA: Consortium for Policy Research in Education. doi:10.12698/cpre.2014.rr80

Ingersoll, R. M., & Smith, T. M. (2003). The wrong solution to the teacher shortage. *Educational Leadership, 60*(8), 30–33. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ666112

Jorissen, K. T. (2003). Successful career transitions: Lessons from urban alternate route teachers who stayed. *The High School Journal, 86*(3), 41–51. doi:10.1353/hsj.2003.0003

Kane, T. J., Rockoff, J. E., & Staiger, D. O. (2008). What does certification tell us about teacher effectiveness? Evidence from New York City. *Economics of Education Review, 27*(6), 615–631. http://www.dartmouth.edu/~dstaiger/Papers/ KaneRockoffStaiger%20EcEdRev2008.pdf

Kavanagh, K. M., & Dunn, A. H. (2013). Teach for America and the political spectacle of recruiting the "best and the brightest." *Critical Education, 4*(11), 48–65. http://ices.library.ubc.ca/index.php/criticaled/article/view/183941/184139

Kee, A. N. (2012). Feelings of preparedness among alternatively certified teachers: What is the role of program features? *Journal of Teacher Education, 63*(1), 23–38. doi:10.1177/0022487111421933

Kolb, D. A., Boyatzis, R. E., & Mainemelis, C. (2001). Experiential learning theory: Previous research and new directions. *Perspectives on Thinking, Learning, and Cognitive Styles, 1*(2001), 227–247.

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2014). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kyriacou, C., Kunc, R., Stephens, P., & Hultgren, A. (2003). Student teachers' expectations of teaching as a career. *Educational Review, 55*(3), 255–263. doi:10.1080/0013191032000118910

Labaree, R. V. (2002). The risk of 'going observationalist': Negotiating the hidden dilemmas of being an insider participant observer. *Qualitative Research, 2*(1), 97–122. doi:10.1177/1468794102002001641

Labaree, D. (2010). Teach for America and teacher ed: Heads they win, tails we lose. *Journal of Teacher Education, 61*(1-2), 48–55. doi:10.1177/0022487109347317

Laffoon, J. (2012). *Why do good teachers stay in high poverty schools?* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas).

Lee, D. (2011). Changing course: Reflections of second-career teachers. *Current Issues in Education, 14*(2), 1–19.

Lerner, P. E., & Zittleman, K. (2002). *Career changers: Women (and men) who switch to Teaching.* Report No. SP 040866. New Orleans, LA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 466452).

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 1997*(74), 5–12. doi:10.1002/ace.7401

National Center for Children in Poverty. (2016). *Child poverty.* Retrieved from http://www.nccp.org/topics/childpoverty.html

National Research Council. (2010). *Preparing teachers: Building evidence for sound policy.* Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, Committee on the Study of Teacher Preparation Programs in the United States, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education.

Ng, J. C., & Peter, L. (2010). Should I stay or should I go? Examining the career choices of alternatively licensed teachers in urban schools. *The Urban Review, 42*(2), 123–142. doi:10.1007/s11256-009-0120-7

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425.

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Retrieved from http://www.ncreportcards.org/src/

North Carolina Professional Educator's Licensure. (2016). *Frequently asked questions.* Retrieved from http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/licensure/faq/

Oakes, J., Franke, M. L., Quartz, K. H., & Rogers, J. (2002). Research for high-quality urban teaching: Defining it, developing it, assessing it. *Journal of Teacher Education, 53*(3), 228–235. doi:10.1177/0022487102053003006

O'Connor, E. A., Malow, M. S., & Bisland, B. M. (2011). Mentorship and instruction received during training: Views of alternatively certified teachers. *Educational Review, 63*(2), 219–232. doi:10.1080/00131911.2010.537312

Ortlipp, M. (2008). Keeping and using reflective journals in the qualitative research process. *The Qualitative Report, 13*(4), 695–705. http://nsuworks.nova.edu/ tqr/vol13/iss4/8

Partelow, L., & Baumgardner, C. (2016). *Educator pipeline at risk.* Center for American Progress. Retrieved from https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/ report/2016/09/14/144215/educator-pipeline-at-risk/

Patton, M. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pope, C., Ziebland, S., & Mays, N. (2000). Analysing qualitative data. *BMJ, 320*(7227), 114–116. doi:10.1136/bmj.320.7227.114

Powers, F. W. (2002). Second-career teachers: Perceptions and mission in their new careers. *International Studies in Sociology of Education, 12*(3), 303–318. doi:10.1080/09620210200200095

Ravitch, D. (2013). *Reign of error: The hoax of the privatization movement and the danger to America's public schools*. New York, NY: Vintage.

Redding, C., & Smith, T. M. (2016). Easy in, easy out: Are alternatively certified teachers turning over at increased rates? *American Educational Research Journal, 53*(4), 1086–1125. doi:10.3102/0002831216653206

Ritchie, J., & Lewis, J. (2003). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C. M., & Ormston, R. (Eds.). (2013). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (2008). *Member checks.* Retrieved from http://www.qualres.org/HomeMemb-3696.html

Robertson-Kraft, C., & Duckworth, A. L. (2014). True grit: Trait-level perseverance and passion for long-term goals predicts effectiveness and retention among novice teachers. *Teachers College Record, 116*(3). http://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentId=17352

Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sass, T. R. (2015). Licensure and Worker Quality: A comparison of alternative routes to teaching. *Journal of Law and Economics, 58*(1), 1–35. doi:10.1086/682904

Scherer, M. (2012). The challenges of supporting new teachers: A conversation with Linda Darling-Hammond. *Educational Leadership, 69*(8), 18–23.

Schonfeld, I. S., & Feinman, S. J. (2012). Difficulties of alternatively certified teachers. *Education and Urban Society, 44*(3), 215–246. doi:10.1177/0013124510392570

Silvernail, D. L. (1998). *Findings from an initial analysis of the New York City Teacher Survey.* New York, NY: New Visions for Public Schools.

Simmons, T. J. (2016). *Transitioning first-career skills into a second career in teaching: A collective case study of effective elementary school teachers* (Doctoral dissertation, Liberty University).

Smith, T. M., & Ingersoll, R. M. (2004). What are the effects of induction and mentoring on beginning teacher turnover? *American Educational Research Journal, 41*(3), 681–714. doi:10.3102/00028312041003681

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sutcher, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). *A coming crisis in teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the U.S.* Retrieved from https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/A_Coming_Crisis_in_Teaching_REPORT.pdf

Teaching Certification. (2016). *Alternative teaching certification.* Retrieved from http://www.teaching-certification.com/alternative-teaching-certification.html

Tricarico, K. M., Jacobs, J., & Yendol-Hoppey, D. (2015). Reflection on their first five years of teaching: Understanding staying and alternatively certified teacher power. *Teachers and Teaching, 21*(3), 237–259. doi:10.1080/13540602.2014.953821

Villar, A., & Strong, M. (2007). Is mentoring worth the money? A benefit-cost analysis and five-year rate of return of a comprehensive mentoring program for beginning teachers. *ERS Spectrum, 25*(3), 1–17. https://edsource.org/wp-content/uploads/old/ment-8.pdf

Warner-Griffin, C., Noel, A., & Tadler, C. (2016). *Sources of newly hired teachers in the United States: Results from the Schools and Staffing Survey, 1987-88 to 2011-12* (NCES 2016-876). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016876.pdf

Wiehe, R. L. (2009). *Second career teachers' perceptions of their profession* (Doctoral dissertation, Kent State University).

Wilkins, C., & Comber, C. (2015). 'Elite' career-changers in the teaching profession. *British Educational Research Journal, 41*(6), 1010–1030. doi:10.1002/berj.3183

Yaffe, D. (2016). *Tackling the teacher shortage.* Trumbull, CT: District Administration. Retrieved from https://www.districtadministration.com/article/tackling-teacher-shortage

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Zeichner, K. M., & Tabachnick, B. R. (1985). The development of teacher perspectives: Social strategies and institutional control in the socialization of beginning teachers. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 11*(1), 1–25. doi:10.1080/0260747850110101

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your college experience. What was going on in your life? Did you have significant obligations outside the classroom?

2. Upon graduation from college, did you immediately transition to a job associated with your degree? If so, why did you leave the position?

3. What was your position just prior to teaching? What did you find most enjoyable/challenging about the job?

4. When and how did you realize that you didn't want to continue in your previous occupation?

5. Describe the event or series of events that lead to your decision to become a teacher.

6. Describe any specific experiences or skills from your previous job that you currently use in the classroom.

7. Tell me about one of your best days in teaching, when you felt most you were in the right profession.

8. Tell me about one of your most challenging days, when you questioned or doubted your decision to be a teacher.

9. Why are you in teaching? How would you describe your mission and purpose?

10. Do you think you made the right decision to become a teacher? Explain why or why not.

11. What would you say to a friend who was considering becoming a teacher?

12. There are 2nd career alternatively certified teachers who enjoy long, successful careers in teaching and others who don't make it through their first year. What do you think makes the difference?

13. The purpose of this study is to identify the reason(s) that 2nd career alternatively certified teachers stay in teaching. Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you feel would help me in my study?

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

The following questions ask you to recall specific and significant personal and professional experiences. Your responses should not be limited by categorizing the experience as a positive or negative one. Try and avoid separating your recollections into ones that were happy or sad. The focus should be on the experience, free of outside or personal judgements.

1. Describe a professional experience(s) during your first career that potentially helps define who you are as an individual.

2. Describe a professional experience(s) that occurred during your first 4 years in teaching that potentially helps define who you are as an individual.

3. Describe a personal experience(s) that helps define who you are as an individual.

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Participant Name: _____

Race/Gender/Age: _____   _____   _____

Years of Teaching Experience: _____

College Major/Degree: _____

Additional Degree(s): _____

Beginning Teaching Date: _____

Occupation/Job(s)
Prior to Teaching: _____

Current Assignment
Content/Grade Level: _____

Relationship Status: _____

Children/Ages: _____

The personal nature of the last two questions serve to address the study's second research question: "What personal life experiences are shared by successful second-career alternatively certified teachers who teach for a minimum of 4 years and transition to a professional license?"