Walden University
A higher degree. A higher purpose.

Walden University
ScholarWorks

Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies

Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies
Collection

2015

A Grounded Theory Study of Navigating the Cycle of Decline in Public School Teaching

Jenny Sanders
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations

Part of the Educational Psychology Commons, and the Education Policy Commons

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Walden University

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Jenny Sanders

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Mitchell Olson, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Deborah Gilbert, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Michael Raffanti, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2015

Abstract

A Grounded Theory Study of Navigating the Cycle of Decline

in Public School Teaching

by

Jenny L. Sanders

MAT, Piedmont College, 2005

BA, Brenau University, 2000

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2015

Abstract

Excessive teacher turnover has considerable financial, logistical, and academic implications for public education. The purpose of this study was to develop a grounded theory (GT) that conceptualized the experiences of former Georgia public school teachers in order to better understand voluntary teacher attrition. Informed by Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory, this GT study provided insight into the process by which teachers arrive at the decision to leave public schools. Interviews with 12 former Georgia public school teachers were conducted. A constant comparative analysis was used to develop the theory of navigating the cycle of decline, which accounts for the general trend of declining motivation, well-being, and fulfillment among teachers who choose to leave the public school system. The cycle of decline consists of 4 stages: (a) embarking, in which new teachers initially experience concerns about authenticity and support in the public school context; (b) resolving, in which teachers attempt to resolve these concerns; (c) weathering, in which teachers attempt to endure or tolerate the conditions causing these concerns; and (d) opting out, in which teachers opt to leave the public school context entirely. The theory provides a useful framework for identifying and implementing strategies for retaining public school teachers. Stakeholders and policymakers in education may be able to minimize the impact of early attrition by ensuring opportunities for teachers to do authentic work in a supportive environment. The study supports positive social change by providing new insight into factors that lead to teacher turnover, and could thus help improve systemic and educational outcomes of public schools in Georgia and across the nation.

A Grounded Theory Study of Navigating the Cycle of Decline

in Public School Teaching

by

Jenny L. Sanders

MAT, Piedmont College, 2005

BA, Brenau University, 2000

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Teacher Leadership

Walden University

February 2015

Dedication

This study is dedicated to all of the teachers who genuinely love what they do for a living. Bless you.

Acknowledgments

Long-term projects like this one are never the work of a single person. They require the loving commitment, patience, insight, and encouragement of a whole multitude of people. Within that multitude, there are a few folks who deserve special mention, of course…

First, I must thank my husband Ben. He has witnessed first-hand all of the ugly realities of living with a stressed-out grad student and continues to love me anyway. I could not have completed this study without the tremendous blessing of his unflagging enthusiasm, positive attitude, and kind heart.

A world of gratitude to my usually patient and always brilliant daughter, Lizzie, who, despite the fact that I have spent a large portion of her childhood in pursuit of this accomplishment, has always been one of my biggest fans and my greatest inspiration. I pray that she will look back on this time in our lives and remember a mother who worked hard to set an example of discipline and excellence, but who still managed to work in a little time for fun, too.

Many thanks to my precious mother-in-law Carolyn, the original Dr. Sanders, who has helped our family in so many ways along this journey. She has never failed to provide me with encouragement and inspiration, even when I was feeling low.

I also have to thank my beloved parents, Jim and Karen Tench, for sowing in me the seeds of curiosity and persistence. Their immeasurable influence and support have made me a life-long learner with a driving passion for asking questions and finding answers that can make the world a better place.

I would also like to thank the participants in my study. Without your willingness to share your experiences, I would have had no foundation for my work. You are exceptional individuals and I'm thankful to have had the opportunity to get to know each of you a little better.

Finally, I have been blessed with the friendship and support of my outstanding committee chair, Dr. Mitchell Olson. I am forever indebted to him for his guidance, insight, and *tremendous* patience as he helped me to navigate the process of completing this study. Thank you a thousand times, Dr. O!

Table of Contents

List of Tables v

List of Figures vi

Section 1: Introduction to the Study 1

Background of the Study 1

Problem Statement 2

Nature of the Study 4

Purpose of the Study 5

Research Question 6

Conceptual Framework 7

Operational Definitions 9

Substantive Terms 9

Methodological Terms 12

Scope and Delimitations 15

Limitations 16

Assumptions 17

Significance of the Study 18

Local Application 19

Professional Application 19

Positive Social Change 20

Summary 21

Section 2: Review of the Literature 22

Introduction 22

Teacher Turnover in Public Schools 24
Contributing Factors 27
Consequences of Teacher Turnover 31
Turnover as Process 32
Leavers in the Literature 34
Disequilibrium 37
Teacher Needs 42
Authenticity and Value Congruence 42
Needs for Support 45
The Public School Context 51
Impact on Perceived Authenticity 53
Impact on Perceived Support 55
Impact on Functional Equilibrium 57
Impact on Attrition 58
Summary 59
Section 3: Methodology 61
Research Tradition 61
Rationale 64
Measures for Ethical Protection 65
Informed Consent, Debriefing, and Benefits 65
Confidentiality 65
Security 66
The Role of the Researcher 66

Relationship with Participants ... 67
Personal Experience ... 67
Two Traits of the GT Analyst ... 68
Grand Tour Question ... 69
Criteria for Selecting Participants ... 70
The Seven Stages of the GT Methodology ... 71
Stage 1: Minimizing Preconceptions ... 72
Stage 2: Data Collection ... 73
Stage 3: Constant Comparative Analysis ... 76
Stage 4: Memoing ... 87
Stage 5: Sorting ... 90
Stage 6: Theoretical Outlining ... 93
Stage 7: Writing ... 94
Validity and Trustworthiness ... 97
Fit ... 98
Workability ... 99
Relevance ... 99
Modifiability ... 100
Grab ... 101
GT: A Self-Correcting Methodology ... 102
Conclusion ... 104
Section 4: Navigating the Cycle of Decline ... 105
The Grounded Theory Process ... 105

Navigating the Cycle of Decline 110
Conditions for Decline 113
Embarking 118
Resolving 136
Weathering 158
Opting Out 181
Conclusion 187
Section 5: Implications and Recommendations for Further Study 190
Overview 190
Interpretation of Findings 192
Implications for Social Change 197
Recommendations for Action 199
Recommendations for Further Study 203
Reflection 206
Conclusion 208
References 210
Appendix: Example of Open Coding 234

List of Tables

Table 1. The Interrelatedness of Expected Authenticity, Level of Motivation, and Associated Stages in the Cycle of Decline. 116

Table 2. The Interrelatedness of Expected Support, Level of Functionality, and Associated Behaviors. 117

Table 3. The Role of Expectations for Authenticity and Support in Determining Stages of the Cycle of Decline and Associated Behaviors. 118

List of Figures

Figure 1. The theory of orienting... 132

Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Over the past century, a great deal of scholarly research in education has been dedicated to the diagnosis and reformation of America's public school system (Angus & Mirel, 1999; Goodlad, 1984; Jennings, 2012). A decades-long parade of trends, mandates, and policies for improving education continues to march from theory to practice in public schools, each wave dutifully implemented and disregarded in turn (Goodlad, 1984; Jennings, 2012; Kuhn, 2014). This sustained expenditure of effort, intellect, and resources on educational concerns is a testament both to the central importance of the public school system in American society and to the system's tenacity in defying reform (Angus & Mirel, 1999; Aud & Hannes, 2011; Jennings, 2012). Even so, public education in America today is characteristically plagued by countless concerns that desperately need to be addressed.

Background of the Study

Although many pressing issues clamor for the attention of stakeholders in public education, the pervasive and widespread exodus of qualified teachers from America's classrooms is particularly troubling (Farber, 2010; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; Nweke, Eads, Afolabi, Stephens, & Toth, 2006; Scafidi, Sjoquist, & Stinebrickner, 2010). The ongoing necessity of filling the constant vacancies that departing teachers leave behind characterizes a problematic "revolving-door" phenomenon in public schools known as teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2001, 2007). Although some measure of turnover is to be expected in any organization, Ingersoll (2001) pointed out that "high levels of employee turnover are tied to how well organizations function" (p. 25). If this is the case, the pervasive level of teacher turnover in America's schools raises many concerns about

the functionality and effectiveness of the public education system. This study interviewed former Georgia public school teachers in order to better understand the professional and personal experiences that resulted in teachers' decisions to leave public education.

Problem Statement

Much like the rest of the nation, Georgia's public schools are currently experiencing problematic levels of teacher turnover, a circumstance that has been shown to be detrimental to many aspects of public education, including teacher quality, school culture, and school effectiveness (Boe, Bobbit, Cook, Whitener, & Weber, 1997; Buchanan, 2012; Corbell, 2009; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll et al., 2012; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF], 2002; Scafidi et al., 2010). Further, research indicates that teacher turnover is more common in the southern United States (Aud & Hannes, 2011) and that turnover rates across the nation are on the rise (Aud & Hannes, 2011; MetLife, 2012). Of even more concern, several studies have linked high levels of teacher turnover with diminished student achievement, especially among high-risk populations (Boyd et al., 2009; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; NCTAF, 2002; Scafidi, Sjoquist, & Stinebrickner, 2007; Waddell, 2010). Teacher turnover is also a major financial concern for Georgia (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001). The cost of replacing Georgia teachers lost to voluntary, preretirement attrition accounts for roughly 50% of the teacher turnover cost in the state (Nweke et al., 2006), with total turnover costs exceeding $300 million annually statewide (Afolabi, Nweke, Eads, & Stephens, 2007).

In response to the social and fiscal necessity of minimizing the detrimental effects of teacher turnover, research studies and reforms attempting to address the problem are

widespread (Corbell, 2009; Gonzalez, Brown, & Slate, 2008). Even so, numerous studies have confirmed that, despite attempts to curb the turnover trend, 30–50% of public school teachers still leave public education within 3–5 years of being hired (Gonzalez et al., 2008; Ingersoll, 2007; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Locklear, 2010; NCTAF, 2002). Ingersoll (2001) claimed that the "primary underlying problem" behind teacher turnover is "the manner in which schools are managed and teachers are treated" (p. 24), a conclusion that has been supported by the findings of many other studies (Alliance for Excellent Education [AEE], 2008; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Cowan, 2010; DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Gonzalez et al., 2008; Locklear, 2010; Miller & Chait, 2008; Renzulli, Parrot, & Beattie, 2011; Santoro & Morehouse, 2011; Strunk & Robinson, 2006; Waddell, 2010). Despite the empirical evidence in support of Ingersoll's assertion, much of the scholarly research and reform related to teacher turnover has focused not on addressing systemic problems that have been shown to diminish teacher retention, but on securing a steady supply of new teachers to replace those who are continually lost to early attrition (Ingersoll, 2001, 2007; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Unfortunately, this shortsighted solution does little more than fuel the spin of the revolving door, leaving education stakeholders to grapple with the challenges of an unstable workforce and a steady decline in the overall effectiveness and cultural health of many of Georgia's public schools (Afolabi et al., 2007; Ingersoll, 2007; Waddell, 2010). These issues are discussed in greater detail in Section 2.

Scafidi et al. (2010) astutely stated that "to improve teacher retention in Georgia, we must first understand why teachers leave" (para. 1). In order to accomplish this goal, this study investigated and conceptualized the experiences of former Georgia public

school teachers who voluntarily left their teaching positions before becoming eligible for retirement. Since the successful implementation of positive reform in public education is largely dependent on quality of stakeholders' shared understanding of the problem (Connelly & Graham, 2009; Scafidi et al., 2010; Tillema, 2005), this study used an inductive methodology known as classic grounded theory (GT) to produce the theory of navigating the cycle of decline. This theory maps the conceptual underpinnings of teacher turnover to supplement the current body of research on the phenomenon (Glaser, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Raffanti, 2005; Simmons, 2008a). The theory is grounded in data from open-ended interviews with 12 former Georgia public school teachers. Former teachers represent a direct and underexamined source of "deeper insight into the reasons behind why teachers are leaving the profession" (Gonzalez et al., 2008, p. 3-4). Section 2 further discusses the foundational importance of understanding former teachers' experiences as a step toward improving teacher retention in Georgia's public schools.

Nature of the Study

Because this study required an open inquiry into the lived experiences of former teachers in Georgia, I identified GT as the most appropriate methodological approach. GT is a rigorous, systematic method for collecting and analyzing data (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The data is used to generate a substantiated, working theory that is "grounded in the realities that are relevant to and experienced by participants in the action scene" (Simmons & Gregory, 2003, para. 16). The general process of a GT study is "to see what data one has and where it will take one's research and subsequently what concepts will emerge indicating a main concern and a core category, which constantly resolves the main concern" (Glaser, 2009, p. 21). Because GT

is a general method of inquiry, it is neither strictly quantitative nor qualitative, meaning that data for a GT study may take any form (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For the current study, data were acquired through and limited to open-ended interviews with former teachers who voluntarily left the Georgia public school system.

According to Urell (2006), a practical and applicable theory in any discipline "must have a direct bearing on the people studied, must account for the complexity of the systems involved, and be reflective of patterns and relationships in the system" (p. 525). This description exemplifies the characteristic qualities of GT. The ultimate goal of this study was to produce a conceptual, substantive theory grounded in data collected from former Georgia public school teachers that addressed the core import of factors relevant to teachers' experiences in a wide range of contexts (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 2011). The result was the theory of navigating the cycle of decline. This integrated theory, grounded in former teachers' experiences, is capable of illuminating the underlying conceptual patterns that define the complex roles of educators in both theory and practice (Urell, 2006). When applied to practice, the current study's theory may be used by education stakeholders to plan, support, and sustain reform because the theory itself emerged directly from the lived experiences of educators who voluntarily opted to leave the Georgia public school system before becoming eligible for retirement. Section 3 provides a detailed account of the GT methodology and its centrality to the objectives of this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to generate a relevant, useful theory that elucidates common conceptual patterns in the experiences of former Georgia public school teachers.

Since GT is designed to "discover what problems [exist] in the social scene, and see how the persons involved [handle] them" (Stern, 1995, p. 30), this methodology provided the tools to make conceptual sense of teachers' experiences leading up to their decisions to leave the public school system. To accomplish this goal, I gathered and analyzed data from open-ended interviews with 12 former teachers who left the Georgia public school system prior to becoming eligible for retirement. Continuing research on the circumstances and behaviors that contribute to teachers' decisions to leave public education is critical to fully understanding and ultimately minimizing the damage caused by teacher turnover in Georgia's public schools. The current study's grounded theory can help satisfy the urgent need for relevant and applicable scholarly research in education as a foundation for positive change.

Research Question

While most studies begin by posing research questions that will guide the research (Creswell, 2003), proposing preconceived research questions conflicts with the inductive processes of the GT methodology (Glaser, 1992). GT requires that the researcher's preconceptions, including those relating to specific research questions and their potential answers, be suspended in order for the concepts in the data to emerge unimpeded during constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus, the research question for this study could most easily be conceived of as a general area of interest: the experiences of former public school teachers. Accordingly, the first interviews for the current study commenced with an invitation to participants in the form of a simple prompt, known in GT as a grand tour question (Olson, 2006), to share their experiences regarding the area of interest: "Tell me about your experiences as a public school teacher." The grand tour

question is a general, open-ended prompt that captures the essence of the area of interest and is stated in terms general enough to prevent the inadvertent funneling of participant responses down a path preconceived by the researcher (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Section 3 includes more detailed information about the development and use of grand tour questions in GT.

Conceptual Framework

Although the current study generated its own conceptual framework through the use of the GT methodology, I used Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory (SDT) to establish a conceptual foothold in the behavioral and motivational patterns that emerged from the experiences of Georgia's former public school teachers. SDT is an explanatory theory useful for understanding the types and degrees of human motivation, regardless of the geographic, circumstantial, demographic, temporal, or cultural context of the action scene (Deci & Ryan, 2008b, p. 182). Ultimately, various conceptual components of SDT emerged from the study data through constant comparative analysis, affirming the relevance of SDT to the study's emergent theory. In addition to its alignment with the study data, there are several further reasons that SDT is a particularly appropriate framework for supplementing the current study's theory of navigating the cycle of decline in teaching.

First, SDT is, like the end product of a grounded theory study, a conceptual explanatory theory that has consistently demonstrated its fit, workability, and relevance over the past 30 years (Deci & Ryan, 2008a, 2008b). SDT provides a concept-centered, research-based foundation for understanding former teachers' experiences and the factors that motivated their decisions to leave the classroom.

Second, SDT is a useful tool for studying participant behavior within in a given social context (Deci & Ryan, 2008a; Ryan & Deci 2000b), which fully aligns with the current study's purpose. This quality was important in the design of the current study, which was intended to conceptualize the thoughts, actions, and motivating factors embedded in the experiences of Georgia's former teachers in the social context of public education (Beltman, 2009, p. 194). SDT provided an initial framework for conceptualizing the contextual factors that "catalyze both within- and between-person differences in motivation and personal growth, resulting in people being more self-motivated, energized, and integrated in some situations, domains, and cultures than in others" (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 68). Because of its sensitivity to the role of social context in the study of the experiences of Georgia's former teachers, SDT was especially well-suited to the current study.

Another reason SDT provided an effective supplemental framework for understanding former teachers' experiences is its focus on recurring conceptual patterns and characteristics of human behavior and motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000b) asserted that establishing conceptual categories reflecting universal human psychological needs "does not diminish the importance of variability in goals and orientations at different developmental epochs or in different cultures, but it does suggest similarities in underlying processes that lead to the development and expression of those differences" (p. 75). Like GT, SDT proved to be sophisticated enough to accommodate the complexity and variation inherent in former teachers' experiences, while providing a tried framework for analyzing those variations for common conceptual characteristics.

Finally, there is a considerable body of research that establishes a precedent for

the use of SDT as a framework for understanding motivation in educational contexts (Capel, 1987; Feinberg, Assor, Kaplan, Kanat-Maymon & Roth, 2005; Malanowski & Wood, 1984; Pelletier, Seguin-Levesque, & Legault, 2002; Reeve, 2002; Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon & Kaplan, 2007; Ryan & Sapp, 2005; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Vallerand et al., 1993). Bouwma-Gearhart's (2010) case study on preservice educator attrition used SDT as a guiding framework and described SDT as "a theory of motivation shown to successfully inform a wide array of psychological data concerning human behavior and optimal functioning in a variety of social contexts" (p. 30). Wagner and French (2010) also selected SDT as their framework for conceptualizing the relationship between teacher motivation and job satisfaction.

Clearly, SDT was an appropriate choice for enhancing the conceptualization of patterns in the current study's area of interest: the experiences of Georgia's former teachers. Even though SDT tentatively served as an initial framework for outlining the study's interest area, I determined through constant comparative analysis of current and relevant literature that the SDT framework had earned its way into the study's integrated theory of how teachers navigate the cycle of decline.

Operational Definitions

This section defines a series terms that are fundamental to the substance of the study and introduces some of the most common methodological terms used in GT.

Substantive Terms

This section defines common terms related to the study's area of interest and the theory of navigating the cycle of decline.

Attrition. Teacher attrition is most often presented as a component of the more inclusive concept of teacher turnover (Boe et al., 1997; Ingersoll, 2001). Definitions of teacher attrition vary from study to study (Borman & Dowling, 2008; NCTAF, 2002; Scafidi et al., 2010), but generally agree with Ingersoll's (2001) assertion that that teacher attrition involves teachers who leave their teaching jobs. Attrition from Georgia public education, then, refers to teachers who have left teaching positions in Georgia's public schools. A range of factors can be included in the calculation of teacher attrition rates, many of which relate to leavers' occupations after teaching or reasons for leaving the profession (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino, Santibañez, & Daley, 2006; Ingersoll, 2001).

Authenticity. Authenticity can be defined in psychological terms as "the unobstructed operation of one's true, or core, self in one's daily enterprise" (Kernis, 2003, p. 13). Doing work that is meaningful and authentic to their altruistic, student-centered values for teaching is of critical importance to many teachers. Teachers' values often serve as a touchstone for authenticity because they tend to function as the foundation for teachers' operational beliefs about the purpose and nature of the work of educators (McCrickerd, 2012; Mitchell, Parker, Giles, Joyce, & Chiang, 2012).

Burnout. Van Tonder and Williams (2009) referred to burnout as "a psychological syndrome that develops in response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors in the work situation, which, de facto, articulates a non-productive relationship (effectively, a crisis) between employees and their work" (p. 205). Although theories on the locus of causality, the characteristics, and the consequences of professional burnout vary widely, several studies have substantiated a link between burnout and teacher

turnover (Coman, 2010; Rumley, 2010; Strunk & Robinson, 2006; van Tonder & Williams, 2009).

Leaver. The term leaver is sometimes used to designate an individual who has left the teaching profession (Ingersoll, 2001; Shen, 1997). For this study, a leaver is a former teacher who voluntarily quit teaching in the Georgia public school system before becoming eligible for retirement. The current study's participant sample was comprised entirely of leavers from Georgia's public schools.

Retention. Teacher retention is the complement to teacher attrition. Retention refers the condition of continuing to teach in the public school system and describes teachers who are *stayers*, as opposed to *leavers*. Not surprisingly, studies indicate that the conditions and circumstance associated with high teacher retention are generally absent or diminished in schools with high rates of attrition (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006; Cowan, 2010).

Turnover. The term *turnover* is defined by many studies as a meta-category encompassing teacher attrition and mobility (Boe et al., 1997; Ingersoll, 2001). The term *mobility* (or to use Ingersoll's [2001] term, *migration*) refers to teacher movement within education or "teachers leaving one school for another," while *attrition* is defined as "teachers leaving the classroom to take up other professional responsibilities" either within or outside the public education system (Miller & Chait, 2008, p. 2). Ingersoll (2001) also makes a helpful distinction between voluntary turnover and involuntary turnover such as retirement, layoffs, and terminations. Although turnover is not synonymous with attrition, the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably. This study uses the term *turnover* to describe a disruptive problem in public education that Ingersoll

(2001, 2007) referred to as a "'revolving door' where large numbers of teachers depart their jobs for reasons other than retirement" (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 24).

Methodological Terms

Although Section 3 expands considerably on the methodological definitions offered in this section, the most central terminology is defined below for readers who may be unfamiliar with GT.

Coding. Data analysis in GT entails three distinct types of coding: open (or substantive) coding, selective coding, and theoretical coding. Early analysis commences with open coding, in which the researcher codes the data line by line for incidents that might be potentially relevant to the area of study (Glaser, 1992). When the core variable or category emerges from open coding, the researcher switches to selective coding, in which he or she codes specifically for incidents in the data that relate directly to the core category (Glaser, 1978, 1992). Theoretical coding, which entails coding for relationships among categories and their properties, begins to take precedence over other types of coding in the later stages of data analysis.

Conceptualization. Conceptualization refers to the process of abstracting data to reflect ideas and concepts instead of specific descriptors and details. The conceptualization of substantive data occurs as grounded theorists "develop ideas on a level of generality higher in conceptual abstraction than the qualitative material being analyzed" in order to "bring out underlying uniformities and diversities, and to use more abstract concepts to account for differences in the data" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 114). Conceptualized data reflects abstract theoretical ideas rather than specific people, places, and things.

Constant comparative analysis. Constant comparative analysis is a non-linear process in which the researcher simultaneously collects and analyzes data, allowing the results of ongoing data analysis to direct consequent data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Stern, 1995; Vander Linden, 2005). This method of data analysis requires "intellectual rigor and continuous questioning" as well as "skill, creativity, and an intuitive sense" (Becker, 1995, p. 139). Constant comparative analysis is the foundation for the systematic rigor that defines GT.

Core category. Also called the core variable, the core category is defined as the main conceptual pattern that accounts for most of the variation in the area of interest being studied (Hernandez, 2009; Simmons, 2010); essentially, the core category is what the study's emergent theory is about (Simmons, 2010). In the current study, the core category that emerged was *navigating the cycle of decline*.

Grand tour question. Grounded theory interviews generally commence with a broad, open-ended "grand tour" question or prompt that allows participants to control the direction of the interview to reflect their most immediate concerns and experiences (Olson, 2006). Section 3 provides more information about the role and evolution of the grand tour question in GT studies.

Grounded theory (GT). GT is a research methodology conceived by Glaser and Strauss (1967) that is designed to produce working conceptual theories of social context based on evidence (data) collected directly from individuals who have lived experience in a given area of interest. A detailed discussion of the GT methodology is presented in Section 3.

Inductive inquiry. Stern (1995) explained that inductive inquiry generates theory, while deductive inquiry seeks to validate hypotheses. Although inductive inquiry is fundamentally different from deductive inquiry, the inductive methodologies are rigorous and produce scholarly results that are relevant and useful. Glaser (1992) explained that "induction truly takes care and time, and it can be done just as systematically as deduction and testing. Rigor is its own pattern, varying independently from whatever method it is used with" (p. 73). Section 3 further discusses of the centrality of induction to the GT process.

Saturation. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), saturation of a conceptual category occurs when "no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category" (p. 61). By striving to saturate all relevant conceptual categories, the GT researcher strengthens the theory and ensures full emergence of the theory's critical components.

Substantive and formal theory. Glaser (1978) explained that substantive theory is "developed for a substantive or empirical area of sociological inquiry," while formal theory is "developed for a formal or conceptual area of sociological inquiry" (p. 144). Essentially, the difference between formal and substantive theory lies in the scope of each type of theory. A formal grounded theory is informed by numerous substantive theories that span a variety of disciplines to provide a deep, dense, and broadly applicable conceptual overview of the properties of a general concept. Generally, existing substantive theories serve as "springboards or stepping stones to the development of a grounded formal theory" (Glaser, 1978, p. 146). For instance, the current study's substantive theory of navigating the cycle of decline could inform a broader formal

theory on how individuals experience and navigate disequilibrium in a wide range of social contexts. When considered together, substantive and formal theory constitute the hierarchy of the “overall design for the cumulative nature of knowledge and theory” (Glaser, 1978, p. 147). Progressively, data becomes substantive theory, which, in turn, can contribute to far-reaching formal theory that transcends any specific social or substantive context.

Theoretical sensitivity. Glaser (1978) described the GT researcher’s theoretical sensitivity as “a long term biographical and conceptual build up that makes [the researcher] quite ‘wise’ about the data - how to detail its main problems and processes and how to interpret and explain them theoretically” (p. 2). The researcher’s theoretical sensitivity is critical to his or her ability to discern relevant concepts and their properties in the data and to weave these into a unified theoretical construct.

Scope and Delimitations

The current study produced a substantive grounded theory of the experiences of Georgia’s former public school teachers: the theory of navigating the cycle of decline. This theoretical product “can be applied and adjusted to many situations with sufficient exactitude to guide [education stakeholders’] thinking, understanding, and research” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 233). Although the current study’s theory is grounded in data from the experiences of former Georgia public school teachers, the conceptual patterns of behavior for coping with disequilibrium and decline in teaching may also be applied to better understand the experiences of teachers who remain employed in public education and of teachers who work in a wide range of other educational contexts. Further, because the theory is conceptual in nature, it may even be useful for conceptualizing the

behavioral patterns of individuals in a variety of other professions and contexts where disequilibrium can emerge. In this sense, the scope of this GT study extends to legitimate applications outside the context of Georgia's public schools and even has the potential to inform a full-blown formal theory in future GT research.

In accordance with its inductive design, the current grounded theory study started out with no specific delimitations aside from the area of interest. The experiences of former Georgia public school teachers served as its initial and primary delimitation. This study did not collect data from, and does not claim to reflect, the experiences of former teachers who left the Georgia public school system involuntarily. Likewise, this study did not attempt collect data that accounts for the experiences of teachers who are currently employed in the Georgia school system. Through the processes of coding, theoretical sampling, constant comparison, saturation, and the emergence of the core category, the GT methodology allowed this study to "[generate] its own selectivity for its direction and depth of development" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 70) within the defined interest area. The emergent categories and properties relevant to the study's core variable also served to delimit the literature selected for review during later phases of the study (Glaser, 1998).

Limitations

The current study has several limitations. First, it produced a substantive theory grounded in data gathered from a limited participant sample of only 12 former teachers and situated in the substantive context of Georgia's public education system. It is possible that these conditions may limit the theory's applicability to other groups or substantive contexts. Second, since GT relies heavily on the researcher's theoretical sensitivity and

ability to set aside preconceptions about the area of interest, it is possible that researcher bias or preconception may have influenced the study. However, the GT methodology entails numerous strategies and methods to help the researcher put aside preconceptions and minimize bias in data collection and analysis. Third, the quality of participant interview data was in no way guaranteed, but since the study was concerned primarily with participants' perspectives on their own experiences, this potential limitation likely had little effect on the study's overall viability. Fourth, GT categories and properties must be indicated by multiple incidents from the data, which ensures that no single aberration or outlier in the data could influence the development of the theory. Finally, because the study had to align with my enrollment at Walden University, temporal and budgetary constraints placed limits on the amount of time I was able to invest in collecting and analyzing data, developing the theory, and compiling the final research report.

Assumptions

One of the definitive practices of GT is to minimize preconceptions of all types relating to the substantive area under study (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, I do hold two assumptions that formed the foundation of the current study.

The first assumptions was "anchored in the belief that the world, at some level, is orderly, patterned, and understandable" (Glaser, 2009, p. 23). If this is the case, then it follows that data collected from an orderly, patterned, and understandable world should reflect, on an analytical level, these same characteristics. Glaser (2009) reached a similar conclusion, affirming that "all data has patterns than can be conceptualized to generate substantive GT" (p. 31). Based on this assumption, I followed Glaser's (1992) sage

advice to “trust to and be confident of emergence” (p. 39).

The second assumption underpinning the current study was that all data collected from participants could provide valuable insight into their main concerns and lived experiences. On the whole, I assumed that participants would be honest and forthright in sharing their experiences. Even so, Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained that theorists evaluating participant responses must consider how the data informs the study through “what is explicitly stated as well as from what he can read between the lines” (p. 231). Glaser (1998, 2009) identified five types of data that inform emerging theories in different ways: a) baseline data reflecting the participant’s personal experience, b) properline data shaped by the participant’s perception of what constitutes a “proper” response, c) interpreted data, which is communicated by the participant through the lens of a specific set of beliefs, standards, or expectations, d) vague data that the participant intentionally presents in indefinite or evasive terms, and e) conceptual data, which emerge over the course of the study and reflect recurrent conceptual patterns in the area of interest (Glaser, 1998, 2009). Whether the “truth” in the participant data was apparent on the surface or shrouded in participants’ perceived expectations, imposed regulations, or in a simple reluctance to reveal their inner thoughts, careful analysis helped to uncover the underlying conceptual patterns in the data.

Significance of the Study

Ultimately, the GT methodology is simply a tool to serve the higher intent of this study: to generate a theory that will be useful in supporting positive social change in the field of education. The potential value of a theory “that explains and clarifies the underlying, usually complex, sources of a problem grounded in the realities of the study

context" (Simmons & Gregory, 2003, para. 9) as a foundation for educational reform is evident (Urell, 2006). The theory of navigating the cycle of decline conceptualizes the circumstances, beliefs, and experiences that turn teachers into leavers, endowing the theory with the potential to provide valuable insight into pressing and immediate challenges in education.

Local Application

The impetus for this study was my increasing awareness of problems relating to teacher turnover, first in a small high school in North Georgia and then as a widespread concern plaguing the state's entire public school system. Prompted by the sense of urgency that accompanies an immediate local concern, I selected GT as the study's methodology in order to generate a useful working theory that "will make sense and be understandable to the people working in the substantive area" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 239-240). The appeal of a GT study is that it can be understood and used by participants to address local problems by providing "relevant conceptual and perceptual empowerment over the continual resolving of their concerns" (Glaser, 1998, p. 8). Since the theory of navigating the cycle of decline conceptualizes the experiences of teachers who left Georgia's public schools, the theory will be useful in developing and implementing strategies to raise teacher retention rates and minimizing the negative impact of turnover on Georgia's schools.

Professional Application

Grounded theorists recognize that "to have an adequate grasp of reality [they] must look at things as systems, with properties and structures of their own" (Laszlo, 1996, p. 8). Although the theory of navigating the cycle of decline emerged from data

collected in interviews with former Georgia public school teachers, it is comprised of concepts instead of specific, substantive details. This theoretical abstraction expands the theory's reach and thus addresses the conceptual import of these teachers' experiences in the broader context of public education (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998, 2011). Since the theory is based on patterns derived from data, it can help education stakeholders perceive the complex interconnectedness among the institutions, ideologies, and individuals that comprise the public education system in the broadest sense. On a professional level, this grounded theory can be used to inform the development of practices and policies to increase teacher retention in public schools across the nation (Cherubini, 2008; Glaser, 2011).

Positive Social Change

Simmons (2006) stated that "without a clear, well-grounded theoretical explanation and understanding of 'what is...,' 'what ought to be' will likely remain elusive" (p. 483). Clearly, any sincere attempt to improve the way public schools operate must begin by cultivating intimate familiarity with the nature of specific problems. GT provided a rigorous strategy for identifying and understanding the complex conceptual relationships that characterize the experiences of Georgia's leavers in their former teaching roles. The theory of navigating the cycle of decline can help to illuminate the web of interrelated sociological and psychological patterns that hold sway over the day-to-day functionality of public schools and the people who work in them. The current study's theory offers a grounded foundation upon which teachers, administrators, and policymakers can build effective strategies for authentic and effective educational reform.

Summary

Excessive teacher turnover has considerable financial, logistical, and academic implications for public education. The purpose of this study was to generate a theory that conceptualized the experiences of former Georgia public school teachers in order to better understand voluntary teacher attrition. The GT methodology was rigorously applied to generate the theory of navigating the cycle of decline. This study's objective of generating relevant theory to inform positive social change was inextricably tied to the specific requirements and processes of the GT methodology. Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory provided the initial conceptual framework for the study and proved to be an integral part of the theory of navigating the cycle of decline. Because of the relevance and authenticity of the theory of navigating the cycle of decline, the current study provides novel insight into the social processes that turn *stayers* into *leavers*. The study supports positive social change by providing new insight into factors that lead to teacher turnover, and could thus help improve systemic and educational outcomes of public schools in Georgia and across the nation.

Section 2 features a review of the scholarly literature that is most relevant to the theory of navigating the cycle of decline. Section 3 explores the classic GT methodology in detail and provides an overview of the application of this methodological design in the current study. Section 4 explicates the conceptual categories and properties of the current study's product, the theory of navigating the cycle of decline. Section 5 integrates the study's conclusions with relevant literature to identify current and future implications of the study's GT and offers possibilities for the application and extension of the theory in future education research.

Section 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

In GT studies, the researcher refrains from reviewing the literature until after data collection and analysis are nearing completion and the key components of the study's theory have emerged from participant data (Glaser 1978, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Obviously, since it is conducted near the conclusion of a study, the purpose of a GT literature review is not to create a context for justifying the study, as is often the case in academic research. Instead, the two-fold purpose of a GT literature review is (a) to inform, enrich, diversify, and focus the theory (Raffanti, 2005) and (b) "to situate the research outcome within the body of previous knowledge, and thus to assess its position and place within the main body of relevant literature" (Christiansen, 2011, p. 21). In response to the first purpose, relevant literature has been incorporated into the explication of the study's final product, the theory of navigating the cycle of decline (see Section 4). Section 2 is most concerned with the second purpose listed above: demonstrating the current theory's place within, and contribution to, the current body of literature on the theory of navigating the cycle of decline. Even in fields that have already been heavily researched, GT can have a considerable impact:

> Grounded theory will transcend many more discrete articles…. In transcending this more prosaic literature, the grounded theory both synthesizes it and integrates it into a larger more general picture. Overriding scope is achieved. Thus, while the researcher did not open up the area, he makes his mark in organizing, transcending, and providing a broader picture of the area. (Glaser, 1998, p. 73)

Inherently, GT studies are inductive, “big picture” inquiries designed to generate a transcending, conceptual explanation of the complexities that influence a specific area of inquiry. This section of the study presents an integrated, critical review of the literature on the conceptual categories that comprise this study’s theory, in order to unify and elevate the collective body of extant knowledge relevant to the theory of navigating the cycle of decline.

The literature reviewed in this section was collected from diverse sources using a range of research strategies. In preparation for the review, I kept a working list of potentially relevant keywords and concepts that emerged during data collection and analysis. As the current study’s theory reached maturity, I began to search by keyword, online and in databases, for studies that were particularly relevant to its key concepts and properties. I reviewed the reference lists of these studies in search of potential leads. I also searched the bibliographies (a) of frequently published experts in particular disciplines and (b) on specific topics that were highly relevant to the current study. The majority of the studies reviewed herein are from current scholarly sources. In addition, some particularly relevant research conducted in the less recent past is also included to enhance the depth and scope of the review. I further supplemented the review, when appropriate, with relevant information from non-peer-reviewed literature, statistical reports, and governmental or organizational documents.

This literature reviewed in this section is organized thematically. It explores

1. Research related to teacher turnover in public schools and its contributing factors and consequences;

2. Studies that help to define and justify the current study's area of interest: the experiences of former teachers during their employment in Georgia's public school system;
3. Research related to the concepts of disequilibrium and functionality;
4. Research related to the conceptualization of teacher needs, using Deci and Ryan's (2008b) SDT as a framework;
5. Literature related to factors in the public school context that the current study has shown to play a key a role in perpetuating the cycle of decline, which can cause teachers to leave public education.

Teacher Turnover in Public Schools

Before exploring the literature that is most directly related to the theory of navigating the cycle of decline, it is important to establish a clear context for the study within the larger body of literature on teacher turnover. According to Guarino et al. (2006), teacher turnover is comprised of two separate phenomena, mobility and attrition. The term mobility generally refers to movement within the public education system, such as relocation from one school to another or reassignment or promotion from a teaching to a non-teaching position in public education (Ingersoll, 2001; Miller & Chait, 2008). Attrition, on the other hand, usually involves a teacher's leaving a particular school or system or, in some studies, leaving the profession of teaching entirely (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001; Miller & Chait, 2008; NCTAF, 2002; Scafidi et al., 2010). As established in Section 1, pervasive teacher turnover is a serious problem that represents a long-standing concern in American public education (NCTAF, 2010). Charters (1956) stated, "At the end of the school term 1954-1955, nearly one out of every

four high-school teachers left their positions in schools across the nation" (p. 294). Although teacher turnover and attrition rates have fluctuated throughout the years since the mid-1950s, this turnover statistic from over 60 years ago is reflective of modern concerns about teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2001, 2007). In fact, recent studies have confirmed that 30–50% of public school teachers leave public education within 3–5 years of being hired (Gonzalez et al., 2008; Ingersoll, 2007; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Locklear, 2010; NCTAF, 2002). Although teacher turnover is not inherently a negative phenomenon (Guarino et al., 2006; Ingersoll, 2001; Ronfeldt, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011), it is generally represented as cause for concern and even alarm because of its far-reaching consequences for education (AEE, 2008; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Donaldson & Johnson, 2011; Farber, 2010; Guarino et al., 2006; Ingersoll, 2001; Macdonald, 1999; Renzulli et al., 2011; Ronfeldt et al., 2011; Schafer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012). Many studies examining the causes and consequences of teacher turnover indicate that pervasive turnover has a negative impact on students and schools (AEE, 2005; Boe et al., 1997; DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Farber, 2010; Guarino et al., 2006; Ingersoll, 2001; NCTAF, 2002; Renzulli et al., 2011; Ronfeldt et al., 2011; Waddell, 2010). Teachers serve as "key levers to improve efficiency, equity and productivity in public education" (Borman & Dowling, 2008, p. 368), suggesting the potential for far-reaching consequences when the teaching staff of any educational institution is experiencing constant "churn" and instability resulting from teacher turnover (Boruch, Merlino, & Porter, 2012).

Many studies have attempted to identify statistically significant predictors of teacher turnover in terms of specific teacher and school characteristics. Some teacher

characteristics that have been proposed as indicators of turnover include teacher age, race, and gender. Ingersoll (2001) reported age was the strongest descriptive factor that predicted turnover, with teachers under the age of 30 being more likely than middle-aged teachers to leave teaching. Ingersoll also found that that teachers over the age of 50 were prone to higher turnover rates, as well; however, this finding is likely the result of the fact that he included retiring teachers in the sample for his study. Although not specifically tied to age, there is a great deal of literature exploring the turnover and attrition of first-year and early-career teachers, indicating that the majority of teachers lost to the profession before retirement leave relatively early in their careers (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Henry et al., 2011; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012). Regarding race, minority teachers showed more tenacity in being retained than did white teachers (Hancock & Scherff, 2010; Ingersoll, 2001). Findings on the link between gender and teacher turnover were mixed. According to Ingersoll (2001), female teachers are more likely to leave teaching than male teachers; however, Sass, Flores, Claeys, and Perez (2012) found the opposite to be true, a difference that may be accounted for by differing samples. Ingersoll's study sampled nationwide data for all schools and included all incidences of turnover including retirement; Sass et al.'s sample was limited to teachers from Texas public schools. They did not specify whether their definition of attrition included the loss of teachers to retirement.

Contextual or school-related factors have also been linked to teacher turnover (Cowan, 2010; Goodpaster, Adedokun, & Weaver, 2012). Boyd et al. (2009) found that teachers whose students and schools did not score well on standardized tests and accountability measures were more likely to leave public education. However, in their

statewide quantitative study of teacher attrition data in Texas public schools, Sass et al. (2012) found that high school teachers at higher-performing schools actually left public education at a higher rate than teachers at lower-performing high schools and higher-performing elementary schools. To account for this finding, they proposed that high-school teachers at higher-performing schools are highly qualified and may be leaving their teaching jobs in public schools to pursue employment opportunities elsewhere. Aside from this seeming anomaly, Sass et al.'s analysis supported other research findings that teachers are more likely to leave disadvantaged or underperforming schools. DeAngelis and Presley (2011) said that, instead of thinking of attrition as a problem related specifically to poor or low-achieving schools, "policy makers and administrators need to be thinking of it as primarily an individual school problem, and thereby work to identify and provide more targeted assistance to schools of all types that are particularly burdened by high teacher turnover" (p. 598). Clearly, problems related to teacher attrition are not confined to low-achieving or high-poverty schools and systems, although the effects of attrition may receive more attention or be more evident in these schools.

Contributing Factors

Much of the research and policy related to teacher turnover has focused on securing a steady supply of new teachers to replace those who are continually lost to early attrition (Ingersoll, 2001, 2007; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; NCTAE, 2010). Unfortunately, this shortsighted solution fails to address underlying problems that cause teachers to leave public education (Afolabi et al., 2007; Ingersoll, 2007; NCTAE, 2010; Waddell, 2010). In a comprehensive quantitative study using national school data from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and its supplement, the Teacher Followup

Survey (TFS), Ingersoll (2001) identified five main “reasons” for turnover in public schools (retirement, school staffing action, personal, to seek a better job, and dissatisfaction), stating that “the largest proportion of departures had to do with job dissatisfaction and desire to seek better jobs or career opportunities” (p. 23). Ingersoll’s (2001) claim that “dissatisfaction” contributes to teacher turnover encompasses a wide range of possible contributing factors. Teacher dissatisfaction is a complex construct that involves both individual teacher factors as well as factors related to the public education context (Liu, Zhang, Wang, & Lee, 2011; Sass et al., 2012). Some studies have suggested that turnover intentions may be related more to contextual factors than to the personalities of individual teachers (Ahmad & Ahmad, 2014; Ingersoll, 2001; NCTAF, 2010). In light of the current study’s focus, the most relevant factors influencing job dissatisfaction can be grouped into the following categories: job opportunities and lack of support.

Job Opportunities. Many studies concur with Ingersoll’s (2001) finding that many teachers leave public education in search of better job opportunities that offer “increased salaries, greater rewards, and improved working conditions” (Lynch, 2012, p. 122). Donaldson and Johnson (2011) found that common reasons for leaving public education among Teach for America teachers included pursuing a position outside of K-12 teaching, taking courses to improve career opportunities in education, and taking courses to improve career opportunities outside of education. Among Georgia educators, Locklear (2010) found that “teachers with higher degree status are more likely to leave for higher paying jobs, administration, or college level careers” (p. 62). This problem may be exacerbated by the fact that the Southeast ranks the lowest in public school

expenditure on teacher salaries among the regions of the United States (Swanson & Huff, 2010).

Numerous studies have established that low pay can contribute to teacher turnover (Cowan, 2010; Curtis, 2012; Fontaine, Kane, Duquette, & Savoie-Zajc, 2012; Gonzalez et al., 2008; Guarino et al., 2006; Hahs-Vaughn & Scherff, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001; Shen, 1997). Cowan (2010) found that teacher salary helps to improve retention among teachers in rural North Carolina schools, while Curtis's (2012) quantitative inquiry revealed that low salary was linked to the attrition of public school math teachers. Hahs-Vaughn & Scherff (2008) found that "salary was statistically significantly related to attrition" in a quantitative study of beginning English teacher turnover (p. 21). While pursuing a higher paying job appears to be a factor influencing teacher quit decisions, studies rarely attribute the persistent problem of teacher turnover solely or even primarily to concerns about salary. Scafidi et al. (2010) determined that "the exit decisions of teachers, when viewed as a whole, are not strongly related to teacher wages" (p. 2). Based on the literature, it seems more likely that teachers' decisions to leave are motivated only in part by their desire to earn a higher wage.

Lack of support. In addition to higher-paying job opportunities, inadequate support in the teaching context is another leading contributor to teacher turnover (Buchanan, 2012; Ingersoll, 2001). Although a lack of support was frequently cited as a contributor to turnover in the research reviewed for this study, specific needs for support and types of support were largely unexplored. There were two exceptions, however. First, several studies determined that a lack of support for student discipline problems had a significant impact on turnover rates in public schools (Buchanan, 2012; Ingersoll, 2001).

Second, though still quite broad in scope, was the prevalence of findings that identified of administrative support as a key factor in teacher attrition and retention (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013; Curtis, 2012; Miller, 2010; Ndoye, Imig, & Parker, 2010). Ingersoll (2001) demonstrated that high levels of support from administrators were tied to lower turnover rates, while Curtis (2012) also linked teacher turnover to administrative support and teacher blame. In their qualitative study of special education teachers' experiences in public education, Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns (2013) confirmed that administrative support correlated with higher teacher retention. Although studies have clearly substantiated a lack of support as a key contributor to turnover, the current study helped to expand existing understandings about how a lack of support can impact teachers' decisions to stay or leave public education. Using the GT methodology, the current study revealed that teachers' needs for support in the public school context are multi-faceted and complex, being rooted in basic psychological needs for human functionality (Deci & Ryan, 2008b), and largely dependent in many ways upon specific contextual factors.

The idea that teachers' needs for support can vary based on a wide range of factors may help to explain the prevalence of studies on early teacher attrition (AEE, 2008; Corbell, 2009; DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Fontaine et al., 2012; Hahs-Vaughn & Scherff, 2008; Picower, 2011). Because they are often underprepared to meet the demands of the public school context (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011; Fontaine et al., 2012), inexperienced teachers represent a group of high-need professionals who may be more easily retained when provided with adequate support in terms of professional development (Buchanan, 2012; Goodpaster et al., 2012), thorough induction programs

(AEE, 2008; Feiman-Nemser, 2012), and sufficient pedagogical preparation for the task of teaching (Ingersoll et al., 2012).

Consequences of Teacher Turnover

Teacher turnover has considerable financial and educational implications for public education. The Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE, 2005) asserted that "a conservative national estimate of the cost of replacing public school teachers who have dropped out of the profession is $2.2 billion a year" (p. 1). On the state level, the cost of replacing Georgia teachers lost to voluntary, pre-retirement attrition accounts for roughly 50% of the teacher turnover cost in the state (Nweke et al., 2006), with total turnover costs exceeding $300 million annually statewide (Afolabi et al., 2007). Guarino et al. (2006) explained that, even notwithstanding the impact that turnover can have on students and schools, the tremendous expense associated with replacing teachers lost to attrition should make minimizing teacher turnover a top priority in public education.

Although the financial implications of teacher turnover are problematic, the impact of turnover upon students and schools may be of even more concern. Teacher quality and experience represent a critically influential factor in determining student performance (AEE, 2005; Davidson, 2007; NCTAF, 2010; Truscott et al., 2012), so it is clear that teacher turnover can have considerable consequences for students in education. Davidson (2007) stated that "educators play a pivotal role in ensuring high-quality education for students" (p. 158), while Borman and Dowling (2008) found that "teacher characteristics tended to explain more variance in student achievement than any other school resource" (p. 368). When schools are beset by a continual influx of new teachers and an incessant "churning of staff," some disruption of student learning and

achievement is inevitable (Guarino et al., 2006, p. 7). Unfortunately, several studies have demonstrated that the negative effects of teacher turnover are even more extensive in low-achieving schools, where they tend to be most detrimental to the achievement of minority students and other high-risk student populations (Boyd et al., 2009; Donaldson & Johnson, 2011; Goodpaster et al., 2012; Ingersoll et al., 2012; Macdonald, 1999; NCTAF, 2002; Renzulli et al., 2011; Ronfeldt et al., 2011; Scafidi et al., 2007; Schafer et al., 2012; Waddell, 2010). Miller (2010) succinctly appraised core problem associated with teacher turnover: “When we fail to retain effective, highly qualified teachers, we essentially fail our students” (p. 129).

The collective findings of research on teacher turnover easily justify the grim acknowledgement among education stakeholders of the financial and educational consequences of teacher turnover. Although the existing literature abundantly substantiates the claim that teacher turnover is a widespread and urgent concern in education, the pressing problems related to high turnover rates in public schools remain largely unresolved and, in many cases, continue to worsen (Aud & Hannes, 2011; MetLife, 2012).

Turnover as Process

Newton, Rivero, Fuller, & Dauter (2011) insisted that “understanding who leaves, when, and under what conditions is important for policy formulations that target teacher retention” (p. 3), but efforts to substantiate answers to the who, when, and why questions of teacher turnover have yielded a mixed crop of context-bound, inconclusive results with limited application in education policy and practice (Johnson et al., 2005; Newton et al., 2011). Perhaps the problem is that existing conceptualizations of teacher turnover focus

only upon the final outcome of the social processes that cause teachers to opt out of public education (Rinke, 2008). The literature on teacher turnover tends to frame the problem as a collective outcome of many isolated individual decisions, presenting either aggregate statistics or context-bound descriptive data relating to teachers' final decisions to stay or leave (Newton et al., 2011; Rinke, 2008). This focus on teachers' quit decisions as the core of the teacher turnover problem may have contributed to a general oversimplification of the scope and complexity of teacher turnover. Schafer et al. (2012) proposed that teacher turnover, particularly voluntary teacher attrition, is not fundamentally the result of a decision made at a specific time under specific circumstances, but may instead be understood as "an ongoing and dynamic process that entails the making sense of, and reinterpretation of, one's own values and experiences" (p. 117). In essence, the existing research on teacher turnover fails to take into account those teachers who are still employed in their schools, but who may have already embarked upon the process of becoming leavers. Understanding the impact of the experiences and subtle shifts in perspective that pave the way to teachers' quit decisions is fundamental to any effort desirous of improving teacher retention. Using data from the experiences of former Georgia public school teachers, the current study sought to conceptualize teacher turnover as a complex process that is initiated long before teachers actually resign. By envisioning teacher turnover as an extended and embedded process that unfolds over the course of teachers' careers, researchers may begin to see beyond the statistical and anecdotal summations that populate existing studies to perceive the true nature of teachers' decisions to leave public education.

Leavers in the Literature

The current study's central area of interest centered on the experiences of former teachers during their employment in Georgia's public school system. In the literature, former teachers who voluntarily opt out of public education are frequently referred to as "leavers," a term that captures little else except their final actions in relation to the public school system (Henry et al., 2011; Ingersoll, 2001; Shen 1997). The existing literature on the experiences of former teachers is embedded in the expansive body of research on teacher turnover and its attendant concerns. In Georgia (Locklear, 2010; Scafidi et al., 2010), the U.S. (AEE, 2008; Boe et al., 1997; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Cowan, 2010; Renzulli et al., 2011), and other countries (Ghana National Association of Teachers [GNAT], 2009; van Tonder & Williams, 2009), the multitude of studies focused on understanding and resolving education issues related to teacher turnover suggests that it is a universally pressing problem with far-reaching consequences. In the literature, the broad term *turnover* generally encompasses both teacher mobility, in which teachers move around within the public education system, and attrition, in which teachers leave the system entirely (Guarino et al., 2006). As a further distinction, attrition studies often differentiate between general attrition, which includes all individuals who leave the system regardless of reason, and early or voluntary attrition, which is concerned primarily with individuals who leave the public school system voluntarily before retirement (Ingersoll, 2001). Within the existing body of literature on teacher turnover, research that provides insight into the nature of voluntary attrition is most relevant to the area of interest in current study. Unfortunately, research committed to understanding the personal

experiences and perceptions of former teachers who voluntarily left public education is somewhat limited.

Guarino, Santibañez, Daley, and Brewer (2004) organized their meta-analysis of 96 research studies on teacher attrition into six categories by subject: pre-service teachers, retained teachers, external district and school factors, compensation, pre-service policy, and in-service policy. Despite its comprehensiveness, the review found no need for a category related to the experiences of leavers. In fact, only nine of the studies in Guarino et al.'s (2004) meta-analysis included former teachers in the sample; of these, most were quantitative and relied on aggregate administrative or national survey data relating to teachers who left the teaching profession (Adams, 1996; Arnold, Choy, & Bobbit, 1993; Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Shen, 1997; Shin, 1995; Stinebrickner, 2002). The near absence of qualitative and mixed methods studies on teacher attrition suggests that attempts to qualitatively analyze the actions of former teachers firsthand experiences may be thwarted because of the difficulty of locating of former teachers (Berry, Noblit, & Hare, 1985; Boe et al., 1997; King, 1993; Odell & Ferraro, 1992). Accordingly, none of the study samples in Guarino et al.'s (2004) review consisted solely of leavers. Further, none attempted to conceptualize the experiences that lead to teacher quit decisions using first-hand data from former teachers.

Since Guarino et al. (2004) published their meta-analysis, several more recent qualitative studies have been conducted that included former teachers as participants, a step toward redressing the conspicuously limited representation of former teachers in the literature. Gonzalez et al. (2008) investigated factors that contribute to attrition by interviewing eight former Texas public school teachers who opted out after their first

year. The study revealed that "a lack of administrative support, difficulties with student discipline, and low salary levels" were the most influential factors in determining early-career teacher attrition (p. 1). Using snowball sampling, Buchanan (2012) located and interviewed 22 former public school teachers from Australia about "their journeys into and out of teaching" (p. 205), discovering that many participants' expectations and initial motivation for teaching conflicted with the reality of the work they were charged with as teachers. Buchanan asserted that for many former teachers, their initial expectations and altruistic motives were undermined by concerns about support, inadequate professional development, classroom management problems, dwindling self-confidence, overwhelming workloads, and inadequate salaries. On the whole, Buchanan found that former teachers, at least the ones in the study sample, had little desire to return to teaching. Santoro and Morehouse (2011) sought to explore the "moral and ethical dimensions" of teacher attrition by interviewing 13 "experienced and committed former teachers from high-poverty schools" (p. 2670). Santoro and Morehouse's study concluded with the proposition of a new category for teachers who "resign from teaching on grounds that they are being asked to engage in practices that they believe are antithetical to good teaching and harmful to students" (p. 2670), calling teachers who leave on these grounds *principled leavers*. To supplement these few exceptions, the current study of former Georgia public school teachers offers much needed insight into the lived experiences of an under-represented population and contributes to a clearer understanding of the processes by which teachers become leavers, a field of inquiry that education scholars have thus far left largely untended.

Disequilibrium

Human beings oscillate between states of equilibrium and disequilibrium throughout their lives (Henning, 2011), so it is not surprising that individuals experience both states in their work lives, as well. Although many researchers characterize disequilibrium as a developmental opportunity for growth (Henning, 2011; Hildreth, 2011; Mezirow, 1997), unresolved disequilibrium can cause individuals to suffer diminished functionality in coping with or managing work demands and responsibilities. This diminished functionality is the result of declining motivation, well-being, and fulfillment, three indicators that characterize the state of disequilibrium itself. This finding that disequilibrium is closely linked to decreased functionality in the work context is amply supported in the literature. Many researchers explored the impact of the indicators of disequilibrium on teachers' functionality, substantiating the current study's discovery that when autonomous motivation, well-being, and fulfillment in teaching are compromised, teachers are less capable of sustainably coping with the myriad demands and responsibilities entailed in their jobs in public schools.

Motivation. One condition that is indicative of disequilibrium and diminishes functionality in the workplace is the decline of autonomous motivation, which is supplanted by increasingly externally regulated forms of motivation. As Fernet (2013) explained, "Autonomous motivation refers to acting with volition, as when employees engage in their job for the inherent pleasure and satisfaction they experience (intrinsic motivation) and/or because they personally endorse the importance or value of their work (identified regulation)" (p. 72). Ryan and Deci's (2000b) SDT provides a framework for understanding the influence of disequilibrium upon teachers' motivation over time. SDT

proposes a continuum of motivation flanked on one end by intrinsic, internally regulated motivation, in which an individual engages in activities for enjoyment or out of genuine interest. The middle range of the continuum is populated by four different levels of extrinsic motivation ranging from more autonomous (integrated regulation and identified regulation) to less autonomous forms of motivation (introjected regulation and external regulation). The continuum terminates with amotivation, a non-regulated state characterized by an individual's lack of intention or motivation in relation to the context or expected behavior.

According to Deci and Ryan's (2008b) motivational theory SDT, autonomous motivation refers to

> both intrinsic motivation and the types of extrinsic motivation in which people have identified with an activity's value and ideally will have integrated it into their sense of self. When people are autonomously motivated, they experience volition, or a self-endorsement of their actions. (p. 182)

Individuals who are autonomously motivated act of their own free will because they perceive their work to be meaningful and worthwhile in light of their internalized values. Several studies have found that autonomously motivated work activities tend to correlate with optimal functioning and job performance (Fernet, 2013; Klassen, Frenzel, & Perry, 2012; Trepanier, Fernet, & Austin, 2013), while Ryan and Deci (2000a) asserted that autonomous motivation can lead to increased performance, persistence, and creativity. Trepanier, Fernet, and Austin (2013) stated, "Autonomously motivated employees are equipped to deal with job demands because they consider their work as interesting and spontaneously satisfying" (p. 95). Vander Linden's (2005) GT study further suggested

that “a person’s motivation impacts both the level of commitment and the effort put forth in navigating a new experience, as reflected in the person’s choices, actions, behaviors, thoughts, and emotions” (p. 81).

Since autonomous motivation has been linked to higher functionality and job performance, it is not surprising that many studies concluded that controlled or externally regulated motivation correlates with diminished functionality (Benita, Roth, & Deci, 2014; Fernet, 2013). Controlled motivation

> consists of both external regulation, in which one’s behavior is a function of external contingencies of reward or punishment, and introjected regulation, in which the regulation of action has been partially internalized and is energized by factors such as an approval motive, avoidance of shame, contingent self-esteem, and ego-involvements. (Deci & Ryan, 2008b, p. 182)

Work-related activities that result from controlled motivation have no intrinsic value for teachers and do not align with their personal values for their work (Fernet, 2013). The literature supports the current study’s hypothesis that when teachers’ autonomous motivation declines, functionality and job performance decline as well.

Well-being. The literature also provided ample evidence of the current study’s finding that well-being is a critical factor influencing teachers’ functionality in the public school context. The concept of well-being can encompass factors related to both physical and psychological wellness, which, alone and in combination, can have far-reaching consequences for job performance (Brien, Hass, & Savoie, 2012; Sisask et al., 2014; Trepanier et al., 2013). According to Pretsch, Flunger, and Schmitt (2012) the concept of well-being can be described “a positive state that is more than the absence of diagnoses,

diseases, and disease symptoms" (p. 324). When teachers experience this positive state, they are better equipped to meet the demands of their jobs; however, when physical and psychological well-being are diminished, functionality likewise declines. Klassen et al. (2012) explained that

> Teachers who are emotionally exhausted experience physical exhaustion and high levels of stress...and are at risk of dropping out of the teaching workforce or remaining in the classroom but creating a poor quality classroom environment that can have harmful effects on students. (p. 152)

This example characterizes the obstacles to occupational effectiveness and optimal functioning that are presented when well-being is compromised.

Fulfillment. A link between fulfillment and functionality in the public school context is also evident in the literature. According to Santoro (2011), "The moral rewards of teaching… are necessary for sustaining the work of practitioners who care about their profession and their students" (p. 5). Santoro's characterization of fulfillment as a sort of "moral reward" that promotes functionality appears to be in line with the findings of other studies on the topic (Carpentier, Mageau, & Vallerand, 2012; Sisask et al., 2014). Unfortunately, research has identified a trend of decreasing job satisfaction among teachers over the past several years (MetLife, 2012), suggesting that a decline in fulfillment may be having a generally negative impact on the overall functionality of America's teachers.

The literature supports a link between the indicators of disequilibrium and decreased functionality for teachers in the public school context. When teachers are unable to recover from this impact of disequilibrium on their functionality, they may

enter into decline, a progressively less functional state that may eventually lead to turnover intentions. According to Koole, Jostmann, and Baumann (2012), “When people are action-oriented, demanding conditions are likely to facilitate self-regulation. When people are state-oriented, demanding conditions are likely to impair self-regulation” (pp. 328-9). As functionality declines, individuals tend to become less focused on the actions available to them and more focused upon their current conditions, or “state,” which can undermine self-regulation and further impair functionality. Koole et al.’s characterization of decline as a function of self-regulation is echoed in Curtis’s (2012) straightforward statement: “The way an individual feels about their job plays an important role in their effectiveness on the job” (p. 786). The state of decline appears to be at least partially self-perpetuating, a characteristic that Benabou (2002) captures quite clearly: “When people expect to fail, they fail quite effectively, and failure leads to failure more readily” (Para. 5). Swanson and Huff (2010) explained the self-perpetuating nature of declining functionality through diminished competence: “Lower efficacy leads to less effort and the tendency to quit easily, which leads to poor teaching outcomes, which produce decreased feelings of efficacy” (p. 25). Further, the literature suggests that burnout in teaching may actually be a consequence of decline. According to several studies, (Pucella, 2011; Ragnarsdottir & Johannesson, 2014), burnout consists of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, which is “the feeling that one has been sapped of energy,” depersonalization, which refers to “being detached or uncaring,” and a lack of personal accomplishment marked by “a decline in one’s feelings of experienced success at work” (Pucella, 2011, p. 53). Sadly, many teachers find it increasingly difficult to recover from disequilibrium as their motivation, well-being, and fulfillment in teaching progressively decline. Often,

teachers' unresolved concerns about authenticity and support in the public school context prevent them from achieving and maintaining functional equilibrium.

Teacher Needs

The ability to maintain functional equilibrium in teaching may be related to how well teachers' needs for authenticity and support are met in the workplace. The following section explores each of these needs and its relationship to functionality and teacher attrition.

Authenticity and Value Congruence

When teachers engage in work that is inauthentic to their core values for teaching or struggle with unresolved concerns about inauthenticity in the public school context, they may experience disequilibrium. The concept of value congruence may help to explain teachers' need for authenticity in the public school context. Value congruence refers to the similarity or fit between an individual's values and the values of the organizations in which they are employed (Mitchell, Parker, Giles, Joyce, & Chiang, 2012; Peachey & Bruening, 2012; Supeli & Creed, 2014; Vveinhardt & Gulbovaite, 2013). In Hoffman, Bynum, Piccolo, and Sutton's (2011) words, value congruence "is a function of the 'actual' match between employees' values and the values revealed in their work environments" (p. 782-783). Both the literature and the current study indicate that values are an influential factor for many teachers (Curtis, 2012; Garritz, 2010); perhaps this is because individuals' core values tend to be intrinsic, embedded constructs (Ren, 2010) that "are relatively enduring and guide attitudes and behavior (Mitchell et al., 2012, p. 627). For teachers, core values tend to be fundamentally altruistic and student-centered (Buchanan, 2012; Bullough, Hall-Kenyon, & MacKay, 2012; Coulter & Lester, 2011;

Curtis, 2012; De Cooman et al., 2007; Klassen et al., 2012; Picower, 2011; Rayner, 2014). Tyink's (2006) GT of driven altruism described individuals with altruistic values such as those that emerged in the current study as people "who are driven to make commitments to and sacrifices for others beyond what is viewed as normal" (p. 4). When teachers' public school responsibilities are perceived as incongruent with their deeply-rooted, student-centered values for teaching, disequilibrium can emerge, as is indicated by diminished functionality in the work context..

Value congruence and functionality. Value congruence, or the alignment between personal and organizational values, is a determining factor in employee performance and functionality (Ren, 2010; Supeli & Creed, 2014; Vveinhardt & Gulbovaite, 2013). In a review of secondary sources on employee and organizational values, Kanchana (2013) found that "employees will tend to operate at their best when they work for organizations whose values are in tune with their own personal values" (p. 43). Conversely, diminished functionality and disequilibrium can arise when individuals perceive their personal values to be misaligned with the values and expectations of the organizations for which they work (Kanchana, 2013; Vander Linden, 2005; Vveinhardt & Gulbovaite, 2013). Teachers' concerns about the authenticity of their work and value congruence within the public school system influence functionality in terms of motivation, well-being, and fulfillment.

Research suggests a link between value congruence and autonomous motivation. Value congruence has been shown to promote intrinsic motivation and autonomous self-regulation (Ren, 2010), perhaps because individuals' "values are...prime drivers of personal, social, and professional choices" (Suar & Khuntia, 2010, p. 443). Some studies

assert that values influence motivation because they are related to how individuals feel they ought to behave (Parks & Guay, 2012; Suar & Khuntia, 2010). According to Dahlgaard-Park (2012), “Value seems to be the ultimate source in the creation of genuine intrinsic motivation. When people are motivated to do something based on value, the tasks or activities seem to be linked to the person’s inner desire” (p. 138). Core values also appear to relate to achievement goals, which are “incorporated beliefs, attributions, and emotions, which together determine the individual’s orientation toward task accomplishment” (Benita et al., 2014, p. 2). When value congruence is compromised and teachers begin to perceive that the work they are doing is no longer aligned with their core values, autonomous motivation is likely to be replaced with controlled or extrinsic motivation, in which individuals “perceive themselves as ‘pawns’ subjected to the play of heteronomous forces” (Benita et al., 2014, p. 2). Thus, the authenticity of teachers’ work appears to affect the perceived causality of their motivation.

Value incongruence is also directly linked with diminished well-being, another indicator of disequilibrium and compromised functionality. Peachey and Bruening (2012) found that value incongruence can lead to impaired health and increased levels of stress, while Kinsler (2014) linked the human need for authenticity to both subjective and psychological well-being. Negativity, another aspect of psychological health, has also been linked to perceptions of value incongruence (Peachey & Bruening, 2012; Vveinhardt & Gulbovaite, 2013), suggesting that problems with inauthenticity in the public school context may correlate with negative attitudes and diminished functionality.

A correlation between value congruence and fulfillment, the final indicator of disequilibrium, is also substantiated in the literature. Several studies found that value

incongruence can undermine fulfillment and job satisfaction (Bao, Vedina, Moodie, & Dolan, 2013; Kanchana, 2013). Santoro and Morehouse (2011) stated that, regarding teachers' fulfillment, "the moral rewards of teaching are activated when educators feel that they are doing what is right in terms of one's students, the teaching profession, and themselves" (p. 2). When misalignment between teachers' core values and the organizational priorities of the public school context emerges, many teachers experience a decline in fulfillment resulting from their inability to teach in ways that are authentic or "right" in light of their values.

Value congruence and teacher attrition. In sum, concerns about inauthenticity emerge when teachers perceive that their personal core values for teaching are incongruent with the priorities and values of the public school context. When these concerns remain unresolved, functionality can decline continuously over time, resulting in decreased organizational commitment and turnover intentions. Although many studies proposed a link between value incongruence and attrition (Buchanan, 2012; Kanchana, 2013; Peachey & Bruening, 2012; Vveinhardt & Gulbovaite, 2013), these findings also reveal a bright side to teachers' commitment to their values. Research suggests that schools and systems that attempt to understand teachers' core values and promote value congruence may actually be able to bolster retention by increasing the perceived authenticity of teachers' work (Bao et al., 2013; Peachey & Bruening, 2012; Vveinhardt & Gulbovaite, 2013).

Needs for Support

In addition to their need for value congruence and authenticity in their work, teachers also require adequate support in the work context for their basic psychological

needs in order to maintain functional equilibrium and avoid decline. According to SDT, human beings are fundamentally motivated toward positive growth and achievement when three core psychological needs are met: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000b; Stone, Deci, & Ryan, 2009). Autonomy needs are met when individuals feel empowered to act according to their own self-determined choices. Needs for competence are fulfilled when individuals believe that they have the ability to exert influence and change important outcomes. Finally, relatedness needs are met based on the level of satisfaction and support that individuals derive from social relationships (Buchanan, 2012).

Psychological needs and functionality. The current study posits that when these needs are unmet in the public school context, teachers experience disequilibrium and diminished functionality. The literature supports this hypothesis. Multiple studies indicate that teachers' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are closely related to functionality and work performance (Benita et al., 2014; Brien et al., 2012; Garritz, 2010; Vander Linden, 2005). Trepanier et al. (2013) found that unmet psychological needs for competence can impact individuals' ability to cope with challenges in the workplace effectively, claiming that diminished self-efficacy may actually cause individuals to perceive work as more challenging and obstacles as more daunting than they are in actuality. In her GT study exploring how individuals navigate new experiences, Vander Linden (2005) explained the impact of competence needs upon functionality:

> A person's own perception of his/her level of competency impacts the emotions felt as he/she goes through a new experience. When a person perceives his/her

> level of competency as less than what is needed to navigate an experience, he/she often experiences more nervousness, uncertainty and fear. (p. 46)

Likewise, Garritz (2010) found that diminished competence can result in reduced functionality and withdrawal or avoidance behaviors. Conditions that compromise teachers' relatedness needs, such as isolation or strained relationships with fellow teachers, administrators, and students, can also impact teachers' ability to cope effectively with the stresses and demands of the public school context (Goodpaster et al., 2012; Roffey, 2012). For many teachers, persistent concerns about support relating to unmet psychological needs often perpetuate disequilibrium in terms of declining motivation, well-being, and fulfillment in the public school context. The literature substantiates links between teachers' psychological needs and each of these indicators of disequilibrium.

First, the connection between psychological need fulfillment and autonomous motivation has been well established. One of the core tenets of SDT establishes a causal connection between the fulfillment of individuals' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness and their levels of autonomous motivation, claiming that "social environments can facilitate or forestall intrinsic motivation by supporting versus thwarting people's innate psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 71). Wang and Liu (2008) found that contexts that support and satisfy these innate psychological needs generally increase teachers' intrinsic motivation to teach. Benita et al. (2014) stated that conditions that undermine autonomy, "such as use of rewards, deadlines, threats, surveillance, and pressuring language tend to be experienced as controlling and thus to undermine autonomous regulation" (p. 3), while Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014)

established that feelings of competence can promote autonomous motivation. Regarding relatedness needs in the context of education, teachers have opportunities to interact with many groups of people, but intrinsic motivation can be significantly diminished when teachers' relationships with students (Fontaine et al., 2012), colleagues (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Fontaine et al., 2012; Wagner & French, 2010), administrators (Brown & Wenn, 2009; Fontaine et al., 2012; Ingersoll, 2001; Wagner & French, 2010), parents (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011), and even the community at large (Ingersoll, 2001) are negative, strained, or absent.

Concerns about support for psychological needs are also related to teachers' well-being. Environments that are not supportive of teachers' needs for autonomy have been linked to diminished well-being and increased stress in several studies (Benita et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2011; Pretsch et al., 2012). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) found that feelings of competence can decrease stress and minimize the likelihood of burnout. Roffey (2012) determined that compromised relatedness needs can impact teacher well-being in the public school context, while Cancio et al. (2013) found that positive relationships with administrators can actually reduce stress and promote well-being. Based on the literature, the negative impact of unfulfilled psychological needs upon teachers' well-being is evident.

Unsurprisingly, the literature also demonstrated that a lack of support for autonomy, competence, and relatedness can have a negative impact upon teachers' sense of fulfillment. Wininger and Birkholz (2013) found that job satisfaction was linked to all three basic psychological needs. According to Benita et al. (2014), "Higher levels of interest or enjoyment and lower levels of tension were found in an autonomy-supportive

context than in either an autonomy-suppressive or a neutral context" (p. 8). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) supported this finding, stating that autonomy is linked with both engagement and fulfillment at work. Cancio et al. (2013) found that positive relationships with administrators support relatedness needs and actually tend to increase fulfillment. Other studies have found that unfulfilled relatedness needs appear to cause low morale, distrust, and disrespect, all of which diminish teachers' feelings of fulfillment in education contexts (Gonzalez et al., 2008; Ndoye et al., 2010).

Psychological needs and teacher attrition. Just as unfulfilled needs for authenticity and value congruence can lead to attrition, so too can a lack of support for unfulfilled psychological needs in the public school context. Schools and systems that do not support teachers' needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy may play a role in goading otherwise capable teachers to seek other employment, further intensifying the systemic problem of teacher turnover.

The literature consistently substantiates the importance of autonomy in teachers' decisions to leave or stay in public education (Ingersoll, 2001; Shen, 1997). Several studies have established a positive correlation between support for autonomy and teacher retention (Brown & Wenn, 2009; Fisher, 2014; Guarino et al., 2006; Liu et al., 2011), while others have demonstrated the reciprocal link between diminished autonomy and teacher attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Bouwma-Gearheart, 2010; Hohman, Packard, Finnegan, & Jones, 2013). To further substantiate the relevance of pedagogical autonomy to the issue of teacher retention, Wagner and French (2010) described "one's satisfaction with the degree of influence or control one has…, as well as the degree of freedom one needs to be creative and challenge oneself professionally" as critical

conditions for the motivation and retention of quality teachers (p. 167). Therefore, it is not surprising that practices and policies that inhibit teachers' "freedom to make reasonable curricular and instructional choices" (Feldmann, 2011, p. 2) also interfere with teacher retention.

Circumstances that undermine teachers' sense of competence turn up frequently in the literature as contributors to attrition (Swanson & Huff, 2010). Age and experience are often directly related to practitioners' sense of competence in their chosen field, as is evidenced by the high percentage of young, inexperienced teachers succumbing to attrition early in their careers (Bouwma-Gearheart, 2010; Guarino et al. 2006; Ingersoll, 2001; Newton et al., 2011; Shen, 1997). In their quantitative study of teacher attrition from North Carolina public schools, Henry, Bastian, and Fortner (2011) found that a high proportion of new teachers who leave the profession in the first few years are generally less effective than their peers, strongly supporting the possibility that competence needs are a factor that influences quit decisions. Poor student achievement, motivation, and discipline can also diminish teachers' sense of competence, regardless of the actual cause or nature of these problems (Gonzalez et al., 2008; Guarino et al., 2006; Ingersoll, 2001). Santoro and Morehouse (2011) identified "an absence of a 'sense of success' with students" as a major contributing factor to teachers' eventual decision to leave the profession (p. 2673).

Like autonomy and competence, unfulfilled relatedness needs can also influence teacher retention and attrition. Circumstances that enhance positive, supportive relationships and clear communication in the workplace have been shown to increase teacher retention (Allen & Shanock, 2013; Brown & Wenn, 2009; Cancio et al., 2013;

Hohman et al., 2013; Ingersoll, 2001; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). Further, findings that demonstrate the positive impact of relatedness-supportive programs and activities such as mentoring, induction programs, and collegial collaboration in efforts to retain qualified teachers lends further credence to the centrality of relatedness needs to sustainable teaching practices (Guarino et al., 2006; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Ndoye et al., 2010). Collectively, the literature indicates that a lack of support for teachers' competence, relatedness, and autonomy needs can negatively impact motivation, well-being, and fulfillment, leading many teachers to the conclusion that they might do best to simply put down their chalk and walk away.

The Public School Context

The previous sections have discussed literature related to the indicators of diminished functionality and disequilibrium and reviewed findings that help to shape our understandings of teachers' needs for authenticity and support in the public school context. This section of the review will look at ways in which the public school context itself contributes to or thwarts the fulfillment of teachers' needs. The literature suggests that there may be certain conditions inherent to the public school context that tend to give rise to and sustain disequilibrium by raising teachers' concerns about authenticity and support.

Historically, America's public schools have been ceaselessly reshaped through top-down reform (Angus & Mirel, 1999; Goodlad, 1984; Jennings, 2012) in what Kuhn (2014) described as "a hit parade of ill-conceived education policies" (p. 2). At this point in the history of American public education, "the needs of schools are great, pressure to change practices is building, and current school improvement efforts have not been

particularly effective" (Truscott et al., 2012, p. 64). Although many current trends in education such as mandated reform, accountability initiatives, and standardized curriculum and assessment are designed to spark improvement in the quality of schools, the sweeping changes they bring often inadvertently result in increased workloads and overwhelming pressure for teachers and an inauthentic "bottom-line" approach to public school operations that places emphasis on data and funding over student-centeredness. The Race to the Top program is the latest in long line of public school reform initiatives that call for sweeping changes to educational organizations in exchange for supplemental funding. Designed to "encourage and reward States that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform," the Race to the Top program is an example of a top-down initiative that may be doing more harm than good for public schools and educators (U.S. Department of Education, 2014, p. 2). In order to remain eligible for the near $400 million dollar grant, Georgia's public education leaders have been hard-pressed over the past three years to create and implement significant changes to curriculum, assessment, and teacher and leader accountability systems used throughout the state (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Unfortunately, insufficient resources and inadequate infrastructure for the implementation of some of these reforms have led to portions of Georgia's funding being placed on high-risk status, meaning that "the State has not yet demonstrated sufficient progress against its approved plan" (U.S. Department of Education, 2014, p. 21).

Since top-down policy mandates are often tied to funding for public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2014; Santoro & Morehouse, 2011), quantifiable evidence of school improvement is in high demand. This demand for data has led to the

predominance of accountability and assessment reform in public schools. With tremendous amounts of funding at stake, Georgia's public education system has undergone a radical overhaul over the past three years with the introduction of a new statewide teacher accountability program known as the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). This complex teacher evaluation program consists of three components by which teacher effectiveness is determined: teacher assessment using a standardized performance rubric, student perception surveys, and student growth (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). In addition to this ambitious undertaking, Georgia is simultaneously attempting to implement a new comprehensive assessment system, Georgia Milestones, which will completely replace all current assessments, including the CRCT, course EOCTs, and writing assessments across grade levels statewide (Fincher, 2014). In a mad dash for Race to the Top funding, these two massive reforms that will affect every public school teacher and student in the state of Georgia are being rolled out in the same school year, despite established logistical concerns (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). In many ways, the high-stakes intensity and "bottom-line" priorities of Georgia's public schools are rooted in mandated changes such as these. Top-down, pervasive changes in education policy can create opportunities for disequilibrium to emerge by raising teachers' concerns about the authenticity of their work and their needs for support in public schools.

Impact on Perceived Authenticity

The literature suggests that the prevalence of mandated reform and constant change in public education is related to perceived inauthenticity and concerns about value incongruence among teachers (Kuhn, 2014; Pretsch et al., 2012; Santoro, 2011). Core

values are intrinsic, embedded constructs that guide teachers' attitudes and behavior toward their work (Ren, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2012). Teacher values are most often altruistic and the initiative to teach is generally intrinsically motivated (Buchanan, 2012; Bullough et al., 2012; Coulter & Lester, 2011; Curtis, 2012; De Cooman et al., 2007; Klassen et al., 2012; Picower, 2011; Rayner, 2014; Tyink, 2006). Truscott et al. (2012) asserted that "most teachers want to teach well and reach as many children as they can" (p. 68), so it is not surprising that value congruence is "a critical predictor of supportive work environment perceptions" (Pan & Yeh, 2012, p. 282). When non-negotiable, top-down initiatives prevent teachers from working according to their student-centered values, perceptions of inauthenticity and value misalignment with the public school context are likely to emerge. Mandates that are imposed upon schools and classrooms tend to shift the focus of education toward compliance with policies in order to receive funding and avoid censure rather than supporting an authentic emphasis on students' well-being, achievement, and growth. Kuhn (2014) pointed out the underlying impetus for these seeming quick-fix attempts at education reform through accountability and assessment measures: "The administration of mass-produced bubble tests is cheaper than an equal education investment in Americans of all stripes, as are reductions in funding for schools where students don't do well on those tests" (p. 115). Despite the necessity of complying with mandated policies and securing adequate funding for schools, these constant reforms may be a key contributor to many teachers' unresolved concerns about the authenticity of their work in public schools. Changes in organizational strategy can cause individuals to perceive their organization's values differently (Peachey & Bruening, 2012), and, according to Santoro (2011), some teachers may find it "difficult to

maintain a sense of doing good work when policies foreclose opportunities to teach in ways that they believe are right" (p. 6). In addition to this general shift away from the authentic purpose of education, the ongoing change that often accompanies top-down reform tends to raise demand and divert teachers' limited time and energy toward inauthentic tasks that are not in alignment with their student-centered values. Santoro (2011) warned that "if high-stakes accountability renders the moral rewards of the profession inaccessible, it is likely that strong teachers will find little to sustain them in the pursuit of good work" (p. 18).

It is interesting to note that, in their quantitative study of person-organization fit, Supeli and Creed (2014) found that individuals' perceptions of value congruence may actually be of more consequence in determining performance than the actual degree of alignment between individual and organizational values. This finding potentially suggests that, whether actual value incongruence exists between organizational and teacher values or not, the simple fact that teachers perceive top-down mandates to be misaligned with their values may have enough impact to raise enduring concerns about authenticity in public schools.

Impact on Perceived Support

The literature provides ample support demonstrating that pervasive, top-down reform in public education can raise concerns about support by undermining psychological needs and increasing demand.

Teachers' basic psychological needs may be more difficult to meet in the public school context as the result of pervasive, top-down reform and accountability measures. Teachers' need for autonomy especially suffers when mandates limit teachers' control

even in their own classrooms (Kuhn, 2014; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). Kukla-Acevedo (2009) stated, “Current federal and statutory accountability policies may constrain teachers’ classroom autonomy more than the individual school policies and practices” (p. 451). High-stakes testing pressures, mandated curriculum materials, increased paperwork and data collection tasks, and procedural red tape are just some of the intrusions upon teachers’ professional autonomy brought into play alongside reform initiatives (Bouwma-Gearheart, 2010; Berryhill, Linney, & Fromewick, 2009; Ingersoll, 2001; Ndoye et al., 2010). Other studies have found that teachers’ competence and relatedness needs may also go unmet as the result of contextual factors such as controlling circumstances and pervasive change (Stone et al., 2009; Swanson & Huff, 2010).

The negative impact of pervasive change and mandated accountability measures upon teachers’ psychological needs may be partially attributed to the increased level of demand that accompanies the implementation of top-down initiatives (Fritz, Sonnentag, Spector, & McInroe, 2010). According to Pretsch et al. (2012), “a specific characteristic of the teaching profession is the combination of high demands and low control which is...the condition that provokes the highest work-related stress” (p. 331). This high-demand/low-control dynamic may be related to Sass et al.’s (2012) finding that “the primary reason teachers left the profession was the increased levels of accountability and pressure associated with high-stakes testing” (p. 5). When the increased pressure cannot be relieved through the exercise of personal and professional control over factors influencing the situation, teachers are sure to struggle. Even seemingly less-monumental conditions that increase demands on teachers’ time and energy and raise stress levels, such as limited access to resources (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Guarino et al., 2006),

large class sizes (Ingersoll, 2001; Pretsch et al., 2012), and overloaded course schedules (Berryhill et al., 2009; Pretsch et al., 2012) can give rise to problematic concerns about support and have a negative impact on teachers (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011, p. 50; Fisher, 2014). Opportunities for renewal, such as those provided through time off from work (Fritz et al., 2010) or positive experiences and interaction with others who share meaningful relationships (Pucella, 2011) help to combat the increased expenditure to accommodate increased demand. Unfortunately, these opportunities for renewal are themselves often precluded by the high levels of demand and accountability that now characterize public education.

Impact on Functional Equilibrium

The current study found ample evidence that unresolved concerns about authenticity and support give rise to disequilibrium and diminish functionality, a conclusion that is supported in the literature as it relates to the indicators of disequilibrium: motivation, well-being, and fulfillment. External rewards and punishments such as those associated with mandated accountability initiatives and other top-down reforms in public education have been linked to decline in autonomous motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Fernet (2013) found a correlation between negative contextual factors and employee motivation and well-being, describing “a sequential effect of environmental work factors on motivational processes, which are then translated into positive or negative manifestations of psychological health” (p. 73). The literature provides ample documentation of the negative impact that pervasive changes in the work context can have upon employees’ stress levels and sense of security (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Ragnarsdottir & Johannesson, 2014). Several studies have drawn

correlations between the work environment and employee well-being (Biggio & Cortese, 2013; Wininger & Birkholz, 2013), while others have substantiated a specific link between high-levels of demand in the work context and decreased psychological health (Feuerhahn, Kuhnel, & Kudielka, 2012; Pan & Yeh, 2012; Pretsch et al., 2012). Like motivation and well-being, fulfillment can also suffer as the result of pervasive reforms and mandated policies in public schools (Houchins, 2010; Ololube, 2006).

Impact on Attrition

The prevalence of mandated reforms in the public school environment has been shown in the literature to play a major role in teacher turnover (Ragnarsdottir & Johannesson, 2012; Sass et al., 2012). Santoro (2011) emphasized that the question of teacher attrition should be "analyzed from the perspective of whether teachers find moral value in the actual work they are asked to perform," taking into consideration the many impediments to "doing good work" that currently exist in public schools (p. 3). Again, the literature indicates that the increased demand that accompanies the implementation of reform initiatives is also likely related to increased attrition from public schools. Although Ingersoll (2001) found that while teachers mentioned demanding conditions such as "large class sizes, intrusions on classroom time, lack of planning time..., and interference with teaching" as problematic concerns, these factors did not have a measurable impact on turnover rates (p. 22). More recent studies have substantiated a clear link between increased demand and attrition (Buchanan, 2012; Donaldson & Johnson, 2011; Fisher, 2014; Pan & Yeh, 2012; Ragnarsdottir & Johannesson, 2014; Swanson & Huff, 2010).

Summary

Section 2 attempted to situate the current study's GT within the context of the existing literature. Many studies sought to determine predictors or demographic factors that indicated teacher turnover. Research showed that low-achieving or disadvantaged schools may experience higher rates of teacher turnover than higher-achieving schools, but that all schools are at risk of being negatively impacted by teacher attrition. Excessive teacher turnover has serious consequences for success of students, as well. The current study's area of interest centered on the experiences of former teachers during their employment in Georgia's public school system. Unfortunately, research committed to understanding the personal experiences and perceptions of former teachers is somewhat limited. The current study supplements the few existing studies involving former teachers by providing new insight into the lived experiences of an under-represented population and contributing to a clearer understanding of the processes by which teachers become leavers. Many studies explored the impact of the indicators of disequilibrium on teachers' functionality, substantiating the current study's assertion that when autonomous motivation, well-being, and fulfillment in teaching are compromised, teachers are less capable of sustainably coping with the demands and responsibilities entailed in their jobs in public school. The literature also supports the current study's hypothesis that teachers' needs for authenticity and support must be met in order for equilibrium and functionality to be sustained. Finally, the literature suggests that there may be certain conditions inherent to the public school context that tend to give rise to and sustain disequilibrium by raising teachers' concerns about authenticity and support. Based on the evidence in the literature, further researcher is needed to explore former teachers' experiences in the

public school system. A clearer understanding of these experiences and the circumstances that underpin teachers' decisions to quit may help education stakeholders develop effective reform initiatives that also provide adequate support for teachers' needs and minimize the conditions for decline. Section 3 will present information related to the justification and implementation of the GT methodology.

Section 3: Methodology

The current study used classic GT as its methodological design (See Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998, 2009, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This methodology provided an open-ended, structured, and rigorous method for generating a grounded conceptual theory related to the study's area of interest: the experiences of former Georgia public school teachers. GT as a distinct methodology was outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their well-known work, *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Over time, Glaser and Strauss's common understanding of the methodology they jointly created began to diverge, leading some to make a distinction between Straussian and Glaserian (or "classic") GT (Raffanti, 2005). Although, Strauss's definition of GT (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) has diverged in some ways from the original tenets presented in *The discovery of grounded theory*, classic GT continues to adhere to the methodological constructs established and applied in the pair's earlier work (Raffanti, 2005). Glaser's contribution to the development of the GT methodology has consisted not of altering the core tenets of the methodology, but of expanding, elucidating, and illustrating the unique features and practical applications of this versatile and powerful research design (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998, 2009, 2011).

Research Tradition

GT is distinct from other research methodologies in three different ways: (a) By design, GT studies *generate* rather than *verify* theory; (b) they use primarily inductive rather than deductive methods of inquiry; and (c) they focus on the conceptual core of the data rather than the surface descriptors of the data.

GT differs from many other common research methodologies in that the GT researcher's primary objective is to generate a new theory from data, instead of testing or verifying existing theories or hypotheses (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 28). Consequently, the results of a GT study cannot rightly be called *findings*, but must be understood as a theoretical product systematically generated from data that takes the form of "an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses," better known as a *grounded theory* (Glaser, 1998, p. 3). Even so, the GT "is not generated as a specific verificational check" and is not intended to support or disprove existing theory (Glaser, 2009, p. 40). Glaser (1992) explained that generative and verificational methodologies constitute sequential phases of the overall process of inquiry into an area of interest. Generative methodologies allow researchers to discover underlying patterns in the area of interest and then write theories about them; these theories can be applied and tested, in turn, by researchers using verificational methodologies (Glaser, 1992, p. 30). In conjunction, generational and verificational methodologies play complementary roles in advancing the general understanding of specific phenomena or areas of interest.

Methodologies that are designed to verify or substantiate claims are deductive in nature; those that seek to generate theory, such as GT, are necessarily inductive methodologies (Glaser, 1978, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 114). Deductive studies begin with assumptions or preconceived questions that take the form of hypotheses to be tested. The findings of deductive studies are deduced from data collected specifically for the purpose of verifying or refuting the study's initial assumptions. Conversely, an inductive inquiry begins with no such preconceptions, but rather with a general area of interest that provides the initial direction for the research (Glaser, 1978, 1998; Olson,

2008). The purpose of an inductive study is to collect and analyze data from which a theory emerges through constant comparison of incidents and theoretical concepts occurring in the data (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 37-38). Unlike the concrete verificational findings of deductive inquiries, the results of GT studies are grounded theories that "expose and conceptualize paradigmatic patterns operative within a system" (Olson & Raffanti, 2006, p. 536). Grounded theories are able to capture the theoretical essence of these underlying patterns because they are induced directly from data collected from within the system (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 41). Although GT departs from the more traditional deductive research model in some ways, the opportunity to cultivate a deep, theoretical understanding of an area of interest ensures that undertaking an inductive study is a worthwhile endeavor.

Whereas traditional research methodologies often seek to capture and explain specific descriptive or statistical characteristics of the data, GT studies tease out and define the conceptual core of a general area of interest (Breckenridge & Jones, 2009; Glaser, 1978, 2009; Olson, 2008). Using constant comparative analysis, the GT methodology systematically conceptualizes descriptive data from the interest area to produce a framework of interconnected concepts that transcend the specific contexts from which they emerged (Glaser, 1978, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009). Because the results of a GT study are conceptual instead of descriptive, the theory is not bound by the specific social context or substantive area from which it was derived (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Simmons, 2008b; Urell, 2006). A GT generated through the systematic conceptualization of data can potentially be used to inform a wide range of contexts to support positive social change.

Rationale

Classic GT is well suited to the current study's objective of supporting positive social change in education. Because GT is inductive, studies using this methodology can commence with nothing more than a general area of interest (Olson, 2008). By choosing an inductive design, I was able to refrain from posing preconceived research questions or hypotheses about the experiences of former public school teachers, as would be expected with most deductive research designs. Instead, the GT methodology permitted participants to "speak for themselves" about what was most relevant to them, rather than obliging them to respond to preconceived questions that may be more reflective of my interests than of the participants' own concerns. In this way, GT's inductive design provided me with the opportunity to gather first-hand data about the lived experiences of former teachers and to compose from this data a conceptual picture of the social and behavioral patterns underpinning participants' experiences in the context of Georgia's public school system.

The final result of a GT study, the grounded theory, is a set of conceptual hypotheses grounded in the lived experiences of participants that, most often, accurately reflects the main concerns of participants in the action scene under study (Glaser, 2010). Because they are grounded in data from participants in the action scene, grounded theories are usually highly relevant, easy for individuals in the action scene to identify with, and useful to stakeholders in the action scene. The current study's GT of navigating the cycle of decline in teaching synthesizes and conceptualizes the experiences of teachers who leave Georgia's schools, which means that it can provide valuable insight into the nature of teachers' quit decisions and even into the nature of teacher turnover in

general. Because it allowed me "to structure a social research study that will yield relevant information for educated and sustainable social change" (Urell, 2006, p. 525), GT was the optimal research design for the current study.

Measures for Ethical Protection

I carefully ensured the privacy and safety of all participants involved in the study. The study's parameters presented no conflicts of interest among the participants, myself, and the objectives of the study, nor did the study require the participation of individuals from vulnerable populations. Measures for ensuring the ethical treatment, confidentiality, and security of participant data are outlined in the following section.

Informed Consent, Debriefing, and Benefits

All participants were required to provide informed consent before participating in the study (see Appendix A). Participants were debriefed about the study before being interviewed and received a summary debriefing to communicate the results of the study when it was complete. Full copies of the final research report are available to participants upon request. Regarding potential benefits of participating in the study, participants may have experienced a catharsis or release after the interview regarding their experiences in the Georgia public school system; participants may also experience a sense of reassurance and solidarity with other former teachers upon reading the study's results.

Confidentiality

Because the study's design required that data be collected in face-to-face interviews, complete participant anonymity was not possible. Potential participants were identified and invited to join the study via online networking, so they were not required to disclose any personal information prior to consenting to participate in the study. To

ensure confidentiality during data collection and analysis, all identifying participant information was removed from interview transcripts and other written records. Because participants could withdraw their consent to participate in the study at any point, all documents were assigned participant-specific reference numbers that could be used to identify and pull information contributed by specific participants from the data pool. No identifying links to individual participants appear in the final research report.

Security

All paper copies of participant-related forms, transcripts, and other documents were stored in a locked file cabinet at my home office. Electronic data files and documents were stored in password-protected folders on my laptop and backed up in password-protected folders to my home office desktop computer. All individuals with access to paper or electronic copies of participant documents or data were required to sign a confidentiality agreement.

The Role of the Researcher

In a GT study, the researcher's primary role is that of a theoretical data analyst, skillfully elevating the disparate substantive codes in the data through the GT process to form an integrated explanatory theory. In order to facilitate the conceptualization of the study's data, I had to build working relationships with participants that were free from conflicts of interest. I also had to understand my own experiences and potential bias in relation to the study's area of interest so that their influence on the emergent theory could be minimized. Finally, I had to cultivate two key traits that mark the successful GT analyst.

Relationship with Participants

Aside from sharing the common experience of having taught in Georgia's public school system, I had no professional affiliation with the study's participants nor was the study affiliated with or restricted to a particular school or system. The lack of a central research setting and the unaffiliated status of the participants significantly minimized the likelihood that conflicts of interest related to my role would arise over the course of the study. As a former teacher myself, I interacted with participants as a colleague and earnest listener with an intrinsic professional and personal interest in their experiences. The open-ended, conversational style of interview used in GT was helpful in establishing a sense of trust between participants and myself, which in turn, encouraged participants to freely and candidly share their main concerns.

Personal Experience

Although keeping preconceptions to a minimum is a necessity for generating theory, the GT researcher is by no means expected to somehow wipe his or her mind clear of all knowledge of the area of interest when the study commences (Glaser, 1998). Glaser (1998) pointed out that "it is a fantasy for the researcher to think he/she is not a part of the data," while emphasizing the importance of "keeping track of how one is part of it" (p. 49). Wiggins and McTighe (2005) described the process of keeping track of one's personal preconceptions and bias as "the wisdom to know one's ignorance and how one's patterns of thought and action inform as well as prejudice understanding" (p. 100). To promote self-awareness and cultivate a true openness to the emergent patterns in the study data, I conducted a thorough self-interview as part of the data collection phase of the research. Thorough the self-interview, my own personal experiences were effectively

pulled from the realm of subtle influence and transmuted into data that was processed using constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this way, the self-interview allows a GT researcher to relinquish the baggage of prior experience and knowledge for the duration of the study and become a "non-citizen for the moment so he can come closer to objectivity and to letting the data speak for itself" (Glaser, 1978, p. 8). The self-interview is a common strategy among GT researchers for systematically acknowledging, documenting, analyzing, and then setting aside prior experiences, expectations, and knowledge of the study's interest area, so that researchers are free to do the conceptual work of generating theory from data (Glaser, 1998; Simmons, 1993, p. 4).

Two Traits of the GT Analyst

In a GT study, the researcher's ability to generate a useful GT is heavily dependent on his or her theoretical sensitivity and ability to tolerate confusion (Glaser, 2010). According to Glaser (1992), "theoretical sensitivity refers to the researcher's knowledge, understanding, and skill, which foster his generation of categories and properties and increase his ability to relate them into hypotheses, and to further integrate hypotheses, according to emergent theoretical codes" (p. 26). This definition of theoretical sensitivity encompasses all phases of the GT research study; the researcher's ability to "give conceptual insight, understanding, and meaning" to data underpins the entirety of the GT process (Glaser, 1992, p. 27).

It is not enough that a GT analyst have "the ability to have theoretical insight into his area of research"; this skill must also be combined with "an ability to make something of his insights" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 46). For this reason, Glaser (2010) maintained that among the most important traits a GT researcher possesses is "an ability to tolerate

some confusion" (p. 4). GT requires the researcher to collect and derive meaning from tremendous amounts of data without the clear guidance of specific research questions or hypotheses. Key codes and concepts may emerge from any data, but the researcher can never know in advance which codes and concepts are important and which are incidental. Constant comparison between codes, incidents, and concepts during GT analysis makes the process of analyzing the data confusing, intense, and critically important. This harrying circumstance is a necessary procedural consequence of discovering theory through induction. Glaser (1998) assures GT researchers that "uncertainty, ambiguity, and confusion are a useful path to being open to emergence" (p. 44). In the current study, the traits of theoretical sensitivity and the ability to tolerate ambiguity worked in conjunction as I navigated the constant comparative process and eventually reintegrated the multitude of scattered conceptual elements into a useful, relevant explanatory theory of navigating the cycle of decline.

Grand Tour Question

Although research studies are often structured around general research questions or hypotheses (Creswell, 2003), GT studies do not preconceive research questions to guide data collection and analysis. Instead, GT researchers embark upon an inquiry with nothing more than a well-defined, though general area of interest (Olson, 2008). In order to begin exploring the area of interest, I posed a "grand tour" question at the beginning of each interview. A grand tour question is a general question or prompt that introduces the area of inquiry to participants and is stated in general enough terms to avoid influencing participant responses down a preconceived path (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Olson, 2006). Olson (2006) described a grand tour question as "the starting gate for the grounded

theorist who wishes to obtain unforced or non-coerced interview data" because it "opens the door to discovering what is going on in the action scene" (p. 5). The current study's initial grand tour question took the form of a simple prompt: "Tell me about your experiences as a public school teacher."

The prompt was intentionally broad, designed to encourage participants to select and share their most relevant experiences without feeling pressured respond in ways that conformed to leading questions, cues, or perceived expectations from the researcher. Since an abundance of participant data is the required to fuel the emergence of a GT, one of the most important characteristics of an effective grand tour question is that it "is designed to convey to the respondent that they are being invited to discuss *what is relevant to them* [italics in original] (not the researcher) about the general topic area, on their terms" (Simmons, 2008a, p. 16-17). For this study, the grand tour question was specifically designed to "instill a spill," as Glaser (2009, p. 22) concisely phrased it, encouraging participants to provide rich data on topics of personal relevance and concern.

Criteria for Selecting Participants

The study's sample consisted of 12 participants who voluntarily left teaching positions in the Georgia public school system prior to becoming eligible for retirement. Although the number of participants in GT studies can vary widely, the core categories had reached saturation with data from 12 participants, so no further sampling was required. GT studies rely on a specialized sampling technique called theoretical sampling to guide the selection of participants. Theoretical sampling is continuous throughout a GT study and uses categories and concepts that emerge during data analysis instead of predetermined criteria to select subsequent participants and participant groups for

inclusion. According to Glaser (1978), "initial decisions for theoretical sampling are based only on a sociological perspective and on a general problem area" (p. 44), so my first task in selecting participants was to identify former Georgia public school teachers who were willing to share their experiences. To locate potential participants, the study followed Gonzalez et al.'s (2008) precedent, in which the researchers successfully used snowball sampling to locate former teachers. Patton (2003) explained that snowball sampling entails networking among "people who know people who know people who know what cases are...good interview participants" (p. 243). I used snowball sampling through email and social networking websites including Facebook and LinkedIn to solicit recommendations for potential participants and locate an adequate sample of former Georgia public school teachers. I formally invited potential participants identified through snowball sampling to participate in the study via social media private messaging platforms or email. The first individuals to respond to my invitation to participate in the study became the first interviewees. After the initial interview data were collected and analyzed, GT's specialized practice of theoretical sampling took precedence. More detailed information on theoretical sampling is provided later in this section.

The Seven Stages of the GT Methodology

The following breakdown of the seven stages of a GT study presents a detailed overview of the GT process (see Olson, 2006, pp. 3-18; see Simmons, 2008b). GT's seven procedural stages include minimizing preconceptions, data collection, data analysis, memoing, sorting, outlining, and writing. The presentation of these steps in the process as distinct and strictly chronological may be misleading to individuals who are unfamiliar with GT. GT is a recursive, non-linear process that entails constant and fluid

shifting among the methodology's various stages (Becker, 1995; Holton, 2010). For instance, data collection, constant comparative analysis, and memoing can occur simultaneously, all while the researcher strives to minimize preconceptions and remain open to the emerging theory (Glaser, 1992; Holton, 2010; Stern, 1995). Even during the sorting and writing phases of the process, it is not uncommon for GT researchers to return to the field to collect data to round out an important code or concept (Glaser, 1992; Stern, 1995). Because of the inductive nature of a GT study, the prescribed stages are, in reality, quite flexible and often overlap to permit the researcher to discover, sample for, and saturate theoretical codes and concepts as they arise from the data. Holton (2010) affirmed the significance of GT's recursive design, citing the important role of the methodology's "cycling nature of constant comparison and theoretical sampling in progressing the analysis toward higher levels of conceptual abstraction, core emergence, and theoretical integration" (p. 23). The following section explains GT's processes of turning raw data into conceptual theory in detail.

Stage 1: Minimizing Preconceptions

In this initial stage of the GT process, the researcher prepares for the coming trials of conceptualizing data by minimizing preconceptions, delaying the initial literature review, and selecting an area of interest while avoiding a predetermined research "problem" or hypothesis. For the committed GT researcher, minimizing preconceptions is not a mandate or a burden, but a necessary step toward uncovering the conceptual patterns imbedded in the data. The GT researcher's own personal and professional ideals, interests, aspirations, and preconceptions will have no bearing on the emergence of a truly grounded GT; a theory influenced by ungrounded speculation and personal bias will

suffer from diminished applicability and relevance in the social context from which it claims to be derived (Glaser, 1992, 2002).

Stage 2: Data Collection

The current study collected data through open-ended, intensive interviews with participants. Open-ended interviews are the most common method of data collection used in GT because they generate plentiful data that reflects participants' main concerns instead of prompting or leading participants with preconceived interview questions and protocols (Simmons, 2008b). Interviews were conducted in person whenever possible, but telephone and online interviews provided effective alternatives for accommodating several participants' preferences and schedules. Regardless of venue, all interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed before being coded. Interviews opened with a simple invitation to participants: "Tell me about your experiences as a public school teacher." Burgess (2011) stated that after posing the grand tour question or prompt, "the interviewer should follow the lead of the interviewed" (p. 40), in order to encourage and support the unimpeded sharing of participants' experiences. At all times, the interviewer should strive to maintain the neutral role of a passive, interested listener to participants' concerns (Burgess, 2011; Glaser, 1992, 2002, 2009). Glaser (1998) explained that, in most cases, participants will readily vent their concerns when they realize that they are being listened to. Since GT interviews tend to be conversational and emergent in nature (Glaser, 2009), researchers sometimes need to ask follow-up questions to clarify information or prompt participants to continue with or complete a thought (Burgess, 2011). Follow-up questions should be carefully phrased as "open-ended and probing, yet not leading the respondent or supplying her with a response" (Raffanti, 2005, p. 11). To

avoid leading participant responses, follow-up questions should never be scripted or prepared in advance. Allowing participants to focus on their own central concerns, experiences, and interests is critical in gleaning unforced data from open-ended interviews in GT.

In a GT study, the earliest interviews open with a broad grand tour question that is designed to elicit an abundance of general data in the interest area. The direction and content of these interviews are determined only by what the interviewee's "problem is and how they are continuously trying to handle it" (Glaser, 1998, p. 124). However, as the research progresses and key concepts from the data emerge, interviews with participants tend to be shorter and more frequent, often focused on gathering data about specific components of the emerging theory. Accordingly, the researcher may modify or change the initial grand tour question to reflect the specific focus of each interview. In the current study, I used the initial grand tour prompt in all of the interviews; I also asked some more specific questions related to emergent concepts in the later interviews. Data from later interviews is often used to help define, expand, and saturate underdeveloped properties and categories and to explore potentially important concepts that need further grounding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Theoretical sampling. The narrowed focus of interviews over the course of the study is the result of a GT practice known as *theoretical sampling* (Glaser, 2009). Theoretical sampling is an ongoing process by which "the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges" (Glaser, 1978, p. 36). At the outset of a GT study, the researcher's initial decisions about sampling and the formulation of the grand

tour question are based only the study's general area of interest (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Beyond these preliminary measures required to initiate data collection, "further collection cannot be planned in advance of the emerging theory" (Holton, 2010, p. 28). Instead, the GT researcher uses theoretical sampling to make informed decisions about the next steps in data collection based on emergent patterns and concepts from recently analyzed data. Theoretical sampling allows the researcher to select participants and participant groups that can assist in the development of emergent concepts (Becker, 1995; Glaser, 2002, 2009; Raffanti, 2005; Stern, 1995). In this way, data collection is controlled and guided by the emergent theory, while the theory is induced from concurrent and continuous data analysis (Becker, 1995; Breckenridge & Jones, 2009; Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Vander Linden, 2005).

Theory development. Theoretical sampling plays a critical role in the expansion, integration, and saturation of the emergent theory. Early in the study, theoretical sampling allows the researcher to determine the relevance and fit of potential conceptual categories as they arise from data analysis (Olson, 2006; Stern, 1995). Olson (2006) explained that "following these emergent patterns and data collection and further comparing these concepts to one another will either serve to sharpen the category or deem it as irrelevant or a bad fit" (p. 11). Theoretical sampling also permits the researcher to identify and define the properties of relevant categories, thereby densifying the theory and filling in conceptual gaps revealed during analysis (Breckenridge & Jones, 2009; Glaser, 1992; Stern, 1995). The purpose of theoretical sampling is to expand, explicate, and refine the emerging theory within the interest area (Breckenridge & Jones, 2009; Glaser, 1992), which often "leads the researcher into fertile areas that

preconception or forcing may have shut down" (Raffanti, 2005, p. 14). As data analysis yields fewer and fewer leads for the emergent theory's elaboration and expansion, theoretical sampling shifts to focus on saturating existing categories and exploring conceptual relationships among properties, categories, and patterns (Breckenridge & Jones, 2009; Glaser, 1992, 1998). Formal theories, which seek to integrate conceptual patterns across a range of substantive areas, require a great deal of sampling from a wide range of participant groups, but theories grounded in a single substantive area, such as the current study, saturate with a more limited sample that reflects the bounds of the substantive area of inquiry (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I used theoretical sampling to guide the selection of participants throughout the study process in order to maximize the theory's conceptual depth and scope.

Stage 3: Constant Comparative Analysis

The process of constant comparative analysis lies at the heart of the GT methodology. Constant comparative analysis refers to a systematic and rigorous process of coding, analyzing, and conceptualizing incoming data (Becker, 1995; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Constant comparative analysis is primarily concerned with "generating and plausibly suggesting...many categories, properties, and hypotheses about general problems" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 104). In GT, data analysis is inextricably intertwined with theoretical sampling and ongoing data collection, resulting in a cyclical progression or "matrix operation rather than a linear endeavor" (Stern, 1995, p. 36). Unlike many traditional research methodologies, in which data collection and analysis are distinct and sequential steps, GT requires the researcher to begin both coding and analysis as soon as the first data is collected (Glaser, 1978). Continuous data analysis guides

theoretical sampling for more data collection, new data is analyzed, new leads emerge, and theoretical sampling takes the researcher back to the field to collect more data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained that, "At the beginning, there is more collection than coding and analysis; the balance then gradually changes until near the end when the research involves mostly analysis, with brief collection and coding for picking up loose ends" (pp. 72-73). This gradual shift in emphasis from data collection to analysis occurs naturally as the study progresses.

Conceptualizing the data. The focus of coding in a GT study is to elevate the underlying patterns in the data to an abstract, conceptual level (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Simmons, 2010). The systematic process of constant comparative analysis assists the GT researcher in conceptualizing substantive data. In order to effectively identify patterns and raise the conceptual level of the data, the GT researcher continually asks three neutral questions during data analysis (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998; Simmons, 2008b):

1. What is this data a study of?
2. What category or property does this incident indicate?
3. What is actually happening in the data?

By persistently asking these questions of the data, the researcher is able to "[raise] the empirical level of the data to a conceptual level suitable for theory generation" (Glaser, 1978, p. 59).

The elevation of substantive data to conceptual theory occurs in several distinct steps, each of which is related to a different type of coding occurring during constant comparative analysis. First, open coding entails meticulous line-by-line coding of incidents in the data to generate a range of substantive codes that signify emergent

categories and properties of categories. During open coding, the researcher focuses on first comparing incidents to incidents to generate concepts and, later, comparing the emergent concepts to incidents in the data to verify and develop the properties of each concept (Glaser, 1978). Raffanti (2005) explained that "this line-by-line or incident-by-incident coding is an initial step that instigates the search for patterns" (p. 14). Open coding ceases when the researcher discovers the core category or core variable of the study, at which point selective coding begins (Glaser, 1978). Selective coding focuses on coding incoming data only for categories and properties that are relevant to the core variable (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998). As selective coding continues and the key categories of the theory develop and saturate, theoretical coding becomes the researcher's analytical focus. Theoretical coding involves comparing concepts to concepts to discover the relationships among categories and their properties (Glaser, 1992, 1978, 1998; Hernandez, 2009; Simmons, 2008b). Theoretical coding provides the foundation for the organization or integrated framework of the emerging theory and may overlap considerably with the memoing and sorting phases of the GT process (Glaser, 2009).

Open coding. Open coding is "the initial stage of constant comparative analysis, before delimiting the coding to a core category and its properties" (Glaser, 1992, p. 38). Until the core category emerges, the analyst codes for anything related to the general area of interest in the data (Glaser, 1978, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Simmons, 2008b). Since the researcher is guided neither by preconceived research questions or hypotheses during open coding, open coding involves taking note of any and all potentially relevant categories or concepts. This process of open coding helps the researcher to identify recurrent patterns by comparing and categorizing numerous incidents and discovering the

common properties of the emerging categories (Glaser, 1998; Hernandez, 2009; Holton, 2010; Stern, 1995). By definition, "a category stands by itself as a conceptual element of theory"; "a property, in turn, is a conceptual aspect or element of a category" (Glaser, 1978, p. 153). Thorough the process of generating and verifying categories and their properties, open coding "allows the analyst to see the direction in which to take his study by theoretical sampling, before he becomes selective and focused on a particular problem" (Glaser, 1978, p. 56).

Substantive codes. The codes produced during open coding are known as *substantive codes* (Hernandez, 2009; Raffanti, 2005; Simmons, 2008b). Substantive codes can be defined as the conceptual labels or tags assigned to "categories and their properties, which conceptually sum up the patterns found in the substantive incidents in the field" (Glaser, 1992, p. 27; Holton, 2010). Substantive codes are often "in vivo" codes, meaning that they are derived directly from the language used by participants in the study (Glaser 1978, 1998). Although substantive codes represent early attempts to conceptualize the "substance of the data" (Stern, 1995) and serve as the starting-place for theoretical meaning making, they are distinct in origin and in purpose from theoretical codes, which are discussed in detail later in this section (Glaser, 1998).

Comparing incident to incident. GT theories are grounded in the data, which means that the conceptual building blocks of the theory must be "generated from the patterns of meaning coming from constant comparisons of micro incidents, not macro situations" (Glaser, 1998, p. 143). For this reason, it is standard procedure in GT analysis to meticulously code the data line by line for incidents during open coding (Glaser, 1978, 1998; Stern, 1995). In GT, an *incident* is the basic unit of comparison in constant

comparative analysis, consisting of a small section of data from a source document, usually made up of a word, phrase, or sentence and rarely exceeding a full paragraph in length (Glaser, 1998; Scott, 2009). During GT data analysis, codes are generally recorded directly in the margins of source documents near the incident that indicated the code (Glaser, 1992, 1998).

Comparing incidents to emergent concepts. GT analysts engaged in open coding will "look for patterns so that a pattern of many similar incidents can be given a name as a category, and dissimilar incidents can be given a name as a property of a category" (Glaser, 1992, p. 40). Simmons (2010) stated that a concept is "simply a 'name' for a pattern indicated in the data" (p. 29), while Glaser and Strauss (1967) defined a concept as a "relevant theoretical abstraction about what is going on in the area studied" (p. 23). Based on these statements, it is helpful to define a concept as a name assigned by the analyst to a conceptual or theoretical pattern that has emerged from the substantive data. Emergent categories and their properties continue to develop during and after open coding as the researcher compares fresh incidents from incoming data to concepts that have already emerged from prior data analysis (Glaser, 1992, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The comparison of incidents to emergent concepts has several purposes in constant comparative analysis (Glaser, 1998). First, it helps to verify concepts as actual categories by providing further instances of the conceptual categories in the data. Comparing incidents to concepts also helps to refine the fit of the names that the researcher has assigned to emergent conceptual categories and to generate properties of emerging categories. In time, repeated comparison of incidents to confirmed categories will cease to generate new properties for the category and the category will be

theoretically saturated by comparison with incidents in the data (Glaser, 1998). Comparison of incidents to concepts ultimately elaborates "the full range of types or continua of the category, its dimensions, the conditions under which it is pronounced or minimized, its major consequences, its relation to other categories, and its other properties" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 106), making this type of comparison a critical component of in building GT.

The core category. The core category or core variable of a GT inquiry is the main conceptual pattern that accounts for most of the variation in the area of interest being studied (Hernandez, 2009; Simmons, 2010); essentially, the core category is what the study's emergent theory is actually about (Simmons, 2010). While open coding is responsible for producing a range of codes, categories, and properties, the constant comparative process will eventually advance a very small number of central categories that explain the majority of the variation in the area of interest (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998; Hernandez, 2009; Simmons, 2010). Generally, GT studies produce between one and three core categories that encompass and fully conceptualize the main problem in the substantive area (Glaser, 1978). In the current study, constant comparison and open coding led to the discovery of the core category *navigating the cycle of decline*. The emergence of the core category or categories and their related properties marks the end of open coding; further data collection and analysis is directed by selective coding, in which the analyst codes only for incidents and concepts that are relevant to the core category and its properties (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998; Hernandez, 2009; Simmons, 2008b).

Selective coding. In essence, selective coding commences when "the core variable becomes a guide to further data collection and theoretical sampling" (Glaser, 1978, p.

61). Switching to selective coding allows the analyst to focus on the most central elements of the emergent theory. In this way, "the theory is boiled down and codified, by saturation, more focused memos, selective theoretical sampling and the shift to a more focused theoretical perspective" (Glaser, 1998, p. 150). During selective coding, the researcher's analysis begins to shift from primarily substantive codes based in the data to more theoretical codes that conceptualize and explore the relationships among conceptual categories and properties. Hernandez (2009) explained that, although substantive codes and theoretical codes have distinct purposes, they are not completely isolated, since they generally begin to overlap during the selective coding phase.

Theoretical coding. Theoretical codes capture and name relationships among substantive codes, categories, and properties, as well as provide the theoretical foundation for the organization of the emergent theory (Glaser, 1992, 1978, 1998; Hernandez, 2009; Simmons, 2008b; Stern, 1995). Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained that "different categories and their properties tend to become integrated through constant comparisons that force the analyst to make some related theoretical sense of each comparison" (p. 109). The names with which the researcher imbues the relational concepts that comprise this emergent "theoretical sense" are known as theoretical codes. Glaser (1978) further explained that exploring the properties of a theoretical code helps the researcher define its boundaries, as well as "the empirical *criteria* on which the code rests, the *conditions* under which it emerges or is evident, and its theoretically coded *connections* and *significance*" (p. 85). Discovering, verifying, extending, and saturating theoretical codes is the GT researcher's objective during the concluding phases of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Theoretical coding may continue well into the

memoing, sorting, and even writing stages of the GT process, allowing the researcher to explore the relationships among conceptualized codes that are elaborated in memo form as the theory develops (Glaser, 2009; Hernandez, 2009). Because they capture the conceptual scope of the significance of data gathered from participants in the area of interest, theoretical codes "potentiate [a grounded theory's] explanatory power and increase its completeness and relevance" (Hernandez, 2009, p. 55).

Conceptualizing relationships. The defining trait of theoretical codes is that they are fully conceptualized identifiers for the relationships among existing codes, categories, and properties (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Hernandez, 2009). Like all elements of the GT process, theoretical codes are inherently grounded in the data because they denote "the essential relationship between data and theory" (Glaser, 1978, p. 39). Although Glaser (1978, 1998) provided researchers with numerous examples of common theoretical codes and coding families, every theoretical code must earn its way into a study's emergent theory through constant comparative analysis. Theoretical codes are generated when incidents from the data, substantive codes, categories, properties, and even memos are compared and relationships among these elements begin to emerge from these ongoing comparisons. This process of identifying and exploring the relationships among concepts accounts for much of a GT's power and relevance (Hernandez, 2009). By conceptualizing "the underlying pattern of a set of empirical indicators within the data," (Glaser, 1978, p. 55), theoretical codes permit the researcher to transcend the many disparate incidents in the data to discover the overarching conceptual framework underlying major concerns in the study's area of interest (Glaser, 1978, 1992).

Providing a foundation for theory organization. Theoretical coding is a critical

step in developing an emergent theory's organizational framework (Glaser, 1978, 1992). In the early stages of constant comparative analysis, the researcher's job is to fracture or dis-integrate the data by coding a wide range of individual incidents in the data. As analysis progresses, the researcher's objective shifts from deconstructing data through conceptualization to re-integrating theoretical codes into an organized, coherent theory (Glaser, 1998). Reconstructing a theory from fractured data can be a harrying experience for GT researchers because of the amount of collected data, the multiplicity of codes resulting from analysis, and the complexity of the subtle patterns and relationships that proliferate from theoretical coding and memoing. Fortunately, "the potentially overwhelming complexity of data is made manageable by organizing theory using theoretical codes" (Scott, 2009, p. 106). As the conceptual relationships in the data develop during theoretical coding and, later, memoing, the rudimentary organizational structure of the GT study's theory begins to emerge.

Saturation. The concept of saturation is an important logistical and delimiting feature of constant comparative analysis. In GT, a category is considered to be *saturated* when no new data can be found that helps to further develop the category's properties or provide additional leads for further theoretical sampling (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As the core and sub-core categories that encompass the emergent theory become apparent through constant comparison, incidents from incoming data are used to expand and define the properties of these key categories, essentially identifying many different indicators that point to the same category. To help ensure the eventual integration and relevancy of the emergent theory, any category that is central to the theory should be pursued in the data until it saturates (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 112). Through theoretical

sampling, a GT researcher can strategically select sample contexts and groups that will "maximize the difference in his data to help saturate the categories" (Glaser, 1978, p. 95). When the data yield little new insight and provide only repeated incidents as indicators of an existing, well-developed category, then that category is nearing saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1998).

Interchangeability of indices. Obviously, theoretical saturation of categories cannot be achieved by cataloguing the specific contextual details of every possible incident that might indicate a particular category (Breckenridge & Jones, 2009; Glaser, 2009). Because an infinite variety of descriptive contexts yield infinitely varied incidents as data, GT researchers do not seek to achieve "descriptive redundancy" in their analysis (Breckenridge & Jones, 2009). Instead, they strive for "conceptual redundancy" by exploring the range of conceptual indicators (also called indices) that signify the study's emergent core category or categories. Although the descriptive and contextual specifics of each incident will vary widely, incidents that are quite heterogeneous on the substantive level can easily indicate a common conceptual category or property. This "interchangeability of indices" is the key element in theoretical saturation for a GT study. Glaser (1978) concisely explained the conceptual import of the interchangeability of indices in theoretical saturation: "The more the analyst finds indicators that work the same regarding their meaning for the concept, the more the analyst saturates the distinctions and properties of the concept for the emerging theory" (p. 64). The category becomes theoretically saturated and verified when indicators from the data, despite their descriptive variety, become interchangeable and can no longer expand the theoretical variance of the conceptual category and its properties (Glaser, 1978, 2009). At this point,

the analyst can stop collecting data for the saturated category.

Theoretical completeness. Just as categories become saturated through constant comparative analysis, so too does the emergent theory. When all of the core and central categories have saturated and the theoretical bounds of the data have been reached, the emergent theory is "theoretically complete," which simply means that "the researcher can explain why most action goes on in a substantive area with his grounded theory" (Glaser, 1998, p. 86). As the theory itself saturates through constant comparison, it begins to transcend the substantive data from which it emerged. The conceptualization of the substantive data becomes theoretically complete when the data, despite careful and thorough theoretical sampling, no longer provides any new categories, properties, or leads to expand the theory. The GT researcher can confidently begin to wrap up the ongoing process of collecting and analyzing data "when considerable saturation of categories in many groups to the limits of his data has occurred, so that his theory is approaching stable integration and dense development of properties" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 64). Constant comparison allows the researcher to produce a well-developed GT that is fully saturated and theoretically complete.

Saturation as a delimiter. Fortunately, in GT there is no need to collect the amount of data that would be required to produce the "full coverage of descriptive generalization" that many qualitative studies aspire to capture (Glaser, 2009, p. 17). Breckenridge and Jones (2009) emphasized that, in GT studies, saturation is not a matter of "exhausting the description of a particular situation at a particular point in time" (p. 121). Saturation helps the researcher determine when the data is exhausted of conceptual wealth. When the data stop producing incidents that indicate new categories and

properties, then no further incidents from the data need to be analyzed. Saturation ensures that the conceptual categories comprising the emergent theory have been confirmed and fully explored (Glaser, 1998). When constant comparative analysis generates only incidents that indicate the same categories over and over, saturation naturally delimits the data collection and allows the researcher to confidently move on the next phases of the study.

Stage 4: Memoing

Glaser (1978) described memoing as "the core stage in the process of generating theory, the bedrock of theory generation, its true product" (Glaser, 1978, p. 83). Although memoing is sequentially the fourth stage of the GT process, the GT researcher may write memos throughout the process of constant comparative analysis and well into the concluding phases of the study (Glaser, 1978). Because memos are conceptual, the researcher must try to avoid logical speculation or elaboration, focusing instead on capturing any grounded connections or insights that arise from analysis of the data (Glaser, 1978, 1998; Simmons, 2010). The memoing process is important in GT because it accommodates the emergent theory's critical transition from descriptive to conceptual data (Glaser, 1978; Holton, 2010; Simmons, 2010). Memoing bridges the gap between description and conceptualization in two ways: 1) by helping the researcher track the development of the emerging theory in conceptual terms (Glaser, 1998), and 2) by elaborating and connecting theoretical codes that specify relationships among the theory's emerging conceptual components.

Tracking the emergent theory. Because of the profusion and complexity of the codes generated by constant comparison, the researcher must depend on memoing as a

means of tracking the many ideas and connections that emerge during data collection and analysis. Glaser (1998) explained that memos can serve as “an alter memory that greatly expands the researcher’s capacity” (p. 182), while Olson (2006) described the researcher’s collection of memos as a “theoretical diary where observation merges ideas and theory” (p. 9). In order to successfully capture emergent thoughts and connections in memo form, the researcher must be willing to consistently “[interrupt] coding and analyzing or any other activity at any moment to memo an emergent idea” (Glaser, 1998, p. 182). Although the conceptual patterns in the data will emerge repeatedly in constant comparative analysis, instances of momentary conceptual insight into the data tend to be fleeting (Glaser, 1978, 1998). By immediately recording conceptual memos when they occur, the researcher avoids losing or forgetting the idea (Glaser, 1978), takes advantage of “the initial freshness of the analyst’s theoretical notions and...[relieves] the conflict in his thoughts” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 107). Consistent and disciplined recording of emergent memos results in an extensive collection or fund of theoretical memos which the GT researcher will eventually sort and organize to form the theory’s conceptual framework. By exhibiting “creativity, keen observation, intuitive insight, and sensitivity to what is going on in the data,” (Olson, 2006, p. 9), the researcher can generate a vast fund of memos that reliably captures the emerging theory’s development and provides the raw material for sorting and outlining later in the GT process (Glaser, 1978, 1998).

Developing theoretical codes. Theoretical codes name the connections that exist among conceptual elements of theory; memos flesh out the details of these connections (Glaser, 1978). Although all conceptual categories and properties are assigned names or codes by the researcher, Glaser (1998) insisted that simply keeping a list of codes and

properties is not sufficient for tracking the theory's emergence. Instead, theoretical codes "should be written about with their grounded meanings in memos and their relations to each other.... Relate these concepts in memos based on their meanings and use theoretical codes in relating them to other properties and categories" (Glaser, 1998, p. 142). The GT researcher memos extensively on emergent concepts, properties, and variations to capture theoretical nuances and insights into the interrelatedness of the emerging theory's conceptual components. When sorted, memos that capture connections among the theory's key concepts can assist the researcher in correctly placing specific categories in the emerging theory's organizational framework based on their relation to other theoretical components (Glaser, 1978). Early memos may develop the properties of categories (Glaser, 1978; Holton, 2010) or propose theoretical codes, while mature memos are more likely to "[present] hypotheses about connections between categories and other properties" or "integrate these connections with clusters of other categories to generate the theory" (Glaser, 1978, p. 84). Just as categories and properties become theoretically saturated through constant comparison, memoing will also eventually cease to yield new conceptual insight (Glaser, 1998). Memos mature as they saturate, revealing with increasing clarity and richness the relationships that link the core category and its properties with other key concepts in the theory (Glaser, 1998). Through extensive memo writing, the GT researcher begins to develop "a strong sensitivity to just how social organization, social structure, social processes and social interaction work in the 'real world'" (Glaser, 1978, p. 89). These valuable insights into relationships among conceptual variables allow the researcher to understand the underlying concerns of the stakeholders in the action scene under study.

Integrating the literature. GT researchers initially avoid reviewing the literature in their study's area of interest until the theory has begun to take shape to minimize preconception and protect the emergent theory's groundedness in the data from outside influence. During the memoing phase of a GT study, the emerging theory grows increasingly clear and substantial for the researcher, ensuring that the theory's groundedness is no longer endangered by the conceptual grab of existing literature relevant to its core category. Comparing extant research to components of the emergent theory generates additional memos exploring connections between the study's emergent patterns and the concepts embedded in the literature. The memos produced during this phase of the study are treated with the same consideration as memos arising from constant comparative analysis of incidents in the data. Both types of memos are subject to the rigors of constant comparative analysis, sorted into the emergent theoretical outline, and integrated into the theory (Glaser, 1978). As the study concludes, memos connecting the emergent theory with existing research help the researcher "[weave] his theory into its place in the literature" (Glaser, 1978, p. 137). Incorporating the literature at this stage in the GT process ensures the theory's groundedness in the data and establishes its contribution to the current body of knowledge relevant to the theory's core concepts.

Stage 5: Sorting

In constant comparative analysis, the GT researcher's job is to fracture and deconstruct the data so that he or she can discover the underlying conceptual patterns in the area of interest (Simmons, 2006). As the joint data collection and analysis phase of a GT study winds down, this deconstruction of the data leaves the researcher with a proliferation of categories, codes, and memos that, at best, "suffer from loose

construction" (Stern, 1995, p. 36). In order for the study to produce a theory that is both presentable and useful to stakeholders, the fractured data and the conceptual products of its analysis must be re-integrated into an organized theoretical whole (Glaser, 1978). The synthesis of the emergent theory into an integrated whole begins with the fifth stage of the GT process: sorting. During this important phase, the researcher finally "begins to put the fractured data back together" (Glaser, 1978, p. 116). Sorting memos into an integrated theoretical framework is much like solving a complex conceptual puzzle. In keeping with the conceptual focus of the GT methodology, the researcher sorts, not the data itself, but the ideas that emerged from the analysis of the data in the form of memos (Glaser, 1978). In this way, sorting transforms the scattered conceptual results of constant comparison into an organized, integrated outline of the study's theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 225). Successfully sorting memos into an integrated outline requires skill and sensitivity to the subtle variations and latent interrelationships among the theory's categories and properties. During the sorting process, the researcher meticulously examines the conceptual content of each memo for subtle clues that reveal "where each concept fits and works, its relevance, and how it will carry-forward in the cumulative development of the theory" (Glaser, 1978, p. 120). These "theoretically discrete discriminations" empower the researcher to construct a working GT from concepts discovered through constant comparison and developed through memoing (Glaser, 1978, p. 118).

At the beginning of the sorting process, the conceptual components of the GT are dispersed throughout a ponderous accumulation of theoretical codes and memos. Fortunately, because memos are conceptual, not descriptive or chronological, the researcher may initiate the sorting process with any memo from his or her extensive fund

(Glaser, 1978). Glaser (1978) suggested that initially, the researcher "should simply start sorting the categories and properties in his memos by similarities, connections, and conceptual orderings (p. 117). As the researcher sorts memos by their conceptual content and relationship to the theory's core category, a rough organizational structure uniting the theory's key conceptual components will begin to emerge (Glaser, 1978). In building the theory around the core category, the researcher will "sort for cumulative build-up in the use of concepts and the multivariate complexity of the theory" (p. 123). This means that once a category or concept is introduced and elaborated as an integral part of the theory, its overall theoretical role as defined by its interrelationships with other concepts is carried forward and integrated throughout the theoretical outline. Carrying concepts forward by integrating them throughout the sort helps to generate a complex theory that is dense enough to account for most of the variation related to the core category (Glaser, 1978). In this way, sorting memos results in a "rich multi-relation, multivariate theory" with "internal integration of connections among a great many categories" (Glaser, 1978, p. 116).

In addition to making sense of existing theoretical memos, sorting is in itself a method of further refining the relationships among the conceptual components of the theory. For this reason, the process of sorting often generates additional theoretical codes, which are in turn, further developed through memoing. These new memos are then added to the pile to be sorted into the emerging theoretical outline (Glaser, 1978). On occasion, sorting can even generate additional leads for theoretical sampling, prompting the researcher to return to the field to collect more data (Simmons, 2008b). In GT, methodological regressions such as this are not to be perceived as setbacks, but as

indicators that the method is working; when a call to revisit a previous stage of the method emerges during sorting, the researcher must seize the opportunity in order to fully ground, condense, and saturate the theory. Memos generated during sorting generally relate a higher level of conceptual thought and reflect more discrimination among the subtleties of the emergent theory than those written earlier in the process (Glaser, 1978). The generation of new memos and the occasional return to the constant comparative phase of the method during sorting are essential, in the long run, to the theoretical completeness of the theory (Glaser, 1978).

Stage 6: Theoretical Outlining

Although it is isolated as the sixth stage of the GT methodology, theoretical outlining actually takes place during sorting. In practice, the researcher constructs the theoretical outline while he or she sorts and reintegrates the theory's conceptual components into a theoretical whole (Glaser, 1978; Stern, 1995). Sorting memos into a theoretical outline eventually allows the researcher "to visualize the total integration of his grounded ideas, hence where each fits, as all ideas eventually integrate" (Glaser, 1978, p. 118). Ultimately, theoretical outlining results in a clear picture of the emergent theory's underlying organizational structure.

Integrative fit. Because theoretical outlining entails a conceptual integration of the underlying patterns discovered during the collection and analysis of the substantive data, the "groundedness" of the GT method becomes particularly apparent at this stage in the study. Glaser (1998) matter-of-factly explained that "the world is integrated whether the researcher likes it or not. It is the grounded theorist's task to discover it" (p. 189). Thus, if the categories, properties, and memos that the researcher generated in the earlier

phases of the study have emerged unforced from participant data, then the sorting of these conceptual products should produce an outline that ultimately reflects the existing reality under study. In Glaser's (1978) words**,** "Ideas that are grounded will integrate without many problems, simply because reality is integrated" (p. 118). The ability of the emergent theoretical outline to accommodate all grounded categories and properties is known as *integrative fit* (Glaser, 1978). Through integrative fit, theoretical sorting and outlining serve a "tremendous corrective function" in the theory's development and organization (Glaser, 1978); these processes help the researcher determine the proper placement of each of the theory's conceptual components in the complex web of interrelationships that forms the theory's organizational structure (Glaser, 1998). In the end, careful sorting into a theoretical outline "leads to intense densification of the theory and saturation of lines of thought within that theory" (Glaser, 1978, p. 118). The researcher can depend upon an integrated theoretical outline that fits and is grounded in the study's data to be a reliable guide during in the final stage of the GT process: writing.

Stage 7: Writing

During the writing phase of a GT study, the researcher compiles a polished report to facilitate the public presentation of the study's theoretical product. Writing up and publishing one's GT is critically important because "the goal of grounded theory methodology, above all, is to offer the results to the public" (Glaser, 1978, p. 128). In preparing the theory for publication, the researcher must ensure that the "conceptual framework forms a systematic theory, that it is a reasonably accurate statement of matters studied, [and] that it is couched in a form possible for others to use in studying a similar area" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 224-225). In order to demonstrate the GT's credibility,

the write-up must clearly communicate both the conceptual content and organization of the theory itself, as well as the methodological procedure by which the researcher derived the theory from data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 228-229). The process of writing a GT is, in many ways, as specialized to the GT method as are other aspects of the methodology (Glaser, 1978).

Organization. The organization of a GT report is relatively straightforward. Early on, the researcher establishes the purpose of the write-up, which is to demonstrate how the core variable explains behavior in the substantive area (Glaser, 1978). To structure a report that fulfills this purpose, the researcher will need to consult the study's theoretical outline, which should have, through the sorting process, attained an advanced level of conceptual development and theoretical completeness (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Stern, 1995). The theoretical outline is an invaluable guide to writing up a GT because it shows exactly "how the theory works and why each idea was placed as it is" (Glaser, 1978, p. 117). The written report should parallel the theoretical outline in delineating each major component of the theory and specifying how it relates to other conceptual components. Accordingly, Glaser (1978) recommended an organizational approach that he refers to as "funneling down" in writing up the content of the theoretical outline. Initially, the "general, grounded, most relevant properties of the core variable are discussed, to give the fullest meaning of [the core variable's] general nature" (p. 131). The core properties presented in this opening discussion are then individually developed in separate sections or chapters. Olson (2006) explained that "funneling down brings emphasis back to the broad problem - the core variable - and focuses all attention on the main concern of the participants of the study" (p. 13). In the course of writing up each of the major properties

of the core category, the researcher maps out the key conceptual interrelationships that make up the theory. Although the majority of a GT report is focused on presenting and developing the properties of the core category or categories, the conclusion may open up to include "generalized properties applicable to other substantive areas and conceptually elaborated through non-research comparisons" (Glaser, 1978, p. 133). This final section is comparable to the discussion and implications sections in scholarly research reports.

Style. GT reports use conceptual writing punctuated by descriptive instances from the data for the illustration of theoretical concepts. According to Glaser (1978), "The dictum is to write conceptually, by making theoretical statements about the relationship between concepts, rather than writing descriptive statements about people" (p. 133). Relating concepts to concepts allows the writer to maintain a conceptual focus in writing, while trying to convey concepts in descriptive terms diminishes the theory's conceptual scope (Glaser, 1998). Although a GT cannot be adequately communicated in purely descriptive terms, utilizing descriptive language to illustrate or support a concept is an acceptable practice in GT and can be used to "lighten" the sometimes dense conceptual content of a GT report (Glaser, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Limitation and obligation. One of the hallmarks of GT is that it produces theories that are rooted in and reflective of reality, which is in constant flux (Glaser, 1992). Consequently, grounded theories are never truly complete, but may be modified infinitely simply resuming constant comparison with new data from the substantive area. When writing a GT, the researcher must concede that "the published word is not the final one, but only a pause in the never-ending process of generating theory" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 40). Writing up a GT necessarily "freezes the ongoing for a moment,"

but this logistical limitation does not relieve the researcher's obligation to report and share the write-up of the theory with colleagues and stakeholders in the substantive area (Glaser, 1978, 1992). Admittedly, a published version of a GT is a somewhat arbitrary representation of a living, changing theoretical framework; however, "what is arbitrary about writing and publishing a substantive theory is more than compensated for by the contribution of the grounded theory methodology by which the theory was generated" (Glaser, 1978, p. 141). Grounded theories are useful. They fit the reality of the area of interest, they work in helping stakeholders understand and resolve their main concerns, and they are relevant because they are grounded in data gathered from the substantive area. Whether the theory is presented as " a well-codified set of propositions or in a running theoretical discussion" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 31), a GT study must conclude with the composition and dissemination of a polished written report of the research's theoretical results. Once it is made available to the public, a GT can be applied by individuals in the substantive area, tested in verificational studies, and even expanded or modified in subsequent GT inquiries. Regardless of the theory's application, the researcher can remain confident that his or her GT theory is, by its inherent groundedness, imbued with the potential to serve as "the necessary theoretical foothold for optimal sustainable change" (Simmons, 2006, p. 485).

Validity and Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of a GT study's theoretical product is dependent on the methodology's effectiveness in generating theory that accounts for the conceptual patterns characterizing participant behavior in the area of interest (Glaser, 1978, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Therefore, a GT's credibility can be determined simply by

examining the theory's fit, workability, relevance, modifiability, and, to a lesser extent, its grab (Glaser, 1978, 1998). A quality GT study will produce a useful, authentic theory that "fits the real world, works in predictions and explanations, is relevant to the people concerned, and is readily modifiable" (Glaser, 1978, p. 142). The following sections discuss each of these criteria in detail.

Fit

Fit refers to how well the theory's conceptual components are grounded in the data from the substantive field (Glaser, 1979, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Simmons, 2010). In some ways, the concept of fit is very similar to the more familiar research term, validity (Glaser, 1998; Simmons, 2010). Creswell (2003) explained that when applied to qualitative research, the term validity is used to indicate the degree to which a study's findings are authentic from the perspectives of the researcher, the participant, or the consumers of the study's results (pp. 195-196). Similarly, the criteria of fit indicates the degree of authenticity reflected in a GT study's theoretical product; essentially, a theory that *fits* will accurately reflect the conceptual patterns inherent in the action scene (Glaser, 1998, p. 18). In order to achieve fit, the components of a theory must be systematically derived and sharpened through constant comparison of incidents in the data. The GT process of constant comparative analysis is designed to ground each category, forcing each one to earn its way into the theory through repeated incidents in the data. In this way, the categories are systematically derived to reflect or *fit* the patterns inherent in the action scene (Glaser, 1978).

Another component of achieving fit between the theory and the reality of the action scene is the nuanced and precise naming of the conceptual components of the

theory. A GT researcher always strives to achieve the "best possible fit between the pattern being named and the word or phrase selected to represent it" (Simmons, 2008a, p. 18). As data collection, analysis, memoing, and sorting advance, the names for theoretically-relevant categories are continually refined and re-fitted to precisely reflect the nature of the conceptual patterns they indicate (Glaser, 1998, 2009; Simmons, 2010). Simmons (2010) emphasized that "poor fit between the pattern and the concept will at least partially un-ground the theory" (p. 30). Fortunately, the GT process is designed to eliminate conceptual components that do not fit the reality of the substantive area, resulting in a well-fitting GT comprised only of concepts that are fully grounded in data from the substantive area (Glaser, 1992, 1998; Simmons, 2010; Vander Linden, 2005).

Workability

The workability of an emergent theory is a simple and authentic evaluation criterion for GT studies. A theory that works can be used by researchers and practitioners in the substantive area to effectively explain, interpret, and predict the major patterns and variations of behavior in the area (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For instance, the current study's theory of navigating the cycle of decline demonstrates its workability by explaining the important conceptual patterns underlying the lived experiences of former Georgia public school teachers. Because grounded theories really work when applied in the area of interest, GT is an especially apt choice for researchers seeking to support positive social change.

Relevance

Because GT is directly linked to and induced from the data collected from participants in the study area, relevance is an innate characteristic of GT (Glaser, 1992,

1998). Carefully induced theory can be trusted to have immediate relevance to people in the substantive area because it addresses their main concerns thorough the discovery and resolution of the core variable (Glaser, 1978, 1998, 2009). The GT processes of constant comparison, theoretical sampling, and saturation ensure that the categories and properties that emerge are highly relevant to the participants' main concerns. Glaser (1978) explained that "what ideas emerge are relevant because of their theoretical power. What ideas did not emerge, did not because of lacking theoretical relevance - they accounted for nothing in the data" (p. 10). Like fit, the relevance of a GT is cultivated throughout the GT process and can be used as a reliable indicator of the viability of the methodology as a means of producing credible, useful theoretical products.

Modifiability

One of the most important indicators of trustworthiness in GT is the modifiability of the GT (Glaser, 1992). Simmons (1997) explained that "grounded theories are about understanding and discovering variation, not making casual or absolute yes or no statements about a narrow subject" (as cited in Vander Linden, 2005, p. 9). Because reality is in constant flux, claiming that a GT study's outcomes represent any sort of conclusive findings is misguided; the theoretical product of a GT study is simply a set of hypotheses, suggestions, or probabilities that are grounded in and induced from substantive data (Glaser, 1992). As a criterion for determining credibility, modifiability simply means that a GT can be adapted to reflect significant and ongoing changes in the social scene (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 2009; 2010; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Olson, 2008; Stillman, 2006). A study with results that are conclusively "written in stone" does not

meet the criteria for modifiability because it fails to give priority to new data (Glaser, 1978, 1992).

Although grounded theories are subject to modification, the process for modifying theory is no less rigorous than the process for generating it. Modifications to theory can only be made by integrating new data through constant comparative analysis (Glaser, 1998; Olson, 2008). Resuming constant comparative analysis of data from the substantive area can guide the researcher in discovering new categories, properties, and indicators that have become relevant in a changing action scene (Glaser, 1978, 1998). The modification of theory through constant comparison and integration ultimately increases the credibility and trustworthiness of the theory; as new data are integrated into its conceptual framework, the theory becomes increasingly dense and can account more fully for the range of variation and circumstances in the substantive area (Glaser, 1978, 1992). In this way, modifiability allows the researcher to "keep up with and manage the situational realities that he wishes to improve" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 242). Since the objective of GT is to generate a useful explanatory theory, modifiability is critical. It is the only way for the theory to maintain relevance and tractability over a changing social scene (Glaser, 1978).

Grab

Grab is a fifth criterion that is used sometimes to informally assess the validity of GT. Olson (2006) eloquently captured the essence of this criterion: "A theory's grab captures one's attention and sparks interest and deeper understanding. Grab is what pulls the reader in, evoking ideas for application and images in the reader's own action scene" (p. 20). If a GT can be trusted as an accurate conceptualization of reality, it will have the

power to "grab" the attention of people from the substantive area by articulating familiar patterns present in their real lived experiences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 239-240).

GT: A Self-Correcting Methodology

A rigorous, systematic GT study is very likely to meet the criteria of fit, workability, relevance, modifiability, and grab (Glaser, 1992). By carefully adhering to the GT methodology and allowing it to work as designed, I am confident that these criteria attest to the trustworthiness and credibility of the current study's final theory. Many of the required processes and core tenets of the GT methodology have procedural characteristics that continuously verify and refine the emerging theoretical product of a GT study. The GT process itself is designed to self-correct for threats to credibility and trustworthiness (Glaser, 1992).

The constant comparison of incidents in the data is one example of the self-correcting processes of GT. Constant comparative analysis results in "a proportioned view of the evidence, since, during comparison, biases of particular people and methods tend to reconcile themselves as the analyst discovers the underlying causes of variation" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 68). In constant comparative analysis, no single bias, source, or incident from the data can justify a theoretical concept on its own, but is "merely an illustration of what might conceivably be a concept that could fit and work" (Glaser, 1978, p. 65, 2009). The categories and properties that merit being integrated into the theory are meticulously and rigorously proposed, verified, explored, and saturated based on the comparison of *many* incidents from an abundance of substantive data (Glaser, 1998). Glaser (2009) explained that "any emergent aberrant variable distorting the data is just a bias to be compared and conceptualized into the theory" (p. 24). The constant

comparative process is designed to adjust and evaluate emergent codes for fit, workability, and relevance, so that the resulting conceptualization of the data will have been continuously refined from the outset of constant comparative analysis (Glaser, 1998). As repeated incidents of a pattern emerge from the data, the pattern is named, becomes a category, and continues to be further refined, corrected, and verified (Glaser, 1998). By the conclusion of the study, the important conceptual patterns underlying the substantive area will have been systematically emerged and saturated (Glaser, 1978), while anomalous instances of bias, forcing, distortion, and preconception are systematically weeded out (Breckenridge & Jones, 2009; Glaser, 1992, 1998).

The later stages of GT have self-correcting features, as well. Memos provide the researcher with a means of expressing "non-grounded ideas occurring from personal biases, personal experiences of an idiosyncratic nature, logical conjectures or deductions, received preconceptions and so forth," so that these ideas can be objectively addressed and prevented from interfering with the emergence of the theory (Glaser, 1998, p. 182.) During sorting, memos that are un-grounded are difficult to integrate into the emergent outline, because they have no foothold in the data and therefore, no grounded relevance to the theory. A theoretical outline can accommodate all grounded concepts because they emerged from an integrated reality; concepts generated from memoing and constant comparison will fit, work, and be relevant to the theory because they are grounded in the substantive data (Glaser, 1978, 1992).

In many ways, the assessment criteria for GT serve to measure the researcher's skill in conducting a GT study, rather than the quality of the methodology itself. A GT study, when conducted systematically using the prescribed processes of the methodology,

is a rigorous and effective means of producing a theory exhibits fit, work, relevance, modifiability, and grab. Such a theory "renders quite well the reality of social interaction and its structural context" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 32), which is, after all, the desired outcome of GT.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to establish that classical GT "is not based on impressionism, nor conjecture, but on a rigorous methodology that empowers" (Glaser, 1998, p. 238). When a theory demonstrates fit, workability, relevance, modifiability, and grab in practice, it will be both meaningful and useful to people in the substantive area (Glaser, 1998). For this reason, GT researchers are obligated to share their grounded theories with stakeholders in the substantive area, which will allow the methodology to continue to "legitimize itself as it is doing in the health, education, and business professions, where it is crucial to have relevant research that works" (Glaser, 1998, p. 16). For the current study, GT proved to be a powerful methodology that provided relevant conceptual insight into the causes, nature, and potential import of the experiences of Georgia's former teachers in the arena of public education. Section 4 presents the current study's GT, the theory of navigating the cycle of decline, in detail.

Section 4: Navigating the Cycle of Decline

This section is divided into two parts. The first subsection begins by explaining how the classic GT methodology was used to develop the GT of navigating the cycle of decline. The second part provides a detailed explanation of the theory, beginning with an overview of the theory and a brief discussion of the conditions that perpetuate the cycle of decline: *experiencing disequilibrium* and *navigating*. This overview is followed by an explication of each of the four stages of the cycle of decline: *embarking*, *resolving*, *weathering*, and *opting out*. Collectively, these stages trace the underlying pattern of declining motivation, well-being, and fulfillment that ultimately leads many teachers to leave public education.

The Grounded Theory Process

While conducting this study, I adhered as closely as possible to the established procedures of the GT methodology to develop the theory of navigating the cycle of decline. First, I took steps to avoid preconceptions by foregoing an initial review of the literature related to the substantive area of interest: the experiences of former Georgia public school teachers (Glaser, 1978, 1998, 2009; Scott, 2009). Because of my personal experiences as a former public school teacher, I also opted to capture my own data through a self-interview, a practice which allowed me to acknowledge, record, and analyze my own experiences objectively and, more importantly, to put them aside as a means of preserving my theoretical sensitivity as I collected and analyzed interview data from other participants (Glaser, 1978, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The self-interview

is a common tool among grounded theorists for this purpose (Burgess, 2011; Hayes-Bautista, 1996; Maddy, 2007; Raffanti, 2005).

After receiving IRB approval (01-07-14-0075711), I began recruiting participants using snowball sampling, which allowed me to rely upon social networking connections and word-of-mouth to locate former teachers who fit the participation criteria for the study (Gonzalez et al., 2008; Patton, 2003). In combination with snowball sampling techniques, social networking as a means of locating and recruiting former teachers provided a groundbreaking opportunity for exploring this formerly elusive population's insider knowledge and experience. Over the course of 3 months, I conducted interviews with 12 former Georgia teachers who had voluntarily elected to leave their public school positions before becoming eligible for retirement. Interviews ranged from 30–90 minutes; most averaged an hour. A digital audio recording was made of each interview for transcription purposes. All interviews were initiated with an open-ended prompt, known in GT as a grand tour question, which gave the participant a general area of interest to discuss (Glaser, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Olson, 2006; Simmons, 2008a). Participants controlled the direction and content of the interviews, as is standard protocol in the GT methodology, since GT research is primarily focused on discovering the conceptual patterns that underpin participants' main concerns and lived experiences (Glaser, 1978, 1998, 2009; Olson, 2006; Simmons, 2008b).

I began the data collection process by setting up my first interviews with former Georgia public school teachers. As is required by the process of constant comparison used in GT analysis, each interview was transcribed and coded before the next interview. This allowed me to select participants who would likely provide the most relevant data to

inform the emergent theory (Glaser, 1978, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The process of allowing ongoing data analysis to direct participant sampling is known as *theoretical sampling* in GT; it is the driving purpose of the joint collection and analysis of data upon which GT relies (Glaser, 1978).

In data analysis, I first focused on open coding, which is a line-by-line coding of all incidents in the interview data (Glaser, 1978, 2011; Raffanti, 2005). Through constant comparative analysis, I compared coded incidents to new incidents from incoming interview data; after a few interviews, several key categories and properties began to emerge. Between the fifth and sixth interviews, I discovered the study's core category of navigating the cycle of decline and, accordingly, switched from open to selective coding, which is the process of coding only those incidents that are relevant to the emergent core category (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998). At this point in the process, I also began to write memos about various codes and their properties that were emerging and developing from the data. Using theoretical sampling, participants for later interviews were selected based on their potential for providing information about unsaturated or underdeveloped categories and properties in the emergent theory. Constant comparative analysis of data from the eleventh interview yielded very little new information that had not already emerged in previous analysis, suggesting that the theory's main categories were nearing saturation. Saturation occurs when new data cease to provide incidents that indicate novel categories or properties related to the core category (Glaser, 1978, 1998, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Even so, I completed two additional interviews to ensure theoretical saturation. Although the final interviews provided ample indicators of existing categories

and properties, they failed to yield any indicators of new conceptual territory related to the core category of navigating the cycle of decline.

As the data collection stage of the study came to a close, I continually wrote, combined, and matured memos of increasing depth and theoretical abstractness. From these memos, I developed a set of higher-level theoretical codes that delineated relationships between categories and properties I had derived from the data (Glaser, 1992, 1978, 1998, 2009; Hernandez, 2009; Simmons, 2008b). Over the course of the next three months, I wrote and sorted memos relating to the relationships of categories within the theory, while constantly organizing and re-organizing those memos and theoretical codes into a provisional outline that took on numerous configurations as I explored the complex interrelatedness of the components of the theory. Throughout the processes of sorting and outlining, I made a special effort to refine the names of the theory's key categories and properties to ensure that they are as perfectly fitted as possible to the concepts they are intended to represent (Glaser, 1998, 2009; Simmons, 2010). During this period, I followed Glaser's (1978, 1998) advice and began to review the literature as it was relevant to the emerging theory. Like the interview data itself, data collected through the review of existing research studies were incorporated into the theory through constant comparison, providing support and depth for the theory (Glaser, 1998).

Finally, I began to write up the theoretical product of my analysis. Careful application of the GT methodology equipped me with a solid theoretical outline to guide the process of writing up the theory (Simmons, 2008b). Following recommended procedures for conceptual writing, I presented the theory of navigating the cycle of decline using conceptual language with examples from participant data and the literature

for support and illustration (Glaser, 1998). As a result, I have carefully crafted what I hope will be received as a clear and comprehensive explanation of the theory of navigating the cycle of decline.

Because of GT's focus on generating theory, so-called "discrepant cases" in the data are handled through constant comparative analysis. In order for an incident, or a specific occurrence, of a behavior to merit being incorporated into an emerging GT, it must recur multiple times in the data (Breckenridge & Jones, 2009; Glaser, 1978, 2009). Multiple incidents indicating a concept suggest that a specific behavior is not an isolated anomaly, but that it is instead a recurring conceptual pattern in the data. Through constant comparative analysis, discrepant or isolated incidents that occur only once or twice in the data are passed over in favor of more pervasive and relevant patterns of behavior that account for the core of participants' behaviors and concerns. Further, the concept of discrepant cases is very nearly irrelevant in GT because conceptual theories are naturally inclusive, being grounded in and therefore able to accommodate a wide array of individual cases that may appear to be very different in specific, descriptive terms.

I used several strategies to ensure the quality of the study's data and final theory. In order to assure the accuracy of the data and its analysis, I used member checking and peer review (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2009). All participants were provided with copies of their interview transcripts and encouraged to change, qualify, or retract any data that they felt did not accurately capture their experiences or reflect their intended meaning. During the course of the study, I provided several participants, along with other former and current public school teachers and education stakeholders, with updates on emerging components of the theory for discussion. These member checks and peer review sessions

helped to validate the theory's emergence and served to verify that constant comparative analysis was being used properly to ground the theory in the data. The conceptual components of the study's final theory were also triangulated through the integration of evidence from the literature review. Since the literature review is delayed until after the theory has emerged from participant data in the GT methodology (Glaser 1978, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), findings in the literature actually serve as an additional source of data to be incorporated into the theory through constant comparative analysis. The review of the literature revealed ample support for the concepts of disequilibrium and the cycle of decline among public school teachers and even served to link these concepts to the pervasive problem of teacher attrition.

Navigating the Cycle of Decline

High rates of teacher attrition are having a negative impact on public schools in Georgia and across the nation (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll et al., 2012; Scafidi et al., 2010). In order to gain clearer insight into the behaviors and circumstances that may be related to teacher attrition, the current study was designed to explore the experiences of former teachers during their employment in Georgia public schools. The inductive GT methodology accommodated the need to explore this area of interest without posing specific research questions or objectives; this freedom from establishing a preconceived direction for the research permitted participants' most central concerns about their work in the public school system to emerge in the data. The remainder of this chapter presents the findings of this study, which take the form of a grounded, conceptual theory: the theory of navigating the cycle of decline. The theory of navigating the cycle of decline accounts for the behaviors and circumstances that culminate in many teachers' decisions

to terminate their employment in Georgia's public schools. For teachers who end up leaving the public school context, navigating the cycle of decline may be best be conceptualized as a series of stages in which motivation, well-being, and fulfillment are continuously eroded over time, which gradually diminishes teachers' functionality and success in the public school context. The four stages of the cycle of decline are *embarking*, *resolving*, *weathering*, and *opting out*.

As teachers embark upon their careers, they are likely to be autonomously motivated and have high expectations for authentic work in a supportive context. Consequently, new and inexperienced employees are often willing to invest considerable time and energy in the work context, anticipating meaningful experiences and fulfillment in return. However, concerns about authenticity and support arise as individuals encounter and orient themselves to new experiences that conflict with their initial expectations for the work context. These concerns can give rise to disequilibrium, a sense of tension, stress, or imbalance indicated by diminished functionality in terms of motivation, well-being, and fulfillment. In an attempt to relieve disequilibrium and regain balance, teachers often leave the embarking stage behind to engage in resolving behaviors such as aligning, nesting, and sheltering. However, when these behaviors fail to resolve disequilibrium, functionality in the work context is often diminished to an even greater extent. In this compromised state, individuals may shift away from trying to resolve disequilibrium and focus more on weathering disequilibrium through complying. Weathering through compliance represents a less autonomously motivated and less fulfilling approach than resolving, since complying is an externally-regulated behavior fueled by the desire to retain the benefits of employment and avoid negative

consequences. When compliance also proves unsatisfactory for addressing concerns that give rise to disequilibrium, individuals' motivation, well-being, and fulfillment are further compromised and their expectations for authenticity and support in the work context tend to be low. At this point, individuals may shift from complying to weathering disequilibrium by mentally and emotionally disengaging from the work context. Disengaging is an even more defensive and less fulfilling behavior than compliance, but for individuals who are experiencing unresolved disequilibrium, it may represent a means of self-protection in a context that fails to offer adequate authenticity and support. When expectations for authenticity and support are minimal and motivation, well-being, and fulfillment are severely diminished, many individuals decide to opt out of the work context entirely to avoid further decline or to seek a more supportive and fulfilling context for employment.

All participants experienced this general trend of decline in their motivation, well-being, and fulfillment that resulted in their engagement in increasingly less autonomous, less healthy, and less fulfilling navigating behaviors over time. This progression moved each of the study's participants through the embarking, resolving, and weathering stages of the cycle of decline and terminated in their decisions to opt out of the public school context altogether. Although a particular individual's progression through the cycle of decline may vary somewhat from the order in which the stages are presented herein, navigating the cycle of decline, the core variable of the study's theory, is at the heart of former teachers' experiences in the public school context.

Conditions for Decline

The study data revealed that many former teachers were fundamentally concerned with navigating the cycle of decline in their experiences in Georgia's public schools. The cycle of decline is perpetuated by two conditions. First, teachers who are progressing through the cycle of decline are often experiencing unresolved disequilibrium, which is indicated by diminished functionality in terms of motivation, well-being, and fulfillment. Second, teachers who are immersed in decline are engaged in navigating behaviors that determine their expectations for the work context.

Experiencing disequilibrium. Disequilibrium is a state of imbalance and tension indicated by diminished functionality in terms of motivation, well-being, and fulfillment. Disequilibrium occurs when individuals encounter experiences in the work context that give rise to concerns about authenticity and support. According to Kernis (2003), authenticity can be defined in psychological terms as "the unobstructed operation of one's true, or core, self in one's daily enterprise" (p. 13). In light of this definition, any context-related task, expectation, or limitation that obstructs the "operation of one's true self" can become a contributor to perceived inauthenticity in the work context. When the expectations and priorities of the work context are misaligned with employees' personal altruistic values, perceptions of inauthenticity emerge, which, in turn, give rise to disequilibrium (Kanchana, 2013). Another underlying condition of disequilibrium that arises from the work context is a lack of support for individual autonomy, competence, and relatedness. According to Ryan and Deci (2000b), these three psychological needs are the "essential nutrients" for motivation, well-being, and fulfillment (p. 75). Work

contexts that undermine or fail to provide support for autonomy, competence, and relatedness tend to promote disequilibrium.

When teachers' concerns about authenticity and support are satisfactorily addressed, disequilibrium is resolved and functional equilibrium can be restored. However, when individuals' concerns persist, disequilibrium persists, as well. Unfortunately, working in a state of unresolved disequilibrium can have a degenerative effect on individuals' motivation, well-being, and fulfillment over time. As individuals grow less motivated, less healthy, and less fulfilled, they also become less capable of sustaining the basic level of functionality required for their jobs. Decreased functionality means that teachers' needs for support are increased and their ability to respond to the demands of teaching in the public school context is undermined. Essentially, working in unresolved disequilibrium can render teachers less and less capable of recovering their functionality without additional support. The diminished functionality that attends unresolved disequilibrium is a key factor fueling teachers' progression through the cycle of decline.

Navigating. In navigating, previous experiences help to establish new understandings and expectations that drive behavior in the work context. Navigating begins when individuals encounter experiences in the workplace that cause disequilibrium, tension, and confusion. These experiences often tend to conflict with individuals' values or initial expectations for the workplace. Individuals attempt to navigate these experiences through orienting, in which they reframe their understanding of the workplace, take stock of their current levels of functionality, and finally make projections that shape their future expectations for the work context. Finally, changing

course involves moving from one stage of the cycle of decline to another in search of potentially effective strategies for resolving, weathering, or opting out of disequilibrium. Each stage in the cycle of decline is defined by its overarching objective and behavioral strategies for managing disequilibrium. The particular stage a teacher enters is influenced by his or her expectations for authenticity and levels of motivation in the work context, while the specific behaviors associated with each stage are determined based on expectations for support and current levels of well-being.

The role of expected authenticity and motivation in navigating. Teachers' expectations for authenticity determine which stage of the cycle of decline they enter because expectations for authenticity relate to teachers' motivation. When individuals perceive the work they are doing in a given context to be in alignment with their personal values, they tend to view the work as "authentic" and meaningful (Dahlgaard-Park, 2012). Consequently, the locus of control for such work is most likely internal or voluntary, as opposed to external or mandated, since the purpose and importance of the work are already an accepted part of the individual's value framework. Thus, individuals are likely to be intrinsically or highly autonomously motivated to do authentic work. In contrast, work that is perceived to be mandated, imposed, or in any way inauthentic is likely to be approached with less autonomous forms of motivation or even amotivation (Benita et al., 2014; Deci & Ryan, 2008b; Ryan & Deci, 2000a). As can be seen in Table 1, expectations for authenticity are associated with the level of motivation individuals experience in a particular stage of the cycle of decline. Together, these factors determine which stage in the cycle of decline teachers experience next.

Table 1

The Interrelatedness of Expected Authenticity, Level of Motivation, and Associated Stages in the Cycle of Decline

Expectations for Authenticity	Level of Motivation (SDT)	Associated Stage in the Cycle of Decline
High	Autonomous • Intrinsic regulation • Integrated regulation • Identified regulation	Resolving
Moderate/Low	Non-autonomous • Introjected regulation • External regulation	Weathering
Low/None	Amotivation • Non-regulation	Opting Out

The role of expected support and well-being in navigating. Expectations for support determine specific behaviors for managing disequilibrium within each stage of the cycle of decline. Expectations for support encompass two dimensions. First, individuals must consider their own needs for support based on their objectives and their level of functionality in the work context. The more diminished an individual's functionality, specifically in terms of well-being, the more support the individual will need to recover from disequilibrium. Second, individuals must consider, based on past experiences, the amount of support they are likely to receive in the future in the work context. When estimated needs for support are balanced with projected availability of support, individuals are likely to perceive their work as sustainable and adopt more ambitious behaviors that require higher levels of expenditure. However, if individuals project that their needs for support outweigh the level of support they are likely to receive

in the work context, they may be inclined to embrace more conservative behaviors for navigating disequilibrium. Table 2 illustrates how expectations for support are associated with varying levels of functionality in terms of well-being, which together help to determine navigating behaviors within the various stages of the cycle of decline.

Table 2

The Interrelatedness of Expected Support, Level of Functionality, and Associated Behaviors

Expectations for Support	**Level of Functionality**	**Associated Behaviors**
High	Functional/Adequate	• Aligning (Resolving) • Complying (Weathering)
Moderate/Low	Somewhat Functional/ Somewhat Diminished	• Nesting (Resolving) • Complying (Weathering) • Re-envisioning (Opting Out)
Low/None	Somewhat Dysfunctional/ Severely Diminished	• Sheltering (Resolving) • Disengaging (Weathering) • Escaping (Opting Out)

Together, expectations for authenticity and support in the work context determine which stage of the cycle of decline teachers are likely to enter next and which specific behaviors for navigating teachers are likely to adopt within a particular stage of the cycle of decline (see Table 3).

Table 3

The Role of Expectations for Authenticity and Support in Determining Stages of the Cycle of Decline and Associated Behaviors

Expectations for support	Expectations for authenticity		
	High (*Resolving*)	Moderate/Low (*Weathering*)	Low/None (*Opting Out*)
High	Aligning	Complying	Re-envisioning
Moderate	Nesting		
Low	Sheltering	Disengaging	Escaping

Declining functionality and dwindling expectations for authenticity and support in the work context are the conditions that drive the cycle of decline, which can eventually lead teachers to opt out of their jobs in public education. The following sections demonstrate how experiencing disequilibrium and navigating expectations for the public school context can cause teachers to spiral progressively downward through the stages of the cycle of decline.

Embarking

The first stage in the cycle of decline is embarking (Olson, 2006). Not surprisingly, the embarking stage occurs most often at the outset of teachers' employment, when teachers lack direct experience in the public school context. Participant 6 noted this lack of experience, stating, "I was fresh out of college and had absolutely no idea what I was doing." Another commented on her lack of teacher training in preparation to embark on her public school journey: "My first day in the classroom

was literally my first day in the classroom. And through that year, it was just trial by fire" (P8). Although they lack experience, teachers in the embarking stage often have the advantage of being fresh and hopeful, an outlook that can support functionality and bolster positive expectations under the right conditions. During the embarking stage, as the cycle of decline begins to take hold, new teachers have their first direct experiences in the public school context and, thereby, discover concerns about authenticity and support that give rise to disequilibrium and affect expectations for their work.

Initial expectations. In the embarking stage, teachers' expectations for authenticity and support are based, not upon actual experiences in the work context, but upon other factors. In the absence of direct experience by which to set expectations for the work context, individuals rely on their personal values and previous experiences as a basis for their expectations (Coulter & Lester, 2011). New and inexperienced public school teachers tend to base their early expectations for teaching on their student-centered values for teaching and upon their previous positive experiences in education. These early expectations are often somewhat "rose-colored" or idealized (Buchanan, 2012; Picower, 2011), since teachers in the embarking stage are largely unaware of potential concerns about authenticity and support that might give rise to disequilibrium.

Individuals in the embarking stage tend to have high expectations for authenticity in the work context because they often base their initial expectations for the work context on their personal values, which are largely shaped through positive early experiences in education (Curtis, 2012). Participant 2 explained that her positive experiences with educators in the past influenced her to become a teacher herself. She stated,

> I had teachers who cared about me... It was a big deal. I had teachers who knew the struggles I was having – multiple different kinds of struggles – and they reached out to me and found ways for me to access what I needed.

Another participant envisioned the impact she expected to make in the public school context in light of her own past experiences with influential teachers. She said, “[They] were so good to me and so encouraging and just... loving. I mean, they loved us. Even when we totally didn’t deserve it and made their faces turn red... I wanted to be that for somebody” (P6). Because they model their expectations for teaching on their own best experiences as students, new teachers tend to anticipate authenticity and fulfillment as the inevitable result of their work with students in the public school context. When reflecting upon her reasons for becoming a teacher, Participant 10 said, “I just knew that I liked it. That it seemed fun, that it seemed intriguing, but just being able to help people, being able to serve others, um, that’s really what drew me to education.” At the outset of the embarking stage, authenticity is often taken for granted, since new teachers generally anticipate that their work will allow them to actualize their student-centered values for teaching in the public school context by demonstrating respect and care for students, providing relevant and meaningful learning opportunities, and advocating for students whose needs are not being met. New teachers envision themselves having a positive influence on students’ lives by inspiring a passion for learning and providing the support, care, and respect that students need.

As in all stages of the cycle of decline, teachers’ expectations for authenticity in embarking are indicative of their level of motivation for work in the public school context. Behaviors in the embarking stage are often intrinsically motivated because

teachers expect to be engaged in work that is inherently authentic and meaningful. Participants described their anticipated fulfillment in the public school context not in terms of extrinsic payoff such as monetary compensation and benefits, but in terms of the intrinsic enjoyment and gratification they expected to derive from "making a difference" in students' lives and inspiring them to find success. Participant 12 reflected this intrinsic motivation as she explained her reasons for becoming a middle school science teacher:

> I was very motivated to try to get to girls to connect with them at the middle school level when they start saying that math and science are for boys or that they're dumb, or that they can't do this. Because I felt like by high school, for a lot of them, it's so engrained by then, so this is like our last chance to catch them and show them that they can do it and empower them. So they were a big focus for me.

Put simply, new teachers are often highly autonomously motivated because they expect that the work they have been hired to do will authentically align with and support their student-centered values for teaching and reflect their own best experiences in education. As a result, teachers are often intrinsically or autonomously motivated for their work in education at the outset of their public school careers.

Because individuals who are new to the work context have no experiences upon which to base their expectations for support, they may have few expectations or concerns about support at all at the beginning of the embarking stage. Because their sense of well-being is usually intact at the outset of their careers, many new employees neglect to give much thought to their own needs for support until after they encounter experiences in the work context in which these needs are not met. Further, new employees have no reason to

expect that the work context might not furnish ample support for their work, because they assume that their desire to do authentic work in a sustainable manner is shared by their employing organization. Participant 7 said,

> I thought that I was going to be able to go into the classroom and build all these great relationships and great rapport with my students... just really be able to see a visible difference in children, being obviously more than growth in academics – just as people and as citizens.

Teachers in the embarking stage are often more concerned with the support they expect to provide to their students than with the support they themselves will need to operate in the public school context. During embarking, high expectations for providing inspirational levels of care and support to students are foremost; new teachers' concerns about the support they themselves will require in the work context are scarcely on the radar.

Investing. Investing is an intrinsically motivated embarking behavior that reflects individuals' initial hopefulness and enthusiasm based on positive expectations for authenticity and support. Because they have no direct experiences to suggest otherwise, individuals may initially view the work context as a supportive environment that will allow them to invest time and energy in meaningful work that is aligned with their core values. Accordingly, individuals are likely to engage in the free expenditure of time and energy as an investment in the work context. When new public school teachers embark on their careers, they generally envision themselves doing work that is meaningful and fulfilling in a teaching context that will support the personal investment they expect to make in teaching. One of Buchanan's (2012) teacher participants said she thought she was "going into a life-long vocation that would be rewarding, exciting, challenging, and

always changing" (p. 210). Since new teachers initially envision the public school context as a favorable setting in which to actualize their student-centered values through respectful, relevant, and supportive teaching, they often anticipate fulfillment and plan on working in the teaching context for the "long haul" (Raffanti, 2005, p. 70).

The defining property of investing as an embarking behavior is the free expenditure of time and energy on efforts that are perceived to be authentic and worthwhile. Thus, if time and energy are the capital for intrinsic investing, then fulfillment is the anticipated payoff. In order to confidently invest time and energy without restriction, individuals must believe that the intrinsic value of the investment justifies long hours and hard work. Participant 1 related her investment behaviors from her early public school career, saying, "I would get there at seven in the morning. I wouldn't leave until five, six, seven o'clock at night. Of course I was single. I was twenty years old, with all these 'gonna change the world' ideas." This participant's belief that her extra time and effort were going to help her "change the world" is reflective of the idealized expectations of new teachers who are unfamiliar with the public school context. Under these assumptions, new teachers often invest their time and energy in the public school context because they believe that their investment will pay off in terms of fulfillment and student success. Participant 9 illustrated this inherent expectation for fulfillment when he explained that even though teaching is a difficult job, "it really is worth it, because of the... children that you've positively impacted." Because they see inherent value in their work, teachers who are investing often go above and beyond their assigned teaching duties in order to put out roots and establish themselves and their student-centered values in the public schools in which they are employed. Participant 2

related her investment in the public school where she taught ESOL: "I was working nonstop to try to create scaffolded study guides for all the content areas, all the grade levels, in the middle school." Although this project was not part of her official job responsibilities, this former teacher knew that the student-centered study guides she invested time and energy in creating would make her future work with students more successful and more fulfilling. The promise of fulfillment made this difficult and taxing work appear to be a sound investment in the public school context.

Despite the largely-unregulated expenditure of resources that may occur during investing, new teachers generally have few concerns about the sustainability of their actions. They have no reason to anticipate that they will not have the support they will need to find fulfillment by actualizing their values in the public school context. Unfortunately, the embarking behavior of investing is often "based on a fictitious ideal rather than an accurate portrayal of the qualities and characteristics needed to navigate the experience" (Vander Linden, 2005, p. 62). For this reason, teachers in the embarking stage soon tend to encounter circumstances in the public school context that have the potential to diminish or prevent them from making the meaningful impact they anticipated they would have on their students' lives. For participants, the hopeful expectations that characterize the beginning of the embarking stage were largely left behind as new experiences in the public school context began to raise concerns about the authenticity and sustainability of their investments.

Encountering. Navigating begins in the embarking stage when individuals encounter disequilibrium through experiences in the work context. In many ways, unrealistic expectations for the work context set individuals up for a fall when their first

encountering experiences occur. Vander Linden (2005) explained that with many new experiences, “the concept or idea that we have of how something may be...is really changed or challenged by the experience of doing it, of going through it” (p. 68). New and inexperienced teachers often base their expectations for teaching upon their own positive, authentic experiences with education and fail to take into account potential deterrents and obstacles that may impede their efforts in the public school context (Curtis, 2012). Consequently, new teachers are likely to encounter experiences that give rise to disequilibrium as they begin to teach in the public school context.

Many participants specifically referred to their first year as a difficult time as the result of unanticipated encounters with disequilibrium in the workplace. Participant 10 reflected on the disappointment and frustration that unfulfilled expectations can bring for new teachers:

> That first year... it’s always hard because you always go in with, I guess, in a sense, rose-colored glasses. Every teacher does it. You’re going to make a difference, you’re going to reach out and touch these kids and make a difference in their lives, and...we don’t see it. And that’s hard that first year.

Participant 10 referred to her early experiences in the public school context as a process of coming “back to reality” from the idealized expectations she had harbored upon entering teaching. Clearly, teachers’ investments during the embarking stage are not always as fulfilling or as meaningful as initially anticipated. Participant 7 even confessed to reconsidering her career path at this early stage:

> I looked up many times what to do with an education degree besides teaching. Yeah, there weren’t many cheerful days, my first year teaching. I had a very hard

> class, academic and behavior-wise, um, so yes, my first year, absolutely, was like, okay, what else can I do with a teaching degree?

In the embarking stage, encountering experiences in the work context that do not align with initial expectations interrupts investing and initiates attempts to navigate these unexpected currents of disequilibrium. In all stages of the cycle of decline, experiences that give rise to disequilibrium and initiate navigating can be divided into two categories. First, *devaluing experiences* reveal aspects of the work context that devalue teachers' commitment to working authentically in ways that uphold and align with their core values. Devaluing experiences often occur when teachers encounter circumstances conflict with their student-centered values or expectations for teaching. Second, *undermining experiences* cause teachers to feel unsupported in the work context. Undermining experiences often occur when individuals encounter circumstances in the work context that undermine or fail to support their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness or when overwhelming demands threaten the sustainability of their work.

Devaluing experiences. In embarking, individuals often encounter experiences that reveal misalignment between their personal values and the operational priorities of the work context through devaluing experiences, which give rise to concerns about authenticity and decrease individuals' functionality in the work context. Swanson and Huff (2010) explained that many new public school teachers "experience a professional jolt. Such shocks to the system are centered on a conflict between new teacher beliefs and values and the reality of teaching" (p. 19). In the embarking stage, devaluing experiences often make a considerable impression on newer, less-experienced teachers who expect to do authentic, meaningful work with students. Experiences that conflict with, trivialize, or

disregard teachers' student-centered values in education may be considered devaluing experiences.

Early devaluing experiences in the public school context often relate to aspects of the organization and management of public schools that many new teachers perceive to be fundamentally at odds with their initial expectations for a shared common goal of improving students' lives. Participant 3 related an experience during her first year in the public school system in which her focus on providing authentic and relevant learning opportunities for students was devalued:

> There was a college prep track for people who were going to go to college and there was a vocational track for people who were training for a vocation.... It was immediately clear to me that the expectations for the vocational classes in academic core classes were *far below* those of college prep classes.... It was almost as if the mentality was whatever you do with these students is okay as long as you stay under the radar and they don't cause any trouble. It felt like babysitting.

For new teachers with high expectations for having a positive impact on students' lives, it is not surprising that experiences like these give rise to concerns about authenticity in the public school context.

Another common devaluing experience in embarking involves public school systems' compliance with top-down mandates and reform policies that appear to place priority upon quantifying and collecting student data over serving the students themselves. Participant 10 said,

> We have standards we have to meet and, as educators, we can completely understand that. But at the same time, not as much emphasis is put on [students'] social and emotional well-being..., the other things that are very important to a child's development, because we tend to lose that somewhere in the mix.

Another participant's concerns about the authenticity of her work were aroused regarding her new school system's oversight in failing to provide her students with even the most basic classroom necessities:

> So they took me down the hall and showed me to my little closet, where my children had to stay, all day. And we didn't even have desks. We had those plastic, fold-down tables. You can't write on those. The pencil goes right through, because it's textured on top. That's the only thing we had to write on all year. (P4)

Devaluing experiences such as these can lead teachers to perceive that public school contexts in which they are employed do not value their authentic commitment to students, which often results in diminished motivation and fulfillment.

Many teachers' realizations about the public school context's priorities occur when their time and energy are diverted from authentic student-centered efforts to accommodate other school or system concerns. During the embarking stage, many teachers have misconceptions about how they will be able to allocate their time and energy, assuming that their resources will be invested in authentic, fulfilling work with students. When teachers discover that they are expected to expend their time and energy on efforts that are irrelevant to or in conflict with their student-centered values, concerns about authenticity often arise. Participant 10 described how the emphasis that her school

placed on standardized testing and curriculum forced her to divert time and energy away from her students:

> With the data and with the paper work, you just became spread so thin. You didn't have the mental energy to address educating the whole child like you wanted to. You could feel the pressure. You know, the scores have to be good. And, of course, where you're feeling the pressure is where you're gonna have to put more of your mental energy and your time and your focus.

In cases such as these, teachers receive the unspoken but clear message that providing meaningful learning experiences and support for students should take a back seat to overarching systemic concerns about standardization and accountability. For this reason, devaluing experiences can often leave new teachers feeling as if their time and energy are wasted on inauthentic pursuits in a context that does not embrace the same student-centered values that drive their work as educators.

Undermining experiences. In embarking, many individuals encounter undermining experiences that reveal the work context's lack of support for basic needs and functionality, which is often exacerbated by newer employees' tendency to underestimate their own needs for support and overestimate the availability of support in the work context.

Ryan and Deci (2000b) explained that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are the three psychological needs that provide the "essential nutrients" for human motivation, well-being, and fulfillment (p. 75). Unfortunately, teachers' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are often unsupported or undermined in the public school context. When Participant 3's duties were unexpectedly changed and she

attempted to find out the reason, she received what she referred to as a "really ugly, hateful kind of response" in which she was told, "That's none of your concern. You're an employee of the county. You'll work where we tell you to work. We made this decision and you're going to have to live with it." This former teacher commented that this reply made her feel like "a moron for asking or being invested." In this example, the teacher's need for autonomy was undermined because she had no control over the change in her duties. Her competence needs were affected because she was treated as if her concern about the change and her investment in her previously assigned duties were ignorant and inappropriate. Experiences like this one can cause relatedness needs to go unfulfilled as well, contributing to expectations for opposition and division instead of shared mattering and unity (Feiman-Nemser, 2012).

In addition to compromising individuals' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, undermining experiences in the embarking stage can also reveal unexpected demands on teachers' time and energy. Undermining experiences related to the over-expenditure of time and energy are common for newer teachers, who often do not know what to expect in terms of the amount of time and energy that will be required by their jobs. Participant 6 related how her lack of experience translated into a heavier workload than she had anticipated:

> My first year I was told that I would have no planning period.... Because I was a brand new teacher, I was not 100% on questions that I should ask during the interview, so I ended up actually teaching on extended day.

Unexpected and overwhelming demands such as this former teacher experienced tend to undermine teachers' needs for support by increasing responsibility and workload,

restricting opportunities for rest and renewal, and diminishing functionality in terms of well-being and fulfillment. Undermining experiences in the embarking stage are often intensified through the unrestricted expenditure of time and energy that occurs with investing behaviors. Teachers in the embarking stage tend to over-invest valuable time and energy in endeavors that they perceive to be meaningful and authentic, but which ultimately fail because the level of expenditure required to sustain them is not supported in the public school context. New teachers often begin to experience their first concerns about support in the public school context as the result of undermining experiences that leave basic psychological needs unmet and place unsustainable demands on teachers' time and energy.

Encountering devaluing and undermining experiences in the embarking stage marks the beginning of the cycle of decline. As new experiences in the work context give rise to unprecedented concerns about authenticity and support, many newer teachers discover that their initial expectations and framework of understanding for teaching in the public school context are unrealistic. The necessity of making sense of these disorienting experiences often prompts teachers in the embarking stage to continue navigating by attempting to orient themselves by developing new expectations for the public school context.

Orienting. During the embarking stage, navigating by orienting helps teachers make sense of early devaluing and undermining experiences in the work context and modify their existing expectations for the work context accordingly. Simmons' (2003) theory of orienting demonstrates the relationships among the equilibrium phase, the

disorienting phase brought on by encountering, and the re-orienting phase that occurs as part of navigating in each stage of the cycle of decline (see Figure 1).

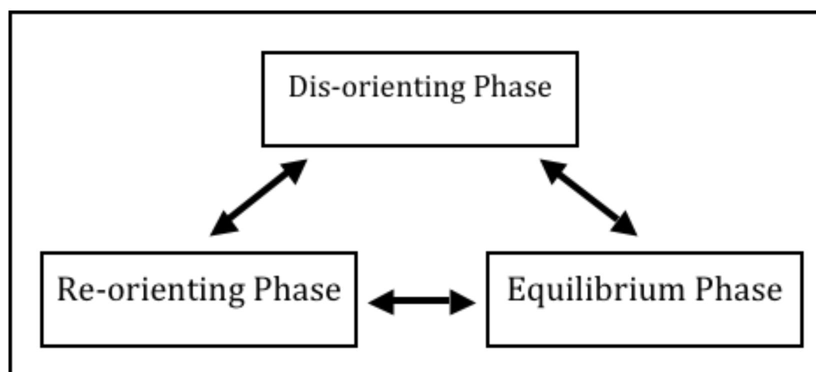

Figure 1. The theory of orienting. From Simmons (2003).

Through the orienting strategies of reframing, taking stock, and projecting, teachers in the embarking stage are able to develop more grounded expectations for their work in the public school context, which can lead them deeper into the cycle of decline.

Reframing. During the embarking stage, the orienting strategy of reframing provides individuals with an opportunity to modify and expand their initial, often idealized understanding of the work context through careful reflection upon their experiences. Teachers' initial expectations for the public school context can be fairly far removed from reality because they are based, not on direct experiences, but upon positive memories, sincere intentions, and high hopes. Because of this gap between expectations and direct experience, the disorientation and frustration that follows initial encounters in the public school context during the embarking stage can be considerable. In Participant 3's words, "My first year was one of the most discouraging and daunting experiences of my life." Because these encounters can contradict individuals' initial expectations and

fracture existing frameworks of understanding, reframing is especially important during the embarking stage as a means of making sense of disorienting and potentially demoralizing experiences in the work context. Several participants noted that this initial reframing of their perspectives of public schools was momentous and difficult, but worthwhile. Participant 10 said, “Once you get past that, that first year, it gets easier. You kind of grow that thick skin and, um, learn to have patience, I guess.” Another teacher’s reframing efforts in her early career were even more successful: “After the first year, you realize what kind of teacher you have to be to get the results that you want” (P6).

Although reframing allows teachers to develop a clearer understanding of the realities of their work contexts, this process does not necessarily modify their core values for teaching. Instead, reframing allows teachers to more clearly perceive the work context as it is and, within that reframed perspective, determine how (or if) their values fit. Reframing helped Participant 3 better understand her encounters with policies that undermined authentic learning and teaching in the public school where she worked; however, the process of figuring out how to respond to this inauthentic construct did not change her student-centered values or her commitment to authenticity. She said,

> I really struggled...the first couple of years I taught because I wasn’t ready to, nor will I ever be, I hope, buy into the idea that these kids have to be here, so let’s pacify them, keep them out of trouble, and maybe they’ll pick up a few...skills.

Participant 8’s reframing experiences helped her to better understand support issues that new teachers often face:

> So looking back on my first year, I think...that new teachers should be protected and are not protected. They’re the ones that are, in fact, given way too many

> responsibilities. I don't feel like I was mentored enough and I feel like I was just given way too much responsibility without enough direction, which unfortunately, made the year more trying than I think it should have been.

Although reframing her expectations for support did not resolve her concerns, this teacher's careful reflection upon her undermining experiences in the embarking stage gave her a more clear understanding of her situation upon which to base future action.

Taking stock. Experiences encountered in embarking can give rise to disequilibrium, which is indicated by diminished functionality in terms of motivation, well-being, and fulfillment. Teachers often take stock of their level of functionality as a part of orienting. In the embarking stage, many teachers find that they are still highly motivated to actualize their student-centered values, even after encountering devaluing experiences in the public school context. Participant 11 explained his motivation to keep working in a context that, at times, felt inauthentic: "I enjoy seeing people learn and discover new interests. I love allowing learning to be fun, what it naturally is, versus making it a drag." For Participant 3, early encounters with disequilibrium seemed to take more of a toll on her psychological well-being as her framework of understanding for the public school context expanded to encompass experiences with social injustice and practices that undermined student-centeredness. She explained, *"*As a first/second year teacher grappling with all of this sort of philosophical stuff and social stuff that really hadn't been on my radar before, it was all sort of… very stressful." Participant 6 realized that administrators placed little value on the vocational courses she taught in her public school, saying, "Because [vocational classes] are not on the end of course tests or the graduation tests, they are deemed much less worthy or important, which, just that in and

of itself is demoralizing." These experiences indicate not only diminished psychological well-being, but a diminished capacity for fulfillment, as well. Because diminished motivation, well-being, and fulfillment can impact individuals' ability to function in sustainable ways over time, taking stock of the impact of these diminished qualities, even in the embarking stage, is a critical step in creating a solid and realistic foundation upon which to base projections for authenticity and support in the work context.

Projecting. Like reframing and taking stock, projecting is a critically important step in navigating the embarking stage. Because individuals' initial expectations for the work context are often based on hopeful ideals, projecting during embarking allows individuals to formulate new expectations for authenticity and support that are grounded in first-hand experience and based on careful consideration. While reframing and taking stock tend to help teachers make more accurate projections about their needs for and the availability of support in the work context, expectations for authenticity may not be altered as much as might be anticipated through unsettling encounters with inauthenticity in the embarking stage. Even toward the end of the embarking stage, teachers may have a difficult time relinquishing their hopeful expectations for authenticity and fulfillment in the public school context, despite their encounters with inauthenticity and inadequate support. After reframing their understandings to accommodate disorienting experiences in the embarking stage, many teachers are still able to maintain a hopeful outlook for the authenticity of their work in the public school context. Despite several discouraging experiences early in her career, Participant 1 said, "I still thought that education, teaching was everything. You still needed teachers. Teaching was still wonderful. It was still worthwhile. We were still valued." Just as before, this participant's hopes for the public

school context as a venue for authentic, valuable work held firm, despite previous encounters in that context that suggested otherwise. For teachers in the embarking stage, this tenacious commitment to the hope for fulfillment in the public school context plays a key role in the next step in navigating the cycle of decline: changing course.

Changing course. Changing course is related to the behavioral approaches teachers take in their attempts to navigate disequilibrium caused by unresolved concerns about authenticity and support in the public school context. Each stage in the cycle of decline can be conceptualized as a specific course of action, which allows individuals to tackle the problems associated with disequilibrium and unresolved concerns about authenticity and support in different ways. Teachers' expectations for authenticity in the work context are related to their level of motivation; combined, these factors help to explain how individuals move between the various stages in the cycle of decline. Since most teachers' expectations for authenticity near the end of the embarking stage are still hopeful and autonomous motivation is still largely intact, the stage of the cycle of decline that conceptually follows embarking is resolving.

Resolving

Like embarking, resolving is a general course of action for navigating disequilibrium and represents the second stage in the cycle of decline. The primary objective of resolving behaviors is to overcome disequilibrium by resolving concerns about authenticity and support to re-establish a sense of functional equilibrium or balance in relation to the work context. Resolving behaviors are often adopted in response to prior experiences that reveal misalignment between individuals' personal values and the priorities of the work context. Encounters with inauthenticity in the work context give

rise to disequilibrium, which resolving behaviors are then intended to rectify. The resolving stage occurs when teachers strategically invest time and energy for the purpose of bringing their values into practice in the work context and enhancing the authenticity of their work.

Initial expectations. Individuals' expectations for authenticity are formed prior to entering the resolving stage and are based on previous experiences in the work context. Initial expectations for authenticity in the resolving stage are generally high, meaning that individuals still believe in and expect to find opportunities within the work context to actualize their personal values in ways that make their work meaningful and worthwhile. As in the embarking stage, high expectations for authenticity in the work context are indicative of highly autonomous motivation in the resolving stage. In fact, a high level of autonomous motivation is a defining property of the resolving stage. This means that resolving behaviors are fundamentally autonomous and internally regulated. Public school teachers perceive an internal locus of control over their attempts to resolve disequilibrium because these efforts are in line with and supportive of their personal values for teaching. Nothing about a teacher's values is imposed; the decision to actualize one's values through teaching lies with and within each individual teacher. Participant 1's passionate reflection upon her work with students revealed her autonomous motivation to actualize her student-centered values. She spoke of being motivated to challenge her students and

> to come up with more that will spark their mind or give them that spark of learning or just...make them love science or make them love school. Give them those experiences that they'll never forget.

The resolving stage reflects teachers' genuine interest in and commitment to resolving disequilibrium by actualizing their values for teaching in the public school context.

Expectations for support are shaped by reframing one's perspective to accommodate new information about the work context, taking stock of the impact of disequilibrium upon one's functionality, and making projections about likely levels of support in the work context. While expectations for authenticity lead teachers into the resolving stage of the cycle of decline, the degree of support individuals expect in the work context plays a critical role in determining which resolving behaviors are perceived to be sustainable in the work context. Thus, each of the three resolving behaviors – *aligning, nesting,* and *sheltering* – reflects a different level of expected support. Aligning requires confident expectations of adequate levels of support, while nesting is often the result of more cautious or conservative expectations for support. When individuals have low expectations or serious reservations about the level of support that will be available in the work context, they are likely to engage in sheltering, which, though limited, still provides opportunities for resolving disequilibrium by actualizing values in the classroom environment. Each of these behaviors is discussed in further detail in the following section.

Resolving behaviors. There are three behaviors associated with the resolving stage of the cycle of decline: *aligning, nesting,* and *sheltering*.

Aligning. When individuals are autonomously motivated to actualize their values and project that their efforts will be sustainable through adequate support, they may engage in aligning. Aligning is a resolving behavior in which individuals attempt to reform aspects of the work context to align with their values as a means of ensuring

authenticity and resolving disequilibrium. High expectations, or at least low levels of concern, for support play a pivotal role in aligning because, in order to attempt the ambitious and demanding labor of transforming the work context, individuals must feel confident in the sustainability of their efforts.

Teachers who are autonomously motivated in the public school context often engage in aligning behaviors to improve the authenticity of their work. Participant 12 reflected upon an attempt to actualize her values for teaching in the public school where she worked part-time by aligning the instructional model to more authentically meet the needs of her students. She and a colleague wrote up a formal proposal for their idea and presented it to the principal:

> When [the principal] got it she was kind of like, “wow,” because we were each giving three full-time days for two and a half days of pay, so that the transition day we would have the kids, both of us in there. And we’re teaching science, so it’s a chance for one person to remediate while the other person is teaching everybody else. Or it’s a chance for us to all day long do experiments that we otherwise don’t feel comfortable doing with just one person. We would still do all of the required meetings as if we were full-time. And the things that you have to sign up for extra, like working the basketball games, we would do that. All conferences would be done together, so we just really gave her a lot and she said yes!

This team of teachers demonstrated their willingness to sacrifice their own personal time, accept reduced pay, and take on full-time responsibilities in order to make changes that allowed them to work in an authentic way to meet students’ needs for support and

continuity in the classroom. Participant 2 related her aligning experience in advocating for an additional support position for ESOL students in her school: “I went to the county office multiple times. Met with leadership about what we need. We need a coordinator position. I helped to instigate the understandings of what we needed and how we could make that happen.” Although there were too many examples of aligning in the study data to include in this report, the fundamental drive behind all of these incidents was clear: individuals who engage in aligning behaviors are committed to bringing about change to improve the authenticity of their work.

These examples provide evidence of another characteristic of aligning: the heavy expenditure of time and energy. Although less-autonomously motivated individuals may shy away from the idea of long hours and difficult work, belief in the intrinsic value of work in the resolving stage can support individuals in achieving their goals, despite the increased demands these goals place on their time and energy. While reflecting on her teaching experiences in an impoverished island community, Participant 8 stated,

> I taught four classes a day on block scheduling, forty plus kids in the classroom with very limited resources, very limited pay, air conditioning that didn’t work half the time, but these kids on that island...truly valued education and their families truly valued teachers. So that experience was by far one of the most rewarding experiences I’ve ever had as a teacher.

Because this teacher perceived the work she was doing in these adverse circumstances to be worthwhile and fulfilling, she was able to sustain her efforts to bring meaningful learning experiences to her students, despite many obstacles that may have been deal-breakers in a less promising context.

As long as autonomously motivated efforts to align aspects of the work context with their personal values remain sustainable, individuals are likely to persist in this demanding approach to resolving disequilibrium. However, trying to resolve conditions in the work context that underpin disequilibrium can constitute an excessive drain on individuals' resources of time and energy and increase their needs for support. Because this kind of uphill climb against "the system" is exhausting and potentially demoralizing, individuals who remain committed to their values must either be extraordinarily creative in their management of time and energy or suffer diminished functionality in the work context. When alignment efforts become unsustainable in the work context, autonomously motivated employees may shift to less demanding resolving behaviors to renew their resources while continuing to actualize their values on a less ambitious scale.

Nesting. While goal of aligning is to resolve perceived inauthenticity by changing or modifying aspects of the work context, individuals who are engaged in resolving disequilibrium through nesting seek to actualize their values within the existing framework of the work context. Like all resolving behaviors, nesting represents autonomously motivated attempts to resolve concerns about authenticity in the workplace. However, nesting may be a more sustainable behavior than aligning when individuals' expected needs for support are elevated or when previous experiences in the workplace indicate that adequate support may not always be available. Although nesting behaviors have lower stakes and may lack the excitement and high sense of purpose that often accompany attempts at reform, nesting is also considerably less demanding of individuals' time and energy than aligning. For many teachers, nesting in public education is about selecting manageable objectives and working on a smaller scale to

actualize student-centered values in an authentic way. As Participant 3 noted, in the public school system, “there are a lot of obstacles..., some of which I can’t do anything about.” Although teachers engaged in nesting behaviors are as committed to providing respectful, caring, relevant, and supportive education to students as they would be if they were attempting reform, they simply perceive that the effort required to change certain fixed constructs of public schools’ organization and management to be unsustainable.

After encountering inauthentic aspects of public education that appear to be too entrenched to reform through aligning, many teachers instead commit to nesting efforts to actualize their values within the parameters of the public school’s imposed regulations and mandated policies. Participant 9 expressed his autonomous commitment to authenticity by seeking reasonable justifications for mandated policies in his school and attempting to ground these policies in his own value framework:

> A lot of other people would just go like sheep or not worry about being able to explain it. You know, they would just explain it like, “This is a rule and it has to happen.” I wanted to have some sort of reasoning behind it.

This former teacher’s experience indicates that by justifying mandated school policies in light of his own personal values, he was able to at least partially resolve his concerns about authenticity and conserve some of the time and energy that a more confrontational attempt to change or oppose the regulations would have required. He said that, using a nesting approach, “things went a lot smoother for me, because people realized that I wasn’t being argumentative. I was just looking for a little more information” (P9). Another teacher related her attempts at nesting her personal values for teaching within mandated curricular changes, saying,

> Oh my gosh, there's something new. I explore it a bit and make adjustments. I never say 'no this is not workable.' If it is research based there must be some good in it. I always look for the value in it...even if I hated the idea. (Raffanti, 2005, p. 97)

Participant 9 captured the concept of nesting when he said,

> I will jump through whatever hoop is given to me, because I remember at the core, the reason I'm jumping through the hoop is not for me, but for the children that I'm affecting.... It's not about the hoop. It's about the children. It's about the students.

This focus on the bright side of mandated policies is characteristic of many teachers who are engaged in nesting behaviors as they attempt to make the best of seemingly non-negotiable aspects of the work context while still upholding their autonomous commitment to student-centered teaching.

Sheltering. When individuals are autonomously motivated to actualize their values, but have serious concerns about support in the work context, they are likely to engage in sheltering. Sheltering is a resolving behavior in which individuals attempt to actualize their values within their own sphere of influence, while protecting the authenticity of their work by "closing the door" on potentially conflicting or draining demands in the work context. Teachers engage in resolving through sheltering as a means of providing students with the care, respect, and meaningful learning opportunities they need, despite obstacles in the teaching context that are perceived to be in conflict with these student-centered objectives. Santoro (2011) described a potential impetus for sheltering behaviors: "Given the logic of limited resources, teachers must take honest

stock of the scope of their influence and what degree of good they can do so as not to burn out" (p. 10). In many cases, sheltering behaviors tend to emerge in response to mandated policies that impose upon classroom pedagogy and practice, such as those related to standardized curriculum and assessment. Participant 8 described her sheltering behavior in frank terms:

> I went into my classroom and I closed the door.... I just went into my classroom and I taught my kids and if they performed well on the test, they did, and if they didn't, they didn't. At the end of that year, I realized that was how I wanted to teach. I didn't want to teach to the test.

This teacher adopted sheltering as a means of resolving the disequilibrium she experienced after perceiving the inauthenticity of the assessment-driven culture of the public school system. Another teacher's comment echoes a similar sentiment:

> I don't teach to the test. That's what other teachers are doing. They teach students formulas for writing that will help them score well on the WASL. I don't follow that line of reasoning. I focus on making them good writers.... My core belief is that I'm preparing each student for college. They all know that it's my expectation they will go to college. I'm too young to compromise my ideals. I'm too young to give up on my beliefs about teaching. (Raffanti, 2005, p. 67)

This teacher's commitment to her personal values is readily apparent in this example, despite her outright rejection of the "teach to the test" model of instruction embraced by other teachers in her school. Participant 1 reveled in the freedom she felt from disequilibrium when she sheltered herself and her students from inauthentic work and impositions:

> In your classroom you've got to make sure you're doing this, this, and this because it's gonna be on the test..., but there were a lot of us that we closed the door and we taught. And the kids were learning, and we were… making these kids think. We were making them do things that stretched their minds rather than just memorizing. But we were also having fun.

Like many other former public school teachers, this participant "closed the door" on the perceived inauthenticity of the school system's imposition upon her teaching practice in order to teach in a way that was authentic to her student-centered values.

While sheltering and other resolving behaviors appear to offer benefits and may even bolster the perceived authenticity of the work of teaching, many public school teachers discover that resolving behaviors can be difficult to sustain, which prevents them from fully resolving their concerns about authenticity that perpetuate disequilibrium in the work context. Further, many individuals experience a continued decline in functionality during the resolving stage, which increases their needs for support and decreases their ability to cope effectively with challenges in the workplace. When concerns about authenticity and support are not adequately resolved, and teachers must navigate new encounters that perpetuate disequilibrium in the resolving stage.

Encountering. When individuals in the resolving stage encounter disequilibrium through new experiences in the work context, they are propelled once again into the process of navigating. Both devaluing experiences, which give rise to concerns about authenticity, and undermining experiences, which give rise to concerns about support, are common encounters in the resolving stage and tend to erode functionality in the work context by diminishing motivation, well-being, and fulfillment.

Devaluing experiences. Individuals who are engaged in the resolving behaviors of aligning, nesting, and sheltering often encounter devaluing experiences in the work context that perpetuate, rather than resolve, existing concerns about authenticity. Some devaluing experiences may indicate that certain resolving behaviors are inadequate for resolving concerns about authenticity because they are, in and of themselves, inadequately authentic. Although autonomously motivated, nesting and sheltering behaviors may soon be perceived as ineffective methods for resolving disequilibrium because their restrictive parameters chafe and conflict with teachers' values, especially when students suffer as a result. For instance, teachers who are engaged in nesting may discover that they are unable to reconcile their responsibilities as public school employees with their authentic values for teaching. One participant who had attempted to find harmony between these conflicting commitments noted, "As educators, we struggle with the balance between what we know we have to teach and what we know the children need" (P9). Sheltering may also be revealed as an inadequate approach for resolving disequilibrium because the classroom is only part of a network of resources that are necessary to authentically support and advocate for students. Although Participant 4 took great pride in doing authentic work with her special education students despite school policies that she perceived to be inauthentic and detrimental to their progress, she was snapped out of her sheltering behavior when she discovered that her principle simply "didn't feel there was a need for a sub" in her classroom during her scheduled absence for surgery. She recounted,

> I was still on crutches at that time and I went hopping up to the office and I go, "Okay, hold up. I was approved for a long-term sub from county. I have the

> paperwork. My para just told me that there was no sub!" What they did was they pulled paras from kindergarten and they would rotate in every hour. So you had two uncertified people in there for three weeks. That was it. I was livid. (P4)

This kind of devaluing experience captures a persistent inauthenticity in the public school context that prevents many teachers from successfully resolving disequilibrium.

Teachers' concerns about authenticity may also be perpetuated when they have devaluing experiences that reveal a lack of shared values among colleagues and administrators in the public school context. Participant 3, who had volunteered to work with struggling students outside of school, had a devaluing experience when she told her colleagues about her efforts to actualize her student-centered values:

> They were like, "Well, you don't need to coddle them like that. If they're not going to try, then they deserve to fail." And I don't completely subscribe to that. Because they're young. And allowing them to make some of their own choices right now without any support and without any effort to give them the backup that they need…, it's sort of a failure on our part.

Participant 8 noted,

> There are people in public education..., because it's tied to federal funding and all these rates are tied to federal funding, they have to protect themselves, and so it just becomes a numbers game and it doesn't become a human game. And that really, really concerned me.

Devaluing experiences such as these tend to exacerbate teachers' concerns about authenticity in the work context by revealing that not all stakeholders in public schools are committed to student-centeredness as a guiding principle for their work.

Undermining experiences. Because resolving behaviors are autonomously motivated and perceived to be inherently fulfilling, teachers are often only minimally concerned about support in the work context at the outset of the resolving stage. However, because unresolved disequilibrium continually diminishes functionality, teachers' needs for support may increase as the resolving stage progresses and disequilibrium persists. In addition to growing needs for support, individuals often encounter experiences that reveal a lack of support in the work context, which raise additional concerns about support and further perpetuate disequilibrium.

Many undermining experiences in the resolving stage relate to a lack of support for the basic human need for autonomy and control. Although teachers in the resolving stage are autonomously motivated to actualize their values in the work context, undermining experiences in the public school context may reveal that teachers are limited in the ways they can counteract or improve upon inauthentic circumstances. When these undermining experiences occur, support for individuals' sense of professional autonomy is unavoidably compromised. Participant 3 mentioned that her attempts to implement new ideas were continuously thwarted by her colleagues:

> A lot of times I felt like, "I've got a great idea," and "I have all this energy," and "let's do this," and "wouldn't it be cool if we could pull everybody else on board?" But that was never the consensus among the administration or even among my fellow teachers. They didn't want to do anything extra.

Other participants noted a lack of control over their teaching circumstances in the public school context. Participant 1 revealed how her hard work and student-centered values actually drew the attention of school leadership and brought on changes that undermined

her need for autonomy: “I taught sixth grade and they decided that they wanted the sixth grade teachers who were dynamic and energetic and they wanted to spread that...they broke it up! And they moved me to eighth grade.” Similarly, an ESOL teacher who had been struggling to cultivate a more supportive culture for English language learners in her school was approached several times by her principal, who continued to pressure her to give up her aligning efforts for a full-time position in a classroom:

> And then the principal came in a third time, and I finally said, ‘What do you want me to do?” and I think I said it with attitude. And she just very quickly said, ‘Fifth grade.’ And I finally caved. (P12)

Although this former teacher attempted to exert control over her situation by refusing the transfer, she was ultimately unable to do so.

Another basic psychological need that is often under-supported during the resolving stage is the need for competence. In order to serve and educate students and actualize their core values for teaching, teachers must possess self-efficacy and confidence in their ability to meet these objectives. However, undermining experiences during the resolving stage can strip away teachers’ sense of competence, especially when teachers’ time and energy are diverted or depleted. For instance, Participant 2 pointed out that the limited planning time provided during the workday is often insufficient for competently meeting diverse student needs: “You cannot plan differentiated activities and all the levels of scaffolding and rubric creation and special needs, ELL, gifted – if you really want to take all those kids into account...five hours a week isn’t enough.” Several participants pointed out that when planning time is diverted to meetings or other seemingly inauthentic tasks, the ability to competently manage responsibilities in the

allotted time is even further diminished. Participant 12 explained how her overloaded work schedule, combined with several other circumstances, made it difficult for her to do her job well in the time she had been allotted:

> So other kids kept on moving into that school, and so after the first three weeks of school, I was teaching all five subjects in my four hours with no planning on the fifth grade wing..., not sitting there with fourth grade teachers with their planning and all of their resources. I had to request certain books, and basically I was having to make up the whole thing and do what they do in a full day, in a half a day.

Unfortunately, when committed teachers in the resolving stage cannot complete their work at school, they often opt to deplete their time and energy further by bringing their work home with them. Participant 7 commented on the dangers of allowing work to encroach upon free time for renewal and rest:

> It really can be all encompassing; if you bring it home, it's gonna take up all your home time. You're either grading papers or researching new activities to do or writing lesson plans... I think that's the overwhelming part is that, if you don't cut it off, it really can take up all your time and all your thought processes and just be all-consuming.

At times, teachers' commitment to resolving disequilibrium by proactively resolving authenticity concerns can undermine teachers' needs for competence. When time and energy are diverted to inauthentic pursuits or depleted in attempts to actualize student-centered values, concerns about support in the work context necessarily arise.

Like autonomy and competence, relatedness is another basic psychological need that is undermined during the resolving stage. Both devaluing and undermining experiences can encompass elements that prevent teachers' relatedness needs from being met. In previous examples, participants encountered other individuals in the work context who either inadvertently or intentionally undermined opportunities for the cultivation of supportive and meaningful relationships. When teachers' time and energy are diverted or depleted, they have fewer opportunities to seek support for relatedness needs by interacting and collaborating with their peers. Some resolving behaviors, such as aligning and nesting, require interaction with others in the work context, which provide opportunities for collaborative relationships to emerge. However, other people in the school context may not be receptive to these opportunities. When Participant 2 extended an offer of support to other teachers in her school, the icy response from her peers undermined her need for relatedness: "I was met with resistance. I was talked about behind my back. I was talked about in front of me. They didn't have to be that far away from me. I could see what was going on." Divisive undermining experiences such as this raise concerns about support for relatedness needs and diminish teachers' functionality by leaving them lonely and isolated in the workplace.

Devaluing and undermining experiences thwart resolving behaviors and perpetuate concerns about authenticity and support by demonstrating that aligning, nesting, or sheltering behaviors have failed to resolve disequilibrium. Since these kinds of encounters in the resolving stage confirm that concerns about authenticity and support are still present and as troublesome as before, individuals in the resolving stage soon move to orienting as a means of navigating unresolved disequilibrium and gaining a clearer

picture of how their efforts and experiences in the work context continue to perpetuate disequilibrium.

Orienting. In the resolving stage, encountering soon gives way to orienting, in which individuals navigate by reframing their understandings of the work context to accommodate new information gained in the encountering stage, taking stock of the impact of disequilibrium upon their functionality, and projecting modified expectations for authenticity and support in the work context.

Reframing. New information gained through experiences in the resolving stage often requires teachers to once again reframe their understandings about authenticity and support in the workplace. Participant 5 reflected on how her initial frame of reference for the public school context compared to her new experiences:

> I could see my vision of what it was like when I was in education. The lack of respect for authority and no backup for that bothered me, because I felt like these kids could never advance in the real world if they didn't respect other people.
>
> And, um, I had no backup for that. And so I was constantly fighting that battle.

In this example, the teacher's experiences with a lack of support in the work context caused her to reconsider her previous expectations regarding the support for discipline she could expect in her school. Participant 4's negative experiences with administration in her public school after trying to resolve concerns about the unfair treatment of her special education students caused her to drastically reframe her formerly hopeful perception of the support structure in which she was working. She stated,

> If you showed any potential for anything, they squashed it because that would make you look better than them, or they took your ideas and passed them as their own, and if you ever crossed them, they would write you up for insubordination.

Participant 5's less dramatic undermining experiences still prompted her to reframe her understanding of the work context: "What I learned was the paperwork was overwhelming. And it changes often." Reframing understandings of authenticity and support during the resolving stage of the cycle of decline allows individuals to have a clearer and more realistic understanding of how the public school environment is managed and how individuals in the environment behave and react. This reframed understanding often provides the foundation for many teachers' movement from the resolving stage to more advanced stages in the cycle of decline.

Taking stock. Individuals who are in the resolving stage take stock of the impact of unresolved disequilibrium in terms of decreased functionality while navigating this stage of the cycle of decline. Many teachers who exhibit considerable passion and commitment to teaching during the resolving stage tend to exhibit diminished motivation, well-being, and fulfillment after encountering disequilibrium, having failed to resolve their concerns and having reserved no resources for their own renewal and sustainability.

Unresolved concerns about authenticity tend to diminish individuals' autonomous motivation during the resolving stage. Perceived inauthenticity can move teachers toward non-autonomous forms of motivation as their sense of ownership over their work erodes and they feel pressure to accommodate the demands of less authentic aspects of their work in public schools. Participant 9 reflected on how many teachers are caught between

their efforts to teach authentically and the pressure they feel in the public school context to adhere to more inauthentic demands related to standardized testing:

> Especially with educators today, a good portion of how they're graded is how these young men and women do on one test on one day. So in walking that fine line between making sure they have what they need and have what is expected for the test, you just want to make sure that you're able to walk that balanced line. And it's hard.

When the work teachers are asked to do in public schools is mandated and, therefore, less internally-regulated by teachers' values, their autonomous motivation to teach in the public school context is likely to be diminished (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Participant 7 reflected on the erosion of her internally-regulated efforts to serve her students as whole, complex individuals during a push for accountability and improved scores on standardized tests. She stated, "I struggle with being able to truly invest in them other than just academics." This former public school teacher's confession is evidence of a decline in autonomous motivation resulting from her perceived inauthenticity of the one-dimensional relationship to which she was limited with her students.

Encounters with disequilibrium in the resolving stage can cause teachers to take stock of diminished well-being in the work context, as well. Undermining experiences often occur when teachers' limited resources of time and energy are depleted as the result of their attempts to actualize their values in the work context. Too often, the work context does not provide support for or allow opportunities for renewal, which is necessary for high levels expenditure. Participant 9 said, "There's such a fine line between caring as much as you possibly can and not burning yourself up entirely." Participant 6 reflected

upon the unexpected demands that were placed upon her as a teacher of elective classes, over teachers of "more important" core classes:

> The vocational teachers and the art teachers in my school were constantly the ones that were asked to not have a planning or not have a lunch even sometimes, because this teacher didn't have a sub and we need you to cover her class or it's standardized testing and I really need you to do three or four proctorings today instead of the one that the other teachers have to do.

Participant 6 described her experience as "just demeaning," indicating diminished psychological well-being. Participant 10 said, "I almost felt like I almost cared too much, because I just put so much into it that it was like my home life, my time with my family suffered." Teachers who over-extend their resources of time and energy in the resolving stage often suffer from diminished well-being.

Experiences that reveal work to be inauthentic and overly taxing can also teachers to take stock of their levels of fulfillment in their work. At the outset of the resolving stage, teachers expect that their work in the public school context will be fulfilling and meaningful. However, when devaluing and undermining experiences during the resolving stage perpetuate teachers' concerns about authenticity and support, fulfillment in teaching often declines. Participant 3 reflected on her failure to actualize her student-centered values despite her best efforts, stating that the collective impact of her experiences in the public school where she was employed shattered her expectations for fulfilling, authentic work: "It broke my heart, made me resentful, made me bitter." When taking stock during the resolving stage of the cycle of decline, many teachers discover that working in ways

that are no longer motivating, healthy, or fulfilling can take a toll on their ability to uphold the level of functionality required to pursue resolving behaviors.

***Projecting*.** Orienting through projecting is a critically important step in navigating and ultimately abandoning the resolving stage of the cycle of decline. During the embarking stage, initial devaluing experiences in the work context tend to have little effect on individuals' expectations for authenticity. However, this is not the case during the resolving stage. When resolving behaviors fail to address concerns about inauthenticity in the work context, as is evidenced by continuing devaluing experiences and growing concerns about authenticity, individuals' expectations for authenticity at work begin to decline. Participant 4 projected lowered expectations for authenticity based on what she perceived to be the inauthentic origins of mandated public school policies:

> Everyone at the top said, "Okay, we will fix education by making everyone take the same test and that will tell who is behind and who is on schedule." Well, these are people who have never been in the classroom or haven't been for years.

Realizations such as this are rooted in devaluing experiences, take shape during reframing, and tend to lower teachers' general expectations for authenticity in the work context as the resolving stage draws to a close.

As the resolving stage progresses, undermining experiences also have an effect on individuals' expectations for support in the work context. As mentioned earlier, expectations for support are based on two factors: individuals' needs for support and the anticipated level of support that is available for the chosen course of action in the work context. Working in unresolved disequilibrium during the resolving stage can diminish individuals' functionality in terms of motivation, well-being, and fulfillment, which, in

turn, increases individuals' needs for support. Further, continued undermining experiences during the resolving stage tend to raise individuals' awareness of the amount of support that they require, whereas in embarking and at the outset of resolving, they often lack a clear understanding of their own support needs. Participant 8's expectations for support shifted during the resolving stage toward a more defensive stance. She said, "I just think you have to start protecting yourself and so you just start to withdraw piece by piece." Further, undermining experiences during the resolving stage can raise teachers' awareness of the level of support that is available to them in the work context. In some cases, teachers projected a dearth of support based on increased demands in the work context. Participant 4 said,

> I saw this kind of progression coming in when I was teaching and we would have walk-throughs and say they were walking through all of the second grade classes. You all had to be on page 43 at 9:45.

This type of mandated imposition on teachers' efforts to resolve disequilibrium by teaching authentically can cause teachers to project low expectations for the public school context's ability to support teachers' basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

For teachers in the resolving stage of the cycle of decline, becoming re-oriented after devaluing and undermining experiences in the public school context through reframing, taking stock, and projecting determines the point at which teachers abandon the resolving stage in search of more effective ways to cope with disequilibrium in the public school context.

Changing course. Individuals' expectations for authenticity in the work context are related to their level of motivation; combined, these factors help to determine individuals' general course of action for navigating disequilibrium. In cases where resolving behaviors fail to successfully navigate disequilibrium in the work context, some individuals may "compromise their behaviour and gravitate towards more extrinsically motivated, less autonomous behaviour and, therefore, begin to disconnect with their authentic self" (Kinsler, 2014, p. 97). Through encountering and orienting in the resolving stage, many teachers' expectations for authenticity decline, causing them to shift from autonomous, internally-regulated motivation to more extrinsic forms of motivation within the work context. Consequently, the next stage in the cycle of decline that follows resolving is the weathering stage, in which the effects of the cycle of decline begin to become more apparent.

Weathering

The main objective of weathering behaviors in this stage of the cycle of decline is to endure, either temporarily or indefinitely, the presence of disequilibrium in the work context. According to Raffanti (2005), weathering "is a basic social-psychological process that enables individuals to endure changes in a manner consistent with their personal and professional needs, goals, and values" (p. 38). While the weathering stage in the cycle of decline is concerned with enduring, weathering behaviors are not always conducive to or supportive of teachers' personal and professional goals, values, and needs. Teachers often enter the weathering stage in response to experiences revealing circumstances in the work context that make working authentically unsustainable for the time being. These experiences perpetuate disequilibrium, which individuals who adopt

weathering behaviors prepare themselves to endure. In order to accomplish this objective, individuals may attempt to comply with the demands of the work context to protect their employment or disengage from the work context to conserve resources and prevent further decline.

Initial expectations. Expectations for authenticity at the outset of the weathering stage are generally low, meaning that individuals' previous experiences in the workplace have indicated limited opportunities for authentic engagement. For this reason, teachers in the weathering stage see little reason in attempting to resolve disequilibrium by actualizing their values or seeking meaningful and authentic work in the public school context. Instead, low expectations for authenticity cause teachers who choose to remain in the public school context to either "play along" or "lay low" in their efforts to endure disequilibrium and its attendant decline in functionality.

While low expectations for authenticity lead teachers into the weathering stage, the degree of support they anticipate in the work context plays a critical role in determining which weathering behavior is perceived to be most sustainable. There are two primary weathering behaviors, complying and disengaging, which each reflect different levels of expected support from the work context. Individuals whose expectations for support are not extensively diminished may attempt to weather disequilibrium by simply complying with the expectations and priorities of the work context; individuals who have very low expectations for support may elect to weather disequilibrium by mentally and emotionally disengaging from the work context. Each of these weathering behaviors is discussed in more detail in the following section.

Weathering behaviors. There are two behaviors associated with the weathering stage of the cycle of decline: *complying* and *disengaging*.

Complying. When teachers are experiencing diminished autonomous motivation and have only moderate concerns about support, they may engage in complying. Complying is a weathering behavior in which teachers focus on sustaining their employment by placing higher priority upon the demands and expectations of the public school context than upon working in ways that align with their values for teaching. Complying can be temporary or it can serve as a more permanent behavioral strategy for dealing with disequilibrium. Weathering through complying involves meticulously meeting the demands and adhering to the expectations of the work context because this strategy can help to ensure continued employment and protection from adverse consequences. For teachers, this may mean complying with inauthentic mandates and policies that are not conducive to student well-being or achievement. Participant 9 captured the underlying philosophy of compliance, saying, "If your superintendent and the state expect certain things to be happening in the classroom, those things have to happen." McCrickerd (2012) explained that some educators abandon efforts to teach authentically "in favor of those things they believe will be rewarded by their institutions" (p. 57). Raffanti's (2005) code *good little soldiering* captures the type of compliance that the teachers often exhibit in the weathering stage:

> Although one may disagree with the initiative on professional grounds, and although the changes may create personal hardship, one chooses good little soldiering out of a sense of organizational duty: "I accept the changes. My job

> depends on my ability to follow the rules that are set by the state, the district, and the school." (p. 96)

Many teachers see compliance as the path of least risk for weathering disequilibrium; however, compliance often leads individuals to discover that they have diverged considerably from their personal values for teaching during the weathering stage. Participant 5 reflected on the lack of authenticity and student-centeredness she experienced in her work as she attempted to weather disequilibrium through compliance:

> The curriculum maps were so dictative that it became to where you couldn't do fun things. A kid comes in in the morning and says, "Can we do something fun today?" and I say, "Everything we do is fun." But, you know, that's not entirely true.

Teachers who are engaged in complying tend to perceive their work as inauthentic because, instead of focusing on developing and delivering meaningful student-centered learning experiences, compliance entails giving priority to external demands and expectations. Because compliance behaviors are often perceived as inauthentic, weathering through compliance generally offers little fulfillment and has little autonomous holding power. For this reason, when individuals' needs for support increase or their expectations for the availability of support are diminished through experience, they may leave compliance behind and slip into disengaging, a more defensive behavior for weathering disequilibrium.

Disengaging. Disengaging is a weathering behavior in which individuals disengage mentally and emotionally from the work context as a protective measure arising from diminished functionality. Teachers may attempt to weather disequilibrium

by disengaging when they lack the motivation, well-being, or fulfillment to pursue other courses of action. Disengaging is very similar to Vander Linden's (2005) code *docking*, which "is the process of temporarily or permanently disengaging from an experience by staying in or returning to a 'safe harbor'" (p. 75). Low expectations for authenticity and support cause teachers to seek a "safe harbor" from the demands of the public school context through disengaging. According to Vander Linden (2005),

> A safe harbor is an area of safety and security where the person does not feel exposed. It can be a physically safe location, or it can be an emotionally or mentally safe area. It is a place that is relatively predictable because it is familiar to the person. (p. 75)

For teachers, this "safe harbor" for disengagement may be a physical classroom, a defensive attitude, or simply a set of entrenched habits of mind. Participant 2 offered a description of the safe harbor concept in disengaging:

> You can create your own little queendom out in the trailer that they give you or in the little closet that they give you to work in and you can stay as far away from everyone else as possible. Because that's really where they would like you to be.

Raffanti (2005) described disengaging when he referred to a way to "create an invisible shield that teachers hope will protect them from unwanted forces...so that frailties and imperfections remain unexposed" (p. 86). Disengaging is primarily a defensive or protective strategy that allows individuals avoid unwanted stress, responsibility, and criticism. In order to preserve this low profile and mitigate risks that might be too demanding in the work context, Participant 5 offered straightforward advice: "Do not rock the boat. You have to stay under the radar because everything is about radar."

It is when teachers resort to disengaging that the negative impact of the cycle of decline is most apparent. Despite their efforts to protect themselves, individuals who are weathering through disengaging often exist in "survival mode," a desolate state of severely diminished functionality that Participant 5 described quite clearly: "There were days when I left work that I thought, 'Well, was there any benefit to today? I am alive, I am breathing, but I'm not on a much higher level than that.'" Because expenditure in this state is minimal, many teachers anticipate that weathering through disengaging will be more sustainable than other, more proactive courses of action. Although they are still employed in the public school context, teachers who are in survival mode are mentally and emotionally disengaged from their commitment to their own values and from the demands and expectations of the teaching context. Disengagement is indicative of a loss of hope for fulfillment and mattering in the teaching context; teachers who are disengaged spend as little time and energy as possible in the teaching context because they do not view their work in that context as authentic or sustainable over time.

Several participants offered reasons to explain why some public school teachers disengage from the work context instead of simply quitting their jobs. Participant 8 reflected on the disengaged teachers she encountered in her experience in the public school system: "There's a lot of teachers who, once you get to the 20 year mark, you realize, okay, well the retirement package is good and I've got to stay in it." Another participant shared her thoughts on why some teachers persist in teaching for the financial benefits, saying,

> They had been there so long and they were so locked, there was nothing else they could do. Once you're in public school and you've got that security, literally, you

> know, once you've got that tenure or once you've got that retirement plan sitting there, you don't feel like you have an out. (P1)

Participant 5 illustrated this concept of being "locked" from her own perspective: "I just don't think you have a choice. Everybody has to make a living. And when [my husband] wasn't working and I was sick, I didn't have a choice. So I know what that feels like." Although these participants each eventually decided to leave the public school systems in which they were employed, there are likely legions of teachers who persist in weathering disequilibrium for years until they become eligible for retirement.

Like complying, disengaging can be a temporary defensive measure to be set aside if circumstances change or it can be adopted as a long-term solution for seemingly irresolvable disequilibrium. According to Raffanti (2005), teachers often opt to disengage or "bide their time" when "their personal and/or professional needs, goals, and visions do not align with those of the leadership" (p. 86). In other cases, a teacher may disengage from the teaching context "in order to rest and recuperate during a difficult experience so that he/she has the energy to continue through the experience" (Vander Linden, 2005, p. 77). In either case, pervasive concerns about authenticity and support drive individuals toward disengagement as a last effort to safeguard themselves against diminished functionality without leaving the public school context.

Encountering. By the time they enter the weathering stage, individuals generally have had multiple encounters with perceived inauthenticity and project fairly low expectations for authenticity in the work context. Even so, devaluing experiences that reveal the extent of inauthentic practices in the workplace are still possible during the weathering stage. However, undermining experiences may be more influential in

perpetuating disequilibrium than devaluing experiences during the weathering stage. When teachers take up weathering behaviors, they are already experiencing diminished functionality from working in unresolved disequilibrium in previous stages of the cycle of decline, which increases their needs for support. In addition to this initial disadvantage, new encounters with disequilibrium during the weathering stage can continue to fuel existing concerns about authenticity and support, which further erode functionality in the work context by diminishing motivation, well-being, and fulfillment. As functionality declines during the weathering stage, individuals who previously attempted to weather disequilibrium by complying may shift instead to disengaging. Devaluing experiences may prompt this shift from complying to disengaging by revealing that individuals' compliance is an overt imposition or insult to their sensibilities as professionals or that individuals' needs for support outweigh the support they receive in the work context.

Devaluing experiences. In previous stages of the cycle of decline, devaluing experiences tended to involve some revelation about the misalignment between teachers' student-centered values and the operational priorities of the public school context. However, by the time they enter the weathering stage, most teachers are already fully aware of the presence of inauthentic elements in the management and operation of public schools. Instead, devaluing experiences in weathering often relate more to the seemingly inauthentic expenditure of teachers' time and energy. The fact that compliance is, in and of itself, an extrinsically motivated behavior explains why complying tends to exacerbate, rather than mitigate, concerns about authenticity. Participant 5 reflected that, despite her low expectations for authenticity in public school where she was employed, she was still troubled about the inauthenticity of her compliance because it conflicted with her student-

centered values. She explained, “I didn’t have time to value my students the way I wanted to.” She went on to say that, in her experience, “Paperwork and other things have gotten to be more of a priority” than meeting student needs. Devaluing experiences can occur when teachers’ time and energy are spent in complying with inauthentic mandated policies and procedures that are of higher priority in the work context.

Some devaluing experiences may prompt individuals to reject complying in favor of disengaging. Participant 1 recalled the specific experience that caused her to begin to disengage from the public school context:

> The day that they told me that I had a 55 minute class, I had to spend the first five minutes, the middle five minutes, and the last five minutes saying a sentence called a standard and having the kids write the standard in their notebooks, and making sure that the kids knew the standard and could say the standard was when I got cynical and said, this is not teaching.

This teacher perceived such an invasive policy to be too much of an imposition upon her teaching and abandoned her attempts to comply. She shifted instead toward adopting the cynical outlook that is often associated with teachers who are disengaged. Some devaluing experiences cause teachers to consider leaving the public school context altogether. When one former teacher who had become an administrator was reprimanded for attempting to support teachers’ in their compliance with state standardized testing policies, his concerns about the authenticity of his work were overwhelming. He said,

> At this point, I was like, you know what? Guys, I...guys, I think I’ve had enough. I’ve had enough fun. When I got into education, I got in to educate children. To make a good living in education, administration is the path. But it takes you away

> from the core of what took you to be a teacher in the first place, which is your love of children, your love of teaching, and your love of learning. (P9)

This kind of devaluing experience can cause "cognitive dissonance, including the confusing sense of dissonance that occurs when a person's own behavior becomes incongruous with his… values" (Henning, 2011, p. 446). Devaluing experiences that expose inauthenticity in the public school context can cause teachers to reconsider weathering as a viable course for navigating disequilibrium.

Undermining experiences. In the weathering stage of the cycle of decline, undermining experiences promote disequilibrium by exposing demands that increase individuals' needs for support and by revealing the lack of support for individuals' autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the work context.

Many undermining experiences during the weathering stage relate to a lack of support for the basic human need for autonomy and control in the workplace. The objective of weathering is to endure disequilibrium and mitigate its impact on functionality. Unfortunately, some undermining experiences reveal that individuals lack even the most basic level control over the circumstances in which they operate, which prevents them from making changes or adaptations that would allow them to alleviate disequilibrium. Teachers who are weathering by complying with their school's mandated policies and expectations often face compromised autonomy. Participant 1 commented on the type of mandated policy that infringes upon teachers' autonomy needs: "About my fifteenth year teaching was when they started saying, 'Oh, you have to do it this way. You have to teach out of this book and you have to make sure they know this, this, this, and this.'" In Participant 4's case, autonomy in classroom practice was completely

stripped from teachers when the school adopted a new “teacher-proof” curriculum. She stated, “These books are scripted. You have to read the script.” For teachers who are attempting to weather disequilibrium by complying, imposing policies such as these that restrict teachers’ autonomy even in their own classrooms tend to perpetuate disequilibrium by raising further concerns about support.

Like the need for autonomy, teachers also often experience a lack of support for competence during the weathering stage of the cycle of decline. Teachers’ competence can be undermined in the public school context in many ways during the weathering stage. First, teachers who are constantly overloaded with time-consuming responsibilities such as excessive paperwork, meetings, and teaching assignments suffer from a diminished sense of competence, because they are rarely able to “get everything done” (P5, P7). In some cases, individuals may perceive that their obligations in the work context cannot be competently met, regardless of the amount of time or energy expended upon them. Participant 5 talked about how the number of classes for which she had to prepare diminished her sense of competence in the classroom: “I would have three different grade levels of a subject. And if that was a new year for that, you stayed one or two nights ahead of them. That’s the best you could do.” The diversity and newness of this teacher’s class load prevented her from planning ahead and preparing effective lessons for her students. Many participants also mentioned overcrowded classrooms as a source of diminished competence. Participant 4 recounted her frustration when faced with the challenging task of managing a special education classroom competently with no support after her school allowed for an increase in class sizes:

> In special education, you went from having 8 kids in a self-contained room with a [paraprofessional educator] to having 12 kids in a self-contained with no parapro. I could have 12 children in a self-contained classroom by myself, and they would only have to get me a parapro if I had 13 or more. Self-contained children are the ones too severe to be in the general classroom, and you think one teacher can handle 12?

Competence can also be undermined when the "rules" for teaching competently change unexpectedly or are in constant flux, as often occurs with the continual implementation of education reform in public schools. Participant 9 elaborated on the difficulty of competently navigating the constant currents of reform in public schools: "I can see why, you know, [teachers] would want to get off the hamster wheel, because you can never get ahead." Participant 1 echoed this frustration, saying, "Oh, this is just the pendulum swinging. They'll do this for a while and then we'll go back and we'll do something else. And then we'll do something else." Even when teachers attempt to comply with and uphold the mandated changes, they may still encounter the competence-undermining experience of having the game changed. Participant 2, who was responsible for ensuring that certain mandated policies in her school were enforced, related a disorienting experience that left her feeling incapable of doing her job well because she was no longer sure what her responsibilities were. She said,

> I'll never forget sitting down in the principal's office and she said, "You've gotta stop bringing up the law. People don't want to hear about the law." They didn't want to hear the law. I don't know what they wanted to hear. I felt like that was sort of my job.

Competence can also be undermined when supervisors and administrators simply refuse or neglect to provide basic support for teachers' needs in the work context. When Participant 5 asked for a planning period, administrators simply refused to address the issue: "It just didn't happen. They weren't going to try to work it out. They just weren't gonna do it." In the participant data, abandoning teachers by refusing to provide support for classroom discipline problems was a common theme. According to Participant 5,

> The school system didn't really back you up on discipline problems. If you referred students, you were seen as someone who couldn't control the classroom. They wanted it handled in the classroom and to handle it, you had to back up behavior plans with a lot of written documentation and a lot of correspondence with the parents, with documentation of that.

Participant 1 said this lack of support caused her to consider quitting her job: "At one point, I even thought it was safer for me to stay at home because the kids that I was teaching could not be disciplined. There was no pulling them out of the classroom for misbehavior." Clearly, a lack of support for basics like planning and discipline undermines teachers' competence in the public school context, giving rise to pervasive concerns about support and diminishing teachers' ability to do their jobs well.

Support for competence is also lacking when teachers are made to feel ashamed in the public school context. Teachers who are perceived to have failed are sometimes made to feel ashamed for their inability to avoid making mistakes or encountering problems. Participant 5 said, "I was just human and I would make mistakes and my mistakes were just magnified to the extent that everybody just jumped on you like crazy when something happened." Another former teacher related an experience that diminished her

sense of competence over a situation that arose in her classroom over which she had no control:

> I was not treated like a professional who had run into a problem. I was fully blamed by the administration in front of the parents, like, "We don't condone this sort of behavior. Mrs. ____ doesn't watch her doors. She doesn't keep up with her class. This kind of thing is her fault. (P3)

Regardless of where the actual fault may lie for problems in education, blaming and shaming teachers can be destructive to their sense of competence and may cause them to retreat into more defensive weathering behaviors or even consider opting out of the public school context.

Relatedness, the third basic psychological need, is also often unsupported or undermined during the weathering stage. In many of the previous examples of undermining experiences, teachers encountered other individuals in the work context who either inadvertently or intentionally undermined opportunities for the cultivation of supportive and meaningful relationships. Concerns about support for relatedness needs often contribute to teachers' decisions to disengage. Participant 7 stated,

> I kind of had the mentality of if you get in a school with other teachers, it can be a very gossipy place, a very competitive place, just with an atmosphere with that many women, I kind of learned, or tried to, it can be hard, but just kind of stayed in my room and did my own thing.

Some public schools are so prohibitive of relatedness needs that providing support for colleagues or seeking to build relationships can be dangerous. When recalling a difficult time in her own public school experience, Participant 5 remembered a colleague who

attempted to offer support: “She would do it in ways to where it was kind of secret, incognito sometimes. But to really step out on a limb to support [me] would have jeopardized her job.” Building meaningful relationships in the work context can provide individuals with opportunities for renewal and support; however, when relationships prove to be insubstantial, relatedness needs are undermined and organizational commitment can be negatively impacted. Participant 3 explained how her attempt to connect with her principal on a meaningful level about her stress at work finalized her decision to leave her job as a public school teacher:

> So one day, last ditch effort, I go into the principal’s office. Not as a threat or anything. I was just like, “I’m struggling with whether or not I want to renew my contract.” My principal said, “Well, I hate to hear that. Make sure you put your resignation in writing so that we can file it.” And I did. I didn’t renew my contract.

When relatedness needs are neglected and relationships are undermined, individuals may feel disconnected from the workplace. By severing crucial threads of shared mattering, undermining experiences can plunge individuals into a disoriented state of disequilibrium and leave them consumed with concerns about support in the workplace.

For teachers in the weathering stage of the cycle of decline, continuing devaluing and undermining experiences may provide evidence that complying and disengaging have failed as sustainable strategies for enduring disequilibrium. Since the encountering stage in weathering heightens and intensifies existing concerns about authenticity and support, individuals in the weathering stage soon move to orienting in their attempts to understand and better cope with unresolved disequilibrium.

Orienting. Encounters with disequilibrium in the weathering stage soon give way to orienting, in which individuals reframe their understandings of the work context to accommodate new information gained in the encountering stage, take stock of the impact of disequilibrium upon their functionality, and project modified expectations for authenticity and support in the work context.

Reframing. In the weathering stage, individuals initially anticipate that they will be able to sustainably endure disequilibrium by mitigating their concerns about inauthenticity and support in work context through complying or disengaging. However, as they continue to encounter inauthentic and undermining experiences, many individuals begin to be overwhelmed by the inauthenticity and lack of support they are attempting to endure. Thus, new information gained through experiences in the weathering stage often requires teachers to reconstruct their framework of understanding about authenticity and support the workplace. In terms of reframing understandings of authenticity and support in the work context, many participants finally came to terms with the fundamental misalignment between the priorities of the work context and their own core values for teaching in the weathering stage. Participant 4 said,

> It's messed up. The kids are learning the stuff, but it doesn't make any sense to them. And you know it doesn't make any sense to them, because it doesn't make any sense to us. I don't think anybody really knows what to teach.

Participant 5's reframing required her to process the reality that, despite an overwhelming workload, she was also expected to function without a planning period: "You don't always get a planning period. So, I was working 10 to 12 hours a day, no planning." Participant 2 reframed her understanding of the work context on more global terms:

> The last few years, I think that the challenges with the students, plus the changing dynamics on the hallway, more cliques, just teachers seeming to be less passionate about social justice. Just people seeming to be so surface-oriented. I had a hard time working in that. I just really wasn't enjoying it anymore.

In each of these cases, the participants' reframed understandings of authenticity and support in their work served as the foundation for their eventual quit decisions.

Taking stock. Devaluing and undermining experiences in the weathering stage likely indicate that disequilibrium remains unresolved by weathering behaviors. As a result, many individuals who previously projected being able to sustainably weather disequilibrium in the work context continue to exhibit increasingly diminished motivation, well-being, and fulfillment. Participant 3 indicated this diminished functionality as she discussed the stress she was experiencing in the public school context, saying, "I should be able to fix it. I'm so overwhelmed that I don't necessarily see a way to do that." Participant 12 demonstrated the impact of diminished functionality when she said, "I got to one of those points where I just felt like there was no balance in my life whatsoever." This lack of balance is indicative of diminished motivation, well-being, and fulfillment. Individuals who are in the weathering stage take stock of these key indicators of disequilibrium during orienting.

Unresolved concerns about authenticity can further diminish individuals' motivation during the weathering stage. Perceived inauthenticity can move teachers further from autonomous motivation for their work toward more extrinsic forms of motivation and even amotivation as their hopes for working authentically begin to fade. The shift from extrinsic motivation toward amotivation often occurs when external

motivators such as employment benefits and protection from adverse consequences are stripped away. Participant 1 commented on her shift toward amotivation as her extrinsic motivators were removed:

> I was no longer going to get paid for being a National Board Certified teacher. I was about to take a $12,000 pay cut. It was painful. It was painful, um, to know that that was coming and to have to put up with what I was putting up with in the classroom.

When this teacher's pay was cut, a key extrinsic factor that was motivating her to continue to work in the public school context was eliminated. As is evidenced in previous examples of undermining experiences in the weathering stage, many individuals encounter evidence that their complying and disengaging behaviors are ineffective at protecting them from adverse consequences in the public school context, as well. When extrinsic factors such as securing benefits and avoiding negative outcomes are no longer effective motivators for individuals in the work context, amotivation often begins to take root.

During the weathering stage, the increased stress and pervasive disequilibrium that arise during encountering often have a considerable impact upon individuals' well-being in the work context (Ragnarsdottir & Johannesson, 2014). The primary reason for this decline in well-being relates to working in circumstances characterized by high levels of demand combined with low levels of control or autonomy (Pretsch et al., 2012). In public schools, it is often assumed that "high demands should lead to work motivation and willingness to take action, but in the case that no action can be taken because control is lacking, this will lead to stress symptoms" (p. 332). In their attempts to comply with

high levels of demand, many teachers establish a habit of over-expending time and energy during weathering. Participant 3 experienced a prolonged struggle that forced her to confront the unsustainability of her work in the public school system. She explained,

> I really felt like more expenditure for a long time was the answer..., but there comes a point when you logically and physically and emotionally and realistically cannot give anymore than you're giving. And what do you do then, if your only answer is to do better, do more? It's a bad trap to be in.

Participant 8 stated, "There are so many pressures put on you as a teacher...most of which are really out of your control." Even so, many teachers' attempts to cope with these pressures cause their work to spill over into their time at home, consuming opportunities for renewal and further diminishing well-being and functionality. Participant 5 recalled, "I was working 10 to 12 hours a day every day. I still didn't stay caught up, and then I would take stuff home with me." Participant 3 explained that her attempts to comply with demands at work "consumed a lot of energy and since I wasn't ever able to replenish, I didn't have any support, I didn't have anybody backing me up, it did wear me out." Teachers in the weathering stage often feel exhausted, "beaten down" (P3, P4), and apathetic toward their work because their attempts to weather disequilibrium have depleted their resources and precluded their opportunities for renewal.

Depleting may occur when over-expenditure becomes unsustainable and cannot continue. Teachers who have depleted their time and energy exhibit numerous indicators of severely diminished well-being and compromised functionality in the workplace. Participant 3 talked about her frustration at being unable to improve her circumstances in the public school context, despite the time and energy she put into the attempt. She said,

"I don't have the means to, to solve, to resolve the anxiety about what I'm doing and the situations that I'm in. So, it's kind of a downhill slide." As Participant 5 indicated through her own experience with diminished functionality, the effect of depleting upon teachers' well-being can have a life-altering impact and often weighs heavily in teachers' decisions to leave public education.

> I think it finally caught up with me. I would go home and go to bed and stay until I got up the next morning. And that's when I decided I couldn't do that anymore. I just didn't have a life.

Individuals in the weathering stage often suffer from diminished fulfillment when their weathering behaviors ultimately prove to be unsustainable. Low levels of fulfillment in weathering are partially due to the fact that the main objective in weathering is just to get through the day. Because weathering tends to be inherently less authentic than previous courses for navigating disequilibrium, it is also inherently less fulfilling. Teachers who are engaged in weathering disequilibrium have generally shifted their focus away from upholding their core values by teaching authentically in order to concentrate upon simply surviving in the work context. Participant 2 talked about how diminished functionality in the workplace even reduced her fulfillment in working with students, which was a primary motivator for her in the beginning of her career:

> All along there were times when I was like, "I can't do this." Just the way it is in the classroom, working with kids, learning how to negotiate things with them, and having a hard time. It's hard. Middle school children are difficult to work with and it was not always fun.

Fulfillment in teaching tends to decline further when devaluing and undermining experiences during the weathering stage continue to perpetuate concerns about authenticity and support. Participant 9 reflected on his diminished fulfillment in teaching after encountering a lack of support for his efforts to comply with the system's mandated policies:

> I felt it had gotten to such a level of ridiculousness.... I'm to a point now where I don't dwell on that, because I did for a while. It really ate me up. I was working harder. I was putting in more hours. And that was a problem. And I'm like, okay, this makes no sense, because I can't work any harder than I'm already working and then I'm being slapped on the wrist for it.

Severely diminished fulfillment in teaching, such as is common during the weathering stage, has a negative impact on teachers' ability to sustain adequate levels of functionality in the public school context over time. Participant 4's diminished functionality in terms of motivation and psychological well-being clearly influenced her ability to enjoy her work in the public school system: "I would sit out in the car every morning for, like, 45 minutes, dreading going in the building." This example provides a crystal clear illustration of the potential negative impact that working in unresolved disequilibrium can have on individuals' sense of fulfillment and level of functionality in the work context.

Projecting. Along with reframing and taking stock, projecting is a key orienting behavior in navigating the cycle of decline. At the outset of weathering, expectations for authenticity and support in the work context are already considerably diminished. Based on devaluing and undermining experiences that occur during weathering, projecting leads to further modified expectations for authenticity and support based on first-hand

experience. Unfortunately, repeated devaluing experiences during the weathering stage tend to confirm and perpetuate concerns about inauthenticity in the work context. Participant 10 began to project concerns about authenticity in the future after continued devaluing experiences diminished her motivation, well-being, and fulfillment in teaching:

> It was just that by the third year in, I was like, okay these things should be getting easier, and they're not. What am I gonna do if it doesn't get easier? So I kind of had started thinking along the lines then, you know, what do I do if it doesn't get easier?

Individuals' projections for authenticity at this point in the cycle of decline are often so low that teachers may feel inclined to give up the hope of teaching authentically in the work context at any point in the future. Very low or no expectations for authenticity in the work context reflect the impact of diminished functionality in terms of an almost complete departure from any type of motivation for teaching in the work context.

In addition to low expectations for authenticity, individuals' projections for support at the end of the weathering stage are considerably diminished, as well. Continued undermining experiences during the weathering stage tend to heighten individuals' awareness of the amount of support that they require in light of the extent of the demands that are placed upon them, moving concerns about support to a more central place in their consciousness. Participant 3 related how her projections for support in the work context influenced her quit decision:

> It was like a major light bulb.... I realized at that point that I was trying to be reasonable in a system that did not value me at all, as a person, as a professional, as an educator, for what I contributed to the system. And I realized that if I was

> going to recover my self-confidence and regain my self-respect that I was going to have to leave.

Since diminished functionality increases individuals' needs for support, concerns about support are often at their peak near the end of the weathering stage. Participant 1 said, "I'm not saying that public school teachers are not wonderful. They are wonderful. It's the demands that are being put on them that they're having to try to recover from." Another participant echoed this concern about the lack of opportunities for recovery, lamenting that for many public school teachers in her experience, there wasn't even time "to lick your wounds at the end of the day" (P2). The lack of support for renewal and recovery, combined with high levels of demand and inauthentic priorities, cause many teachers in the cycle of decline to project very low expectations for authenticity and support in the public school context at the end of the weathering stage. In one participant's revealing words, "I just knew that I couldn't keep doing that for 24 more years" (P10).

Changing course. Through encountering and orienting in the weathering stage, many individuals project very low expectations or have no anticipation at all for authenticity in the public school context. When extrinsic factors such as the benefits of employment or the need for self-protection are no longer effective motivators, amotivation toward the work context is likely to replace other forms of motivation. Amotivation refers to "the state of lacking the intention to act" (Ryan & Deci, 2000b, p. 72). When individuals are amotivated in relation to the work context, they may enter the final stage of the cycle of decline: opting out.

Opting Out

The primary objective of the opting out stage of the cycle of decline is to avoid disequilibrium and its negative consequences by leaving the work context. Opting out behaviors are often adopted in response to prior undermining and devaluing experiences that reveal seemingly irreconcilable concerns about authenticity and support in the work context. These encounters give rise to and perpetuate disequilibrium that may appear, based on previous experiences in the work context, to be fundamentally irresolvable. In this case, individuals may "opt out" of seemingly immutable circumstances associated with the work context by resigning from their positions. In Santoro's (2011) words, many teachers "leave when they view their current work as unrecognizable in relation to their ideals" (p. 6). The decision to opt out can occur at any point in an individuals' career, but is most common when expectations for authenticity and support are low and functionality in the work context is considerably diminished. For this reason, opting out is the final stage in the cycle of decline. Opting out allows individuals to re-envision their potential as employees in more authentic and supportive circumstances or to escape from the work context and the disequilibrium it engenders.

Expectations. Prior to opting out, expectations for authenticity in the work context are formed based on previous encounters with disequilibrium. Opting out is often determined to be the most effective course for overcoming disequilibrium when expectations for authenticity in the work context are very low, meaning that teachers perceive they will be unable to work in ways that are supportive of their student-centered values for teaching at any point in the future. Henning (2011) described how perceived inauthenticity can motivate individuals to opt out: "Fear of remaining stuck in a stage of

life that no longer 'fits' may be impetus to face the…fear of an uncertain future" (p. 447). The lack of value congruence or authenticity faced by many public school teachers can, over time, simply become too much to bear.

For teachers who are opting out, the level of motivation for work in the current context may be nonexistent. Ryan and Deci (2000b) referred to this condition as *amotivation*. Amotivation toward the work context is a definitive property of the opting out stage. Teachers who are amotivated in relation to the work context are no longer moved to action by factors inherent to the current work context, such as the potential for authentic and fulfilling work with students. Participant 7 said, "I feel like if I had been able to make the difference in public education that I thought I was going to be able to when I graduated, probably would have motivated me to stay a little bit longer." At this advanced stage in the cycle of decline, most teachers have all but abandoned their initial hopes for "making a difference" (P1, P10) in students' lives by actualizing their core values in the work context. Instead, the impetus for opting out is motivated by factors outside of the work context, such as the promise of more authentic and meaningful work, more supportive working conditions, or the opportunity to recover from the stress and frustration of working in unresolved disequilibrium. Thus, motivation for opting out reflects teachers' desire to leave the work context, rather than any sort of motivation to pursue further struggles against inauthenticity within its parameters.

The degree of support individuals expect in the work context plays a critical role in determining which opting out behavior is embraced as a means of making an exit from the work context. Re-envisioning and escaping, the behaviors associated with the opting out stage of the cycle of decline, each reflect different levels of expected support from the

work context. Re-envisioning entails moderate expectations for support, which can allow for a carefully orchestrated and relatively orderly exit from the work context. In contrast, escaping may be precipitated by very low expectations for support combined with a generally dysfunctional state arising from working in unresolved disequilibrium. Each of these opting out behaviors is discussed in detail in the following sections.

Opting out behaviors. There are two behaviors associated with the opting out stage of the cycle of decline: *re-envisioning* and *escaping*.

Re-envisioning. Re-envisioning is an opting out behavior in which individuals project moderate support in their immediate future in the work context, which allows them to have some degree of flexibility in the manner in which they plan and execute their departure. Teachers who opt out of the public school context through re-envisioning are primarily focused on leaving the current work context behind in search of more authentic and supportive conditions for employment. For instance, Participant 11 explained that his primary reason for leaving the public school system was to search for "curricular flexibility that allowed for self-expression as a teacher." Another teacher who had decided to opt out engaged in re-envisioning when she began to ask herself, "If I can't stay in the classroom forever, what else could I do to still be of service to others?" (P10). In re-envisioning, the altruistic inclinations that prompt individuals to seek careers in education in the first place often dictate the type of careers they pursue after public school (Tyink, 2006). The vast majority of participants continue to teach in venues outside of K-12 public education, such as private schools, colleges and universities, consulting firms, tutoring agencies, and in other capacities that center on helping people

learn and grow. Re-envisioning allows individuals to consider options for the future and tie up loose ends in the current work context.

One benefit of re-envisioning is that individuals often have the opportunity to line up new employment before notifying the previous employer of their decision to opt out. Prior to resigning from her public school teaching position, Participant 1 secured a new teaching engagement at a private school where the work conditions are supportive of her desire to work authentically by focusing her time and energy on student-centered teaching. Of this new teaching context, she said,

> I have an hour class time. I only have four classes. I have right at 60 kids. They can write essays and I can read them and have time to grade them and comment on them. We write research papers. We build, we construct, we think... I mean, I'm a teacher again. I am back to, "I can change the world. I can make a difference."

Opting out often gives the appearance of being a terminal decision that marks an unfortunate end, especially in the literature on teacher attrition and turnover, which characterizes former public school teachers as *leavers* and which is focused primarily on the health and sustainability of the public school system (Henry, Bastian, & Fortner, 2011; Ingersoll, 2001; Shen, 1997). However, for individual teachers who have been navigating the downhill slide of the cycle of decline, leaving the public school system through re-envisioning often feels more like a new beginning than an end. Long before acting upon her decision to opt out of her position in the public school system, Participant 2 had already begun to re-envision her potential as an influential force in education. She said, "I was going to get my degree and I was going to find a way to go past teaching in

the classroom." She later explained how this vision for the future helped to sustain her during the remainder of her employment in the public school context, describing a feeling of "relief in knowing that I had alternate paths that I had worked hard to create. I could do something else." For many teachers who resolve the cycle of decline by opting out, re-envisioning simply represents a pathway to a better future after the motivation to contend with disequilibrium in the public school context is gone.

Escaping. In contrast to the orderly departure that characterizes opting out through re-envisioning, opting out by escaping from the work context is a more pressing matter and often entails a more chaotic exit. Escaping is an opting out behavior in which individuals leave the work context at the earliest opportunity to avoid further decline. For teachers who are escaping, "The stress of working in schools erodes their resources and leaves them without energy to continue in their jobs" (Santoro, 2011, p. 10). When expectations for support are extremely low and the expenditure of time and energy required to meet the level of demand in the context has become unsustainable, opting out through escaping from the work context may become necessary. Teachers' growing concerns about the sustainability of their work, the high level of demand, the lack of support for basic psychological needs, and the over-expenditure of time and energy combine to create the state of disequilibrium, which, when left unresolved over time can lead to a steady decline in motivation, well-being, and fulfillment. In escaping, teachers leave the teaching context primarily to avoid this continued decline. For example, Participant 1 began to see the toll that working in disequilibrium had begun to take on her psychological well-being and general outlook. This realization increased the pressure she felt to opt out of the public school system:

> I had become very negative. And that was what I had to get away from. I could not do that. I couldn't be that negative teacher that I dreaded seeing in the morning that was like, "Oh, I hope today's better than yesterday." I just couldn't stand that.

Teachers who are caught up in the cycle of decline eventually encounter a point when their functionality is so diminished and their resources so depleted that they must "draw the line" (P7, P8) on efforts to resolve and weather disequilibrium in order to seek renewal outside of the public school context.

Some teachers experience escaping as a traumatic and sudden event, often occurring soon after significant devaluing and undermining experiences in the work context. When work responsibilities routinely began to encroach on family time, Participant 10 left the public school context as soon as she was able. She said, "The deciding factor in me leaving was just me being able to be with my children and spend time with them and not have anything else hanging over me." Because of a stressful series of devaluing and undermining experiences, Participant 3 decided to act on her decision to opt out several weeks before the end of the school year. In her words, this choice was made "not because I didn't love teaching and not because I didn't love my students. I left because I was broken by the system."

The abruptness and intensity of the need to escape the public school context can leave some teachers with a sense of loss and regret. Participant 3 described the psychological impact of her escape from public school, saying,

> I chose to quit because that was the best thing for me at that time. Even so, it was the worst break up of my life. I've never had a boy hurt my feelings that bad. I've

> never had anything ever break my heart that bad. I mourned for that job. I still mourn for that job.

When Participant 4 was asked if she would consider returning to teach in the public school context, she replied,

> I've been thinking about it just because, you know, the money, but...I don't know. I have just kind of been soured by it right now. Just even the thought of going back in, like, makes your stomach curl.

Although some teachers' may view their eventual decision to leave public education as a failure to uphold and follow through on their student-centered values, many also recognize the obvious necessity of preserving and honoring one's own needs and values when they are threatened:

> It was good that I quit. I didn't want to quit, but it was good that I did. If I was going to continue to be a self-respecting human being and do right by myself, I could not stay there. (P3)

Through the cycle of decline, countless public school teachers fall out of love with their jobs as the result of unresolved disequilibrium. Diminished motivation, well-being, and fulfillment ultimately cause many teachers to opt out of the context that undermines their efforts to uphold student-centered values for teaching.

Conclusion

There are four stages in the cycle of decline: embarking, resolving, weathering, and opting out. In the context of public education, teachers often embark upon their careers with high expectations for authentic work in a supportive environment. However, many teachers soon encounter experiences in the work context that give rise to

disequilibrium by diminishing their motivation, well-being, and fulfillment in their work. After discovering disequilibrium through experiences in the work context, teachers proceed through the stages of orienting and changing course to determine new ways of navigating disequilibrium in the public school context. After the embarking stage, teachers often attempt to resolve disequilibrium by actualizing their values through their work in the public school context. If efforts to resolve disequilibrium are unsuccessful or unsustainable, teachers may adopt a weathering approach to navigating. Some teachers weather disequilibrium by complying with the sanctioned objectives of the public school system, while others simply disengage mentally and emotionally from the teaching context in order to survive. When persistent disequilibrium is deemed too unbearable to weather any longer, many teachers determine that opting out of the public school context altogether may be the only viable option for safely navigating free of the dangerous waters of disequilibrium.

Although not all individuals move through the stages of the cycle of decline in the order they are presented here, this progression of stages represents a general conceptualization of teachers' experiences with decline arising from disequilibrium. Once established, this cycle of decline can lead to diminished persistence, turnover intentions, and quit decisions among employees who are experiencing unresolved disequilibrium. Participants' failed attempts to navigate disequilibrium in the public school context resulted in their entrapment in the cycle of decline and in their eventual decisions to leave their jobs in the public school context.

Section 5 will provide my conclusions and interpretation of the theory of navigating the cycle of decline in the context of the existing body of relevant literature,

followed by a discussion of the theory’s implications for social change, recommendations for action, and recommendations for further study. Section 5 will conclude with my personal reflection on the research experience and the resulting conceptual theory of navigating the cycle of decline.

Section 5: Implications and Recommendations for Further Study

Overview

The purpose of this GT study was to generate a relevant, useful theory that accounted for underlying conceptual patterns in the experiences of former Georgia public school teachers. Continuing research on the circumstances and behaviors that contribute to teachers' decisions to leave public education is critical to fully understanding and ultimately minimizing the negative impact of teacher turnover in Georgia's public schools. The current study's GT of navigating the cycle of decline can help satisfy the urgent need for relevant and applicable scholarly research in education as a foundation for positive change. The theory of navigating the cycle of decline provides a conceptual framework for understanding and discussing the experiences of teachers who ultimately choose to leave public education.

The study used classic GT methodology to produce the theory of navigating the cycle of decline through constant comparative analysis of participant data. The study's final product conceptualizes former Georgia teachers' attempts to navigate the cycle of decline in the public school context. In navigating, teachers perceived, made sense of, and attempted to cope with disequilibrium, an internal sense of functional imbalance indicated by diminished motivation, well-being, and fulfillment. Navigating is comprised of three steps: encountering, orienting, and changing course. In encountering, teachers encounter devaluing and undermining experiences in the school context that give rise to concerns about authenticity and support in the workplace. During orienting, teachers attempt to work through the disorientation and tension that arise from experiences in the

encountering stage by reframing their understandings of the teaching context, taking stock of the impact of disequilibrium on their functionality, and then making projections about the authenticity and support they can expect in the work context in the future. In changing course, teachers select or adopt new courses of action that they perceive to be potentially viable means of managing disequilibrium based on their expectations for the work context and current level of functionality. Changing course entails moving to a different stage in the cycle of decline. This process of navigating occurs cyclically throughout many teachers' careers.

As they navigate, some teachers progress through the four stages of the cycle of decline: embarking, resolving, weathering, and opting out. Each stage is defined by a specific motivational orientation and objectives. At the outset of the embarking stage, teachers have not yet begun to experience disequilibrium in the teaching context; however, navigating is initiated as teachers begin to encounter devaluing and undermining experiences in relation to their work in the public school context. Resolving is often the next stage of the cycle of decline, in which teachers attempt to resolve disequilibrium by addressing their underlying concerns about the authenticity of their work. Resolving behaviors are autonomously motivated; teachers in the resolving stage are attempting to teach authentically in ways that align with their personal values for teaching. When disequilibrium persists and concerns about authenticity and support remain unresolved, weathering generally follows resolving as the next stage in the cycle of decline. In weathering, teachers simply attempt to endure concerns about authenticity and support by complying with or disengaging from the work context. When weathering proves to be an ineffective course of action for mitigating disequilibrium, many teachers

enter the final stage in the cycle of decline: opting out. Opting out of the public school context occurs when teachers perceive that their concerns about authenticity and support in the work context cannot be resolved sustainably or that their diminished functionality prevents them from effectively coping with the demands of the public school context. This progression through the various stages of the cycle of decline provides a conceptualization of the process through which public school teachers become leavers.

Interpretation of Findings

The study's final theory is grounded in the lived experiences of former public school teachers. Data were gathered through open-ended interviews that were initiated with the following grand tour prompt: "Tell me about your experiences as a public school teacher." In place of preconceived guiding research questions, this broad prompt captured the study's initial area of interest and allowed participants to select relevant topics that were of the most interest and concern from their perspectives. This groundedness and the careful application of the GT procedure of constant comparative analysis allow me to confidently present several key conclusions for consideration.

First, the theory of navigating the cycle of decline reveals a clear link between disequilibrium, which arises from concerns about authenticity and support, and the trend of decline that many teachers experience as they work in public schools. The study suggests that teachers need to do authentic, meaningful work that is aligned with their student-centered values for teaching. They need to have adequate support for exercising their professional autonomy, demonstrating and developing competence, and cultivating meaningful, positive relationships with colleagues, students, administrators, and parents. When these needs for authenticity and support are met, teachers are more likely to

experience and maintain functional equilibrium, a state that allows them to consistently rise to the challenges of teaching in public schools with resilience and confidence.

The link between disequilibrium and decline is specifically related to teachers' functionality in terms of motivation, well-being, and fulfillment. Numerous studies have substantiated clear links between authenticity (value congruence) and positive outcomes like optimal functioning (Ren, 2010; Supeli & Creed, 2014), autonomous motivation (Dahlgaard-Park, 2012; Parks & Guay, 2012; Suar & Khuntia, 2010), well-being (Kinsler, 2014; Peachey & Bruening, 2012; Vveinhardt & Gulbovaite, 2013), and job satisfaction (Bao et al., 2013; Kanchana, 2013). The same holds true for the link between positive outcomes and adequate support for psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000b; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Wang & Liu, 2008). When teachers' basic needs go unsatisfied, however, teachers begin to experience disequilibrium. Because of the struggles, stress, and tension that accompany unresolved disequilibrium, teachers can become less capable of sustaining their efforts to successfully manage their myriad responsibilities over time.

If teachers can resolve their concerns about authenticity and support and find ways within the public school context to meet their basic needs, then they can rally from their encounters with disequilibrium and recover their lost functionality. Unfortunately, in cases where teachers' concerns about the authenticity of their work or the level of support they receive in the public school context cannot be resolved, disequilibrium persists and functionality is continually diminished over time, making it more and more difficult for teachers to reestablish equilibrium, especially in light of their waning motivation, compromised well-being, and dwindling fulfillment. Declining functionality tends to be

the deciding factor in many teachers' progression through the stages of the cycle of decline, moving them from more motivated, positive, and fulfilling behaviors, such as those associated with the embarking and resolving stages, toward the less motivated, less healthy, and less fulfilling behaviors related to the weathering stage. When teachers become trapped in decline, they may soon discover that their persistence and commitment to teaching in public schools are in decline, as well, which often leads them into the final stage of the cycle of decline: opting out.

Another conclusion afforded by the current study's theory is that teachers who are sincerely committed to their student-centered values for teaching may be at special risk of succumbing to attrition from public schools. Participant 9 reflected,

> The teachers that care the most are the ones that burn themselves up. They're the ones that take it personally. Those are the best teachers and those are the ones that find it the hardest to accept the fact that there are so many challenges.

Buchanan (2012) echoes this sentiment that passionate teachers are prone to attrition, saying, "Ironically, these ex-teachers' enthusiastic, idealistic, star-crossed love of teaching might have been the root of their downfall" (p. 214). The current study indicated that teachers who are intensely committed to actualizing their values in public schools risk taking a hard fall after encountering devaluing experiences in their work. Teachers' values have an authentic, intrinsic authority that many aspects of the public school system, such as bottom-line reform initiatives and other imposed changes, do not (McCrickerd, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2012; Santoro & Morehouse, 2011). The greater discrepancy between a teacher's values and the expectations and demands of the teaching context, the more likely it is that the teacher will experience the apprehension, instability,

and duress that characterize disequilibrium. Unfortunately, many of the seemingly less-authentic aspects of public education are related to factors outside of teachers' control (Kuhn, 2014; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Stone et al., 2009; Swanson & Huff, 2010). Upon perceiving that many of their most troubling concerns about public education are outside the realm of their influence, teachers who are deeply committed to upholding their intrinsic values for teaching in the public school context may be at risk of becoming leavers. To some, resigning may simply present the most practical approach to casting off the burden of disequilibrium in public schools.

Third, the theory of navigating the cycle of decline suggests that the further decline progresses, the more difficult recovering from decline becomes. Early in the cycle of decline, in the resolving stage for instance, teachers are generally still autonomously motivated to teach as they seek ways to work authentically and sustainably in the public school context. At this early stage, the impact of disequilibrium is likely to have only minimally diminished their psychological well-being and they still anticipate that they will find ways to do fulfilling and meaningful work. At this stage, resolving disequilibrium and recovering from decline is possible with adequate intervention and support to help teachers resolve their concerns about the authenticity of their work. However, once teachers abandon their autonomous efforts to resolve disequilibrium in favor of more passive tactics such as complying and disengaging in the weathering stage, redressing the damage inflicted upon teachers' motivation, well-being, and fulfillment and restoring their hopes for doing authentic work may require more extensive intervention and greater levels of support.

One reason that decline can become harder to combat as it progresses may be that diminished functionality increases teachers' needs for support. As functionality declines because of unresolved disequilibrium, challenges that previously seemed stimulating and exciting may begin to seem uninteresting or even threatening; workloads that previously seemed manageable may represent hopeless endeavors for teachers who are experiencing unresolved disequilibrium. In this compromised state, teachers need additional support and decreased demands to allow them to recover from the impact of disequilibrium. Unfortunately, many teachers do not receive the support they need in the public school context and therefore begin to fail, which further perpetuates the cycle of decline. Several studies have noted that failure begets further failure, just as decline perpetuates further decline (Benabou, 2002; Swanson & Huff, 2010). As they grow less motivated, less healthy, and less fulfilled, teachers are often left to contend with seemingly overwhelming challenges in the public school context with little or no support. Eventually, teachers who are in decline and foresee no improvement in their prospects for recovery or support may feel as if they have no choice but to leave the public school context altogether to escape the cycle of decline and find relief from their continual struggles with disequilibrium.

Fourth, the current study's data yielded numerous instances where former teachers encountered circumstances that impacted their sense of autonomy or competence, but the third psychological need, relatedness, held a much less prominent place in the data. After careful analysis of the data, I propose that many of the participants may have had very little positive social interaction with others in their public school positions. Collaboration, friendship, supportive colleagues, and other evidence of

fulfilled relatedness needs were mentioned very rarely in the data. Although participants did not often specifically mention the impact of unfulfilled relatedness needs, it is possible that they may not have realized their relatedness needs were going unmet. A lack of support for relatedness is problematic because interpersonal support that is integral to meaning making processes. Conklin (2012) explained that "the world of meaning is created through talk, action, and image" (p. 302) and many of these teachers may have been unable to actualize this meaning-making domain because of their isolation and diminished functionality. Since high levels of demand tend to isolate teachers by limiting opportunities for collaboration or camaraderie (Pucella, 2011), participant data hinted at a considerable lack of social support in the public school context. A lack of social support from working in circumstances that undermine relatedness may be closely related to participants' tendency toward decline.

Implications for Social Change

The primary purpose of the current study was to generate a theory that is useful in supporting positive social change in the field of education, so it is not surprising that the theory of navigating the cycle of decline has strong implications for social change at both the local and professional levels.

As the product of a GT study, the theory of navigating the cycle of decline is designed to "make sense and be understandable to the people working in the substantive area" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 239-240). The appeal of a GT study is that it can be understood and used by stakeholders in Georgia's public school system to address local problems by providing "relevant conceptual and perceptual empowerment over the continual resolving of their concerns" (Glaser, 1998, p. 8). The cycle of decline is a

daunting but reversible trend. The current study revealed that teachers leave their public school jobs because their operational functionality is compromised from the impact of unresolved disequilibrium, which fuels the cycle of decline. By acknowledging and responding to the tell-tale signs of this degenerative cycle, stakeholders on the local level in public education can help to arrest decline, resolve disequilibrium, and retain experienced teachers who care deeply about serving students well. By helping to combat teacher attrition, applying the theory of navigating the cycle of decline may be useful in supporting public schools' efforts to bolster student performance and achievement (AEE, 2005; Davidson, 2007; Guarino et al., 2006; NCTAF, 2010; Truscott et al., 2012) and may even contribute to the resolution of other problems that are related to high teacher turnover.

On a professional level, this GT's theory can potentially contribute to the development of practices and policies designed to increase teacher retention in public schools across the nation (Cherubini, 2008; Glaser, 2011). Although the theory of navigating the cycle of decline is grounded in data collected through interviews with former Georgia public school teachers, it is comprised of concepts relating to general patterns of human behavior, rather than specific substantive details that bind it to its context of origin. The conceptual nature of the theory expands its reach to address the conceptual import of teachers' experiences in the broader context of public education (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998, 2011). The theory of navigating the cycle of decline can help education stakeholders perceive the complex interconnectedness among the institutions and individuals that comprise the public education system in the broadest sense.

Recommendations for Action

I have several recommendations for the practical application of the theory of navigating the cycle of decline in the context of public education. By identifying teachers who are in decline, providing opportunities for authenticity and support for basic psychological needs, and intervening early to help resolve teachers' concerns, education stakeholders and policymakers can use the theory of navigating the cycle of decline to address some of the underlying problems in education that have been shown to lead to early teacher attrition.

First, applying grounded action (GA) would create an opportunity to develop a grounded action plan for utilizing and extending the current study's theory in the public school context. The theory of navigating the cycle of decline could be "applied to a specific problem or issue, as discovered during the research process, thereby generating an operational theory" that explains what needs to be done in the social context (Simmons, 2006, p. 488). An action plan could then be developed for implementing this operational theory. The action plan is concerned with the actual circumstances, time, power, and other resources necessary to operationalize the theory and "provides an opportunity for making informed decisions about how to practically and systematically achieve constructive outcomes" (Simmons, 2006, p. 488). Next, action is taken to implement the action plan; this action "constitutes an empirical test of the explanatory and operational theory" (Simmons, 2006, p. 488). Finally, transformative learning is instituted as an ongoing practice in GA because "actions produce changes in systems that, in turn, produce new and/or unexpected outcomes" (Simmons, 2006, p. 488). GA is a responsible and powerful approach to implementing a GT such as the theory of

navigating the cycle of decline in the context of the public school system. GA recognizes the importance of acknowledging the impact of an intervention and takes advantage of the opportunity to monitor the consequences and benefits that arise through reform. This extension of the GT methodology can provide a powerful bridge between theory and practice in education that can lay the foundation for meaningful social change in public schools.

Although the practical application of the theory of navigating the cycle of decline would be thoroughly explored in the grounded action process, there are several straightforward possibilities for application suggested by the theory itself. For instance, the theory of navigating the cycle of decline could be used as a diagnostic tool for identifying teachers who are at risk of succumbing to the cycle of decline. By considering teachers' levels of autonomous motivation, well-being, and fulfillment, administrators, policymakers, and even teachers themselves might be able to better assess the impact of working in unresolved disequilibrium upon functionality in the public school context. As a roadmap to the various stages of decline in public school teaching, the theory of navigating the cycle of decline can help teachers better understand their experiences in the public school context in terms of their impact on functionality. More importantly, understanding the conceptual contributors to the cycle of decline, such as perceived inauthenticity and inadequate support for basic psychological needs, may be able to help teachers identify resourceful ways to meet their own needs for authenticity and support.

The third recommendation is that education stakeholders seek ways to identify and address teachers' concerns about authenticity in public education. One possible method for identifying potentially inauthentic aspects of public education would be by

gaining a clearer understanding of teachers' core values for teaching and the impact of these values upon teaching beliefs and practice. This strategy could provide schools and education systems with information that will allow them to guard against inherently inauthentic influences in education, while seeking ways to promote authentic teaching opportunities within the parameters of the public school context. Several attrition studies have suggested that stakeholders use value surveys or diagnostics to assess employees' personal values so they can better align organizational practices with these values (Bao et al., 2013; Ilangovan & Durdoss, 2009).

Another recommendation for action would be that stakeholders in public education seek out ways to identify and address teachers' concerns about support. Since teachers' needs for support in the work context can vary based on their level of motivation, well-being, and fulfillment, teachers may perceive an increasing lack of support as their functionality declines, even if the degree of demand in the work context stays the same. Unresolved concerns about support can cause teachers to perceive their efforts to function effectively in the work context as increasingly difficult to sustain; as a result, many teachers may begin to adopt less effective and less functional ways of coping with the demands and responsibilities of their jobs, as is indicated by the stages of the cycle of decline. According to Brien et al. (2012), "The needs of teachers must be taken into account in order to ensure that they have the psychological tools necessary to perform adequately without being overwhelmed by the demands and stressors particular to the scholastic environment" (Brien et al., 2012, p. 288). The current study's concept of the cycle of decline can help education stakeholders understand the relationship between functionality and perceived need for support, thereby improving the likelihood that

increased support can be provided to those teachers who are suffering from decline. Bao et al. (2013) recommended that organizations address employees' concerns about support by attempting to reduce sources of work-related stress and by adjusting work conditions to entail less demand and increased support. Roffey (2012) suggested that, "teacher resilience might be enhanced by specific actions that promote positive feelings of belonging, respect, value, and trust" (p. 8). If policy makers and administrators could design policy and procedures that are intentionally respectful of teachers' limited time and energy and supportive of teachers' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, then teachers might be less likely to suffer from unresolved concerns about support and, thereby, less likely to lapse into the cycle of decline. Further, support-centered policymaking and school management strategies might allow teachers who have been in decline to recover and ultimately be retained.

Because disequilibrium can become more difficult to resolve the longer it persists, the final recommendation for action is that education stakeholders find ways to intervene early in teachers' careers, before the cycle of decline advances and teachers' functionality in terms of motivation, well-being, and fulfillment becomes too diminished. Decreased functionality raises needs for support, so the further the cycle of decline advances, the more support teachers are likely to need to recover from the impact of unresolved disequilibrium. Understanding the nature of decline may help public school administrators and policymakers to provide additional support to teachers at every stage of the cycle of decline as teachers struggle to resolve their concerns and overcome disequilibrium. If teachers who are experiencing decline are provided with support interventions that bolster autonomous motivation, well-being, and fulfillment, they may

be able to overcome their struggle with decline and be retained in the public school system, instead of simply enduring their frustrating circumstances or opting out.

Recommendations for Further Study

The current study's limitations and delimitations, combined with the potential of the theory of navigating the cycle of decline to inform positive social change in education, give rise to several key recommendations for further study.

First, the current study revealed that, using modern social networking platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn, a long-neglected population of former teachers may be more accessible for education research than in the past. To date, former teachers have been the focus of very little scholarly education research, perhaps because they are unaffiliated with any particular organization, which may have made them difficult to locate and recruit. However, the advent and widespread use of social networking technology has provided an unexpected avenue for reaching out to and learning from this population. For this reason, I recommend that education researchers conduct additional studies using new avenues and technologies for sampling former teachers to garner the benefit of the rich data that can be provided by the members of public education's lost workforce.

Second, the current GT study's delimitation to former public school teachers could be broadened in future research endeavors to include teachers who are still employed in public education. Examining the various conceptual components of the theory among a population of educators that is still experiencing the influence of the public school context would provide a more complete picture of the cycle of decline. Such a study would make the existing theory more useful and complete by exploring how

continuing teachers may avoid or recover from the cycle of decline. At the present time, the theory of navigating the cycle of decline accounts only for the impact of negative encounters and the negative outcomes of working in unresolved disequilibrium that result in the cycle of decline. By analyzing the experiences of practicing teachers, the expanded GT study could provide insight into the nature of positive encounters in the public school context that may allow individuals to resolve concerns and reestablish functional equilibrium in teaching. The current study offers no account of the teacher qualities that help teachers resolve their concerns or endure the public school context despite their concerns. However, Pretsch et al. (2012) found that "resilience can buffer the negative consequences of the specific characteristics of the teaching profession and therefore contributes to the maintenance of general health and job satisfaction" (p. 332). Although the concept of resilience, which is associated with equilibrium and retention in the literature (Henning, 2011; Pretsch et al., 2012), did not emerge in the current study, this potentially relevant teacher quality may emerge in an expanded GT study to round out a more complete conceptualization of the theory of navigating the cycle of decline. Further, there are likely legions of teachers who are simply weathering disequilibrium and persisting in the cycle of decline until they become eligible for retirement. If this is the case, further study of the cycle of decline might shed light on these teachers' predicament and provide insights on how we might support and encourage teachers who are seemingly locked into the weathering stage of the cycle of decline.

Third, verificational quantitative and qualitative methodologies might provide additional insight into the nature of the cycle of decline. For instance, a comparative quantitative study using data from surveys or questionnaires might be useful for

determining if various components of the cycle of decline are more prevalent in former or practicing teachers. A qualitative follow-up study might provide compelling case studies of former and practicing teachers' experiences with components of the cycle of decline, which would allow researchers to explore how teachers attempt to navigate disequilibrium in descriptive, rather than conceptual, terms. This recommendation is in line with Glaser's (1992) suggestion that verificational studies can be a useful way of extending and validating the theoretical results of GT research.

The fourth recommendation arises from a need to study the cycle of decline in other disciplines. The data from which this theory emerged was derived from the experiences of former teachers in Georgia's public school system, but the theory itself reflects patterns of human behavior that account for and conceptually elevate the experiences of specific people, places, and things in the data (Glaser, 1978). The theory of navigating the cycle of decline can help to explain and predict the behavior of individuals in any discipline that has the potential for misalignment between employees' personal values and the work they are expected to do in a given context (Glaser, 1978, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For instance, service-oriented or fundamentally altruistic professions in disciplines such as education, medicine, journalism, or research are theoretically concerned with "making a difference" in the world and in other people's lives. However, in the practical setting of the work context, such high ideals may be swept aside in favor of other obligations and priorities espoused by an employing organization. For individuals employed in these fields, the conflicting commitments between their personal values for the profession and the operational norms of the work context often lead to concerns about authenticity and support in relation to the work

context. These concerns may cause individuals to experience disequilibrium, which, if left unresolved, may result in decline. Understanding the cycle of decline as a human behavioral pattern emerging in response to certain circumstances in the work context may have considerable implications for education, as well as a range of other disciplines, in future research.

Reflection

Conducting a GT study was a richly rewarding experience that presented a range of stimulating intellectual and organizational challenges. Although I had studied the GT methodology at length before conducting the study itself, I soon discovered that the methodology in practice is much more dynamic and responsive to the data than I had anticipated. As constant comparative analysis progressed and new data came pouring in from interviews, I soon understood Glaser's (1998) caution about the importance of being able to tolerate confusion and ambiguity during a GT study, as well. The profusion of data, codes, and memos at times had the potential to become overwhelming, but through the systematic application of the GT methodology, I was able to fracture the data into codes, discover the underlying patterns, and then re-integrate the resulting theoretical codes and illustrations from the data into a coherent theory. From the beginning, I have been a staunch believer in the power of GT as a tool for understanding the root of problematic trends in education. My personal experience with the application of the methodology only reinforced this belief.

My interest in former teachers' experiences was kindled when I became a leaver myself after 7 years as a teacher in a public high school in rural North Georgia. As I reflected upon my own experiences and witnessed other teachers leaving the profession

as I had, I began to wonder why so many seemingly competent and caring teachers end up opting out of their jobs in public schools. A combination of personal experiences, observations, and curious informal study on the topic gave rise to a lingering personal and professional concern that has culminated in the current study. Although I have a strong love for the profession of teaching and am a committed believer in the work of teachers, I was careful to minimize my preconceptions and set aside my personal experiences through several GT strategies and techniques. My sincere interest in discovering the trends in teachers' experiences that lead them to the decision to leave their public school careers only further motivated me to control carefully for biased perspectives and preconceived expectations as I collected and analyzed data. Thankfully, many of the mechanisms of the GT methodology are designed to help researchers minimize bias and preconception.

In the researcher role, I also placed high value on participants' first-hand experiences and took steps to safeguard their narratives from any influence or guidance on my own part. Since the participants I interviewed were fellow former teachers and tended to share my interest in education, our interactions were enjoyable and the interview process often felt more conversational than formal. Since I was professionally unaffiliated with my participants and since the majority of them were already involved in new careers outside of public education, I believe that the data I gathered through interviews was candid and genuine.

When I undertook this study, I was looking for an explanation that would account for the attrition of those teachers who appear to be "on fire" when they enter the public school context. Starting out, I was passionate, energetic, and committed, but, somewhere

along the way, I had become weary, frustrated, and pessimistic. When I left the public school system, I felt like a failure. I still cared deeply about my students, so I felt as if I had abandoned them, especially since improving the lives of my students was the aspect of my job that I cared about the most. I was plagued by the thought that I just couldn't "cut it," and that my students and my school lost out in the bargain. However, in the process of conducting this study, I discovered that passion, no matter how genuine, no matter how compelling, simply isn't enough to fuel the incredibly challenging work of teaching in public schools. Opportunities to teach authentically in line with student-centered values, along with support for pedagogical experimentation, professional growth, and shared relationships are the keys to a sustainable, dynamic career in public education. This realization is perhaps the most significant personal outcome of this research for me.

Conclusion

Most educators choose to teach because they are intrinsically motivated to help others and aspire to have a positive impact on the lives of their students. Because teachers often view their work as a personal calling rather than a simple job, teachers tend to identify themselves as educators outside the context of a particular teaching position, school, or system (Ahmad & Ahmad, 2014). For this reason, the term "leaver" may be an inaccurate representation of many former public school teachers' commitment to education. Although they are certainly leaving the pattern of decline they encounter in public schools behind, former teachers might be more accurately described as *goers* who are heading out into the world to seek new venues where they can continue their work of serving others. Although leaving the public school system does not necessarily constitute

a serious professional loss for individual teachers who opt out, the effects of teacher attrition have far reaching consequences for schools and students.

Finding ways to support and retain teachers who are in decline is critical for stemming the exodus of qualified, caring teachers from our public schools. All teachers have tremendous potential to make a positive impact and bring their best selves to work in service of students in America's public schools. Ryan and Deci (2000a) capture the essence of this essential human tendency toward self-actualization and success:

> The fullest representations of humanity show people to be curious, vital and self-motivated. At their best, they are agentic and inspired, striving to learn, extend themselves, master new skills, and apply themselves responsibly. That most people show considerable effort, agency, and commitment appears, in fact, to be more normative than exceptional, suggesting some very positive persistent features of human nature. (p. 68)

This view of humanity as fundamentally productive and actualized is at the heart of the current study's focus on the experiences of Georgia's former public school teachers. In light of this belief, the widespread prevalence of early, voluntary attrition and general teacher turnover indicates that something is amiss in America's public schools. More importantly, this view of humanity and its educators, represents a ray of hope among the often overwhelming challenges that seem to characterize public education: if the social context of our public schools can somehow be reformed to support and sustain teachers as professionals *and* as human beings, America's educators will likely demonstrate their ability, and perhaps even inherent inclination, to excel in their professional responsibilities with effort, enthusiasm, creativity, and commitment.

References

Adams, G. J. (1996). Using a Cox regression model to examine voluntary teacher turnover. *Journal of Experimental Education, 64*(3), 267–285.

Afolabi, C., Nweke, W., Eads, G., & Stephens, C. (2007, May*). The cost of teacher attrition and savings from reducing teacher attrition.* Atlanta, GA: Georgia Professional Standards Commission, Educator Workforce Recruitment, Research and Development.

Ahmad, A., & Ahmad, R. (2014). Which is the better predictor of employee turnover intentions: Job satisfaction or organizational commitment? A literature review. *International Journal of Information, Business & Management*, *6*(1), 2-10.

Allen, D. G., & Shanock, L. (2013). Perceived organizational support and embeddedness as key mechanisms connecting socialization tactics to commitment and turnover among new employees. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *34*(3), 350-369. doi:10.1002/job.1805

Alliance for Excellent Education. (2005, August). *Teacher attrition: A costly loss to the nation and to the states.* Washington, DC: Author.

Alliance for Excellent Education. (2008, February). *What keeps good teachers in the classroom? Understanding and reducing teacher turnover.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.all4ed.org/files/TeachTurn.pdf

Angus, D., & Mirel, J. (1999). *The failed promise of the American high school.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Arnold, C. L., Choy, S. P., & Bobbit, S. A. (1993). *Modeling teacher supply and demand, with commentary.* Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Aud, S., & Hannes, G. (Eds.) (2011). *The condition of education 2011 in brief* (NCES 2011-034). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. Retrieved from http://ies.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2011034

Bao, Y., Vedina, R., Moodie, S. & Dolan, S. (2013). The relationship between value incongruence and individual and organizational well-being outcomes: An exploratory study among Catalan nurses. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 69*(3), 631-641.

Becker, P. (1995). Pearls, pith, and provocation: Common pitfalls in published grounded theory research. In B. Glaser (Ed.), *Grounded theory 1984-1994*, Vol. 1 (pp. 135-140). Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Beltman, S. (2009). Educators' motivation for continuing professional learning. *Issues in Educational Research, 19*(3), 193-211.

Benabou, R. (2002). Self-confidence and personal motivation. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *117*(3), 871. doi:10.1162/003355302760193913

Benita, M., Roth, G., & Deci, E. L. (2014). When are mastery goals more adaptive? It depends on experiences of autonomy support and autonomy. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *106*(1), 258-267. doi:10.1037/a0034007

Berry, B., Noblit, G. W., & Hare, R. D. (1985). A qualitative critique of teacher labor market studies. *Urban Review 17*(2), 98-110.

Berryhill, J., Linney, J., & Fromewick, J. (2009, June). The effects of accountability on teachers: Are policies too stress provoking for their own good? *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership, 4*(5), 1-14.

Biggio, G., & Cortese, C. G. (2013). Well-being in the workplace through interaction between individual characteristics and organizational context. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health & Well-Being*, *8,*1-13. doi:10.3402/qhw.v8i0.19823

Boe, E., Bobbit, S., Cook, L., Whitener, S., & Weber, A. (1997). Why didst thou go? Predictors of retention, transfer, and attrition of special and general education teachers from a national perspective. *Journal of Special Education, 30*(4), 390-411.

Borman, G., & Dowling, N. (2008, September). Teacher attrition and retention: A meta-analytic and narrative review of the research. *Review of Educational Research, 78*(3), 367-409.

Boruch, R., Merlino, J., & Porter, A. C. (2012). Where teachers are treated like widgets, education suffers. *Education Week, 31*(27), 20-21.

Bouwma-Gearheart, J. (2010). Pre-service educator attrition informed by self-determination theory: Autonomy loss in high-stakes education environments. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century, 26*, 30-41.

Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., Wyckoff, J., & Urban, I. (2009, March). “Who leaves? Teacher attrition and student achievement” [Working Paper No. 23]. Retrieved from Urban Institute website: http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF /1001270_teacher_attrition.pdf

Breckenridge, J., & Jones, D. (2009). Demystifying theoretical sampling in grounded theory research. *The Grounded Theory Review, 8*(2), 113-126. Retrieved from http://groundedtheoryreview.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/GT-Review-Vol8-

no2.pdf

Brien, M., Hass, C., & Savoie, A. (2012). Psychological health as a mediator between need satisfaction at work and teachers' self-perceptions of performance. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, *44*(4), 288-299.

Brown, K. M., & Wenn, S. R. (2009). Finding, supporting, and keeping: The role of the principal in teacher retention issues. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 8*, 37-63. doi: 10.1080/1570076701817371

Buchanan, J. (2012). Telling tales out of school: Exploring why former teachers are not returning to the classroom. *Australian Journal of Education*, *56*(2), 205-217.

Bullough, R. R., Hall-Kenyon, K. M., & MacKay, K. (2012). Head start teacher well-being: Implications for policy and practice. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *40*(6), 323-331.

Burgess, E. (2011). *Teacher leadership in modern education: A grounded theory study* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Baltimore, MD: Walden University.

Cancio, E. J., Albrecht, S., & Johns, B. H. (2013). Defining administrative support and its relationship to the attrition of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Education & Treatment of Children*, *36*(4), 71-94.

Capel, S. (1987). The incidence of and influences on stress and burnout in secondary school teachers. *British Journal of Special Education, 57*, 279-288.

Carpentier, J., Mageau, G., & Vallerand, R. (2012). Ruminations and flow: Why do people with a more harmonious passion experience higher well-being?. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *13*(3), 501-518. doi:10.1007/s10902-011-9276-4

Charters, W. (1956). What causes teacher turnover? *School Review, 64*, 294-299.

Cherubini, L. (2008). A grounded theory analysis of beginning teachers' experiences: Illuminating leadership capacities. *International Journal of Teacher Leadership, 1*(1), 22-38.

Christiansen, O. (2011). The literature review in Classical Grounded Theory studies: A methodological note. *The Grounded Theory Review, 10*(3), 21-25. Retrieved from http://groundedtheoryreview.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/vol-10-no-3.pdf

Coman, D. C. (2010). *Teacher commitment and burnout: Their effects on the fidelity of implementation of comprehensive treatment programs for preschool children with autism spectrum disorders* (Masters thesis). University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL.

Conklin, T. A. (2012). Work worth doing: A phenomenological study of the experience of discovering and following one's calling. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *21*(3), 298. doi:10.1177/1056492611414426

Connelly, V., & Graham, S. (2009, August). Student teaching and teacher attrition and special education. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 32*(3), 257-269.

Cooper, J., & Alvarado, A. (2006). *Preparation, recruitment, and retention of teachers* (Education Policy Booklet 5). Retrieved from http://www.unesco.org/iiep/PDF /Edpol5.pdf

Corbell, K. (2009). *Strategies that can reduce new teacher attrition in North Carolina* (Friday Institute White Paper No. 3). The William and Ida Friday Institute for Educational Innovation, North Carolina State University College of Education, Raleigh, NC. Retrieved from http://www.learningace.com/doc/2604037
/ a991ff7ec38fcf989a9d7ce08db9733b /strategies-that-can-reduce-new-teacher-attrition-

in-north-carolina

Coulter, S., & Lester, J. N. (2011, November). Finding and redefining the meaning of teaching: Exploring the experiences of mid-career teachers. *Journal of Curriculum and Instruction, 5*(2), 5-26.

Cowan, T. (2010). Teacher perspectives on factors that affect teacher attrition and retention in rural middle schools of North Carolina (Unpublished doctoral dissertation).Cullowhee, NC: Western Carolina University.

Creswell, J. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Curtis, C. (2012). Why do they choose to teach – and why do they leave? A Study of middle school and high school mathematics teachers. *Education*, *132*(4), 779-788.

Dahlgaard-Park, S. (2012). Core values – the entrance to human satisfaction and commitment. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, *23*(2), 125-140. doi:10.1080/14783363.2012.655067

Davidson, E. (2007). The pivotal role of teacher motivation in Tanzanian education. *Educational Forum, 71*(2), 157-166.

DeAngelis, K., & Presley, J. (2011). Toward a more nuanced understanding of new teacher attrition. *Education and Urban Society, 43*(5), 598-626. doi:10.1177 /0013124510380724

Deci, E., & Ryan, R. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior.* New York: Plenum.

Deci, E., & Ryan, R. (2008a). Facilitating optimal motivation and psychological well-being across life's domains. *Canadian Psychology, 49*(1), 14-23.

Deci, E., & Ryan, R. (2008b). Self-determination theory: A macro-theory of human motivation, development, and health. *Canadian Psychology, 49*(3), 182-185.

De Cooman, R., De Gieter, S., Pepermans, R., Du Bois, C., Caers, R., & Jegers, M. (2007). Graduate teacher motivation for choosing a job in education. *International Journal of Educational Vocational Guidance, 7*, 123-136. doi: 10.1007/s10775-007-9117-5

Donaldson, M. & Johnson, S. (2011, October). Teach for America teachers: How long do they teach? Why do they leave? *Phi Delta Kappan, 93*(2), 47-51. Retrieved from http://www.kappanmagazine.org/content/93/2/47.full.pdf+html

Farber, K. (2010). *Why great teachers quit and how we might stop the exodus.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Feiman-Nemser, S. (2012). Beyond SOLO teaching. *Educational Leadership*, *69*(8), 10-16.

Feinberg, O., Assor, A., Kaplan, H., Kanat-Maymon, Y., & Roth, G. (2005, August). *SDT as a basis for comprehensive school reform: Principles, description, and some outcomes of the community growth pattern.* Poster session presented at the meeting of the European Association for Learning and Instruction, Nicosia, Cyprus.

Feldmann, D. (2011). The maintenance of teacher autonomy in a policy-driven era. *Mid-Western Educational Researcher, 24*(1), 2-4.

Fernet, C. (2013). The role of work motivation in psychological health. *Canadian Psychology*, *54*(1), 72-74. doi:10.1037/a0031058

Feuerhahn, N. Kuhnel, J., & Kudielka, B. M. (2012). Interaction effects of effort–reward

imbalance and overcommitment on emotional exhaustion and job performance. *International Journal of Stress Management*, *19*(2), 105-131. doi:10.1037/a0028338

Fincher, M. (2014, May). Assessment Update: Georgia's Changing Assessment Landscape. Retrieved from http://www.gael.org/app/webroot/media/useruploads/files/ Assessment%20Update%20May%202014%20.pdf

Fisher, D. M. (2014). A multilevel cross-cultural examination of role overload and organizational commitment: Investigating the interactive effects of context. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *99*(4), 723-736. doi:10.1037/a0035861

Fontaine, S., Kane, R., Duquette, O., & Savoie-Zajc, L. (2012). New teachers' career intentions: Factors influencing new teachers' decisions to stay or leave the profession. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 57*(4), 379-408.

Fritz, C. Sonnentag, S., Spector, P. E., & McInroe, J. A. (2010). The weekend matters: Relationships between stress recovery and affective experiences. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *31*(8), 1137-1162. doi:10.1002/job.672

Garritz, A. (2010). Pedagogical content knowledge and the affective domain of scholarship of teaching and learning. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning*, *4*(2), 1-6.

Georgia Department of Education. (2014). *Teacher keys effectiveness system implementation handbook*. Retrieved from http://www.nctq.org/docs /TKES_Handbook_-_FINAL_5-30-14.pdf

Ghana National Association of Teachers. (2009). *Teacher attrition in Ghana: Results of a*

questionnaire survey. Retrieved from http://www.teachersforefa.unesco.org /resources/ All/GNAT_2010_TEACHER_ATTRITION__REPORT.pdf

Glaser, B. G. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity.* Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G. (1992). *Basics of grounded theory analysis: Emergence vs. forcing*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G. (1998). *Doing grounded theory: Issues and discussions*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G. (2002, September). Constructivist grounded theory? *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 3*(3). Retrieved from http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/ fqs/article/view/825

Glaser, B. G. (2009). *Jargonizing: Using the grounded theory vocabulary*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G. (2010). The future of grounded theory. *The Grounded Theory Review, 9*(2), 10-14. Retrieved from http://groundedtheoryreview.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/ GT-Review-vol-9-no-21.pdf

Glaser, B. G. (2011). *Getting out of the data: Grounded theory conceptualization.* Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing Co.

Gonzalez, L., Brown, M., & Slate, J. (2008, March). Teachers who left the teaching profession: A qualitative understanding. *The Qualitative Report, 13*(1), 1-11.

Goodlad, J. (1984). *A place called school.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Goodpaster, K. S., Adedokun, O. A., & Weaver, G. C. (2012). Teachers' perceptions of

rural STEM teaching: Implications for rural teacher retention. *Rural Educator*, *33*(3), 9-22.

Grolnick, W. S., Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1997). Internalization within the family: The self determination perspective. In J. E. Grusec & L. Kuczynski (Eds.), *Parenting and children's internalization of values: A Handbook of contemporary theory* (pp. 135-161). New York: Wiley.

Guarino, C., Santibañez, L., & Daley, G. (2006). Teacher recruitment and retention: A review of the recent empirical literature. *Review of Educational Research, 76*(2), 173-208.

Guarino, C., Santibañez, L., Daley, G., & Brewer, D. (2004, May). *A review of the research literature on teacher recruitment and retention* (TR-164-EDU). Santa Monica, CA: Rand. Retrieved from http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand /pubs/technical_reports/2005/ RAND_TR164.pdf

Hahs-Vaughn, D. L., & Scherff, L. (2008). Beginning English teacher attrition, mobility, and retention. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 77*(1), 21-53.

Hancock, C. B., & Scherff, L. (2010). Who will stay and who will leave? Predicting secondary English teacher attrition risk. *Journal of Teacher Education, 61*(4), 328-338.

Hargreaves, A. & Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school*. New York: Routeledge.

Hayes-Bautista, D. (1996). Becoming Chicano: A dissimilation theory of transformation of ethnic identity. In B. G. Glaser (Ed.), *Gerund grounded*

theory: The basic social process dissertation (pp. 1-13). Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Henning, P. (2011). Disequilibrium, development and resilience through adult life. *Systems Research & Behavioral Science*, *28*(5), 443-454. doi:10.1002/sres.1108

Henry, G. T., Bastian, K. C., & Fortner, C. K. (2011). Stayers and leavers: Early-career teacher effectiveness and attrition. *Educational Researcher, 40*(6), p. 271-280. doi: 10.3102/0013189X11419042

Hernandez, C. (2009). Theoretical coding in grounded theory methodology. *The Grounded Theory Review, 8*(3), 51-66. Retrieved from http://groundedtheoryreview.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/GT-Review-vol8-no3-Nov-09.pdf

Hildreth, R. (2011). What good is growth? Reconsidering Dewey on the ends of education. *Education & Culture*, *27*(2), 28-47.

Hoffman, B. J., Bynum, B. H., Piccolo, R. F., & Sutton, A. W. (2011). Person-organization value congruence: How transformational leaders influence work group effectiveness. *Academy of Management Journal*, *54*(4), 779-796. doi:10.5465/AMJ.2011.64870139

Hohman, M., Packard, T., Finnegan, D., & Jones, L. (2013). The effect of mandatory furloughs on self-determination, financial strain, and decision to leave the California State University System in social work faculty. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *49*(4), 748-759. doi:10.1080/10437797.2013.812907

Holton, J. (2010). The coding process and its challenges. *The Grounded Theory Review, 9*(1), 21-40. Retrieved from http://groundedtheoryreview.com/wp-

content/uploads/ 2012/06/GT-Review-vol-9-no-13.pdf

Houchins, D. J. (2010). Juvenile justice teachers' job satisfaction: A comparison of teachers in three states. *Education & Treatment of Children*, *33*(4), 623-646.

Ilangovan, D. D., & Durgadoss, R. R. (2009). Value congruence - personal values and corporate values. *CURIE Journal*, *1*(4), 92-95.

Ingersoll, R. M. (2001). *Teacher turnover, teacher shortages, and the organization of schools.* (Report No. CTP-W-99-1). Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.

Ingersoll, R. M. (2007). *Misdiagnosing the teacher quality problem* (CPRE Policy Brief No. RB-49). University of Pennsylvania, Consortium for Policy Research in Education. Retrieved from http://www.cpre.org/sites/default/files/policybrief/889_rb49.pdf

Ingersoll, R., Merrill, L., & May, H. (2012). Retaining teachers. *Educational Leadership*, *69*(8), 30-34.

Ingersoll, R. M., & Smith, T. M. (2003). The wrong solution to the teacher shortage. *Educational Leadership, 60*(8), 30-33.

Jennings, J. (2012). *Reflections on a half-century of school reform: Where have we fallen short and where do we go from here.* Washington, DC: Center on Education Policy.

Johnson, S., Berg, J., & Donaldson, M. (2005, February). *Who stays in teaching and why: A review of the literature on teacher retention.* Washington, DC: The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers.

Kanchana, K. K. (2013). Values that make employees more valuable in the organization

– a conceptual analysis. *International Journal of Educational Research & Technology*, *4*(4), 41.

Kernis, M. H. (2003). Toward a conceptualization of optimal self-esteem. *Psychological Inquiry, 14*, 1-26.

King, S. H. (1993). Why did we choose teaching careers and what will enable us to stay? Insights from on cohort of the African-American teaching pool. *Journal of Negro Education, 62*(4), 475-492.

Kinsler, L. (2014). Born to be me...who am I again? The development of authentic leadership using evidence-based leadership coaching and mindfulness. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, *9*(1), 92-105.

Klassen, R. M., Frenzel, A. C., & Perry, N. E. (2012). Teachers' relatedness with students: An underemphasized component of teachers' basic psychological needs. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *104*(1), 150-165. doi:10.1037/a0026253

Koole, S. L., Jostmann, N. B., & Baumann, N. (2012). Do demanding conditions help or hurt self-regulation? *Social & Personality Psychology Compass*, *6*(4), 328-346. doi:10.1111/j.1751-9004.2012.00425.x

Kuhn, J. (2014). *Fear and learning in America: Bad data, good teachers, and the attack on public education.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Kukla-Acevedo, S. (2009). Leavers, movers, and stayers: The role of workplace conditions in teacher mobility decisions. *Journal of Educational Research, 102*(6), 443-452.

Laszlo, E. (1996). *The system's view of the world: A holistic vision for our time.* Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Liu, D., Zhang, S., Wang, L., & Lee, T. W. (2011). The effects of autonomy and empowerment on employee turnover: Test of a multilevel model in teams. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *96*(6), 1305-1316. doi:10.1037/a0024518

Locklear, T. (2010). *Factors contributing to teacher retention in Georgia* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL.

Lynch, M. (2012). Recruiting, retaining, and fairly compensating our teachers. *International Journal of Progressive Education*, *8*(2), 121-135.

Macdonald, D. (1999). Teacher attrition: A review of literature. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 15*(8), 835-848.

Maddy, M. (2007). *Maximizing potential: A grounded theory study*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses. (AAT 3300310)

Malanowski, J. R., & Wood, P. H. (1984). Burnout and self-actualization in public school teachers. *Journal of Psychology, 117*, 23-26.

McCrickerd, J. (2012). Understanding and reducing faculty reluctance to improve teaching. *College Teaching*, *60*(2), 56-64. doi:10.1080/87567555.2011.633287

Merriam, S. (2009). Qualitative research: *A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Metlife. (2012, March). The Metlife survey of the American teacher: Teachers, parents, and the economy. New York: Author.

Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *Adult Basic Education,* (74), 5-12.

Miller, S. (2010). *The revolving door: How leaders push teacher turnover* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Atlanta, GA: Georgia State University.

Miller, R., & Chait, R. (2008, December). *Teacher turnover, tenure, policies, and the distribution of teacher quality: Can high-poverty schools catch a break?* Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. Retrieved from http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/12/pdf/teacher_attrition.pdf

Mitchell, R., Parker, V., Giles, M., Joyce, P., & Chiang, V. (2012). Perceived value congruence and team innovation. *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology*, *85*(4), 626-648. doi:10.1111/j.2044-8325.2012.02059.x

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. (2002, August 20-22). *Unraveling the teacher shortage problem: Teacher retention is the key.* A Symposium of The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future and NCTAF State Partners, Washington, D.C. Retrieved from http://nctaf.org/teacher-turnover-cost-calculator/nctaf-research-reports/

National Commission on Teaching and American's Future. (2010, January). *Who will teach? Experience matters.* Washington, DC: Author.

Ndoye, A., Imig, S., & Parker, M. (2010). Empowerment, leadership, and teachers' intentions to stay in or leave the profession or their schools. *Journal of School Choice, 4*, 174-190. doi: 10.1000/15582159.2010.483920

Newton, X., Rivero, R., Fuller, B., & Dauter, L. (2011). *Teacher stability and turnover in Los Angeles: The influence of teacher and school characteristics* [Working Paper]. Berkeley, CA: University of California, Los Angeles School Infrastructure Project.

Nweke, W. C., Eads, G. M., Alfolabi, Y. C., Stephens, C. E., & Toth, F. D. (2006, April). *The impact of teacher workforce retirement/attrition on personnel replacement*

cost. Atlanta, GA: Georgia Professional Standards Commission.

Odell, S. J., & Ferraro, D. P. (1992). Teacher mentoring and teacher retention. *Journal of Teacher Education, 43*(3), 200-204.

Ololube, N. (2006). Teacher job satisfaction and motivation for school effectiveness: An assessment. *Essays in Education, 18.* Retrieved from http://www.usca.edu/essays/vol18fall2006.html

Olson, M. M. (2006). *Driven succeeding - the serpentine path of adult learning: A grounded action study in adult education* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Santa Barbara, CA: Fielding Graduate University.

Olson, M. M. (2008, January). Using grounded action methodology for student intervention - driven succeeding: A grounded action study in adult education. [38 paragraphs]. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 9*(1). Retrieved from http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/1-08/08-1-9-e.htm.

Olson, M., & Raffanti, M. (2006). Leverage points, paradigms, and grounded action: Intervening in educational systems. *World Futures, 62*, 533-541.

Pan, S., & Yeh, Y. (2012). Impact of value congruence on work-family conflicts: The mediating role of work-related support. *Journal of Social Psychology*, *152*(3), 270-287. doi:10.1080/00224545.2011.602133

Parks, L., & Guay, R. P. (2012). Can personal values predict performance? Evidence in an academic setting. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, *61*(1), 149-173. doi:10.1111/j.1464-0597.2011.00461.x

Patton, M. (2003). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Peachey, J., & Bruening, J. (2012). Are your values mine? Exploring the influence of value congruence on responses to organizational change in a Division I intercollegiate athletics department. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, *5*(2), 127.

Pelletier, G., Seguin-Levesque, C., & Legault, L. (2002). Pressure from above and pressure from below as determinants of teachers' motivation and teaching behaviors. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 94*, 186–196.

Picower, B. (2011). Learning to teach and teaching to learn: Supporting the development of new social justice educators. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, *38*(4), 7-24.

Pretsch, J., Flunger, B., & Schmitt, M. (2012). Resilience predicts well-being in teachers, but not in non-teaching employees. *Social Psychology of Education*, *15*(3), 321-336. doi:10.1007/s11218-012-9180-8

Pucella, T. (2011). The impact of national board certification on burnout levels in educators. *Clearing House*, *84*(2), 52-58. doi:10.1080/00098655.2010.511306

Raffanti, M. (2005). *Weathering change: A grounded theory study of organizations in flux* (Doctoral dissertation). Santa Barbara, CA: Fielding Graduate University.

Ragnarsdottir, G., & Johannesson, I. (2014). Curriculum, crisis and the work and well-being of Icelandic upper secondary school teachers. *Education Inquiry*, *5*(1), 43-67. doi:10.3402/edui.v5.24045

Rayner, S. (2014). Playing by the rules? The professional values of head teachers tested by the changing policy context. *Management in Education*, *28*(2), 38. doi:10.1177/0892020613508972

Reeve, J. (2002). Self-determination theory applied to educational setting. In E. Deci & R. Ryan (Eds.), *Handbook of self-determination research* (pp. 183–203).

Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.

Ren, T. (2010). Value congruence as a source of intrinsic motivation. *Kyklos*, *63*(1), 94-109. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6435.2010.00462.x

Renzulli, L., Parrot, H., & Beattie, I. (2011). Racial mismatch and school type: Teacher satisfaction and retention in charter and traditional public schools. *Sociology of Education, 84*(1), 23-48. doi: 10.1177/0038040710392720

Rinke, C. R. (2008). Finding their way on: Career decision-making processes of urban science teachers. *Science Teacher Education,* 1096-1121. doi: 10.1002/sce.20339

Roffey, S. (2012). Pupil wellbeing - Teacher wellbeing: Two sides of the same coin? *Educational & Child Psychology*, *29*(4), 8-17.

Ronfeldt, M., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2011, June). *Teacher Turnover Harms Student Achievement* [Working Paper 171716]. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Roth, G., Assor, A., Kanat-Maymon, Y., & Kaplan, H. (2007). Autonomous motivation for teaching: How self-determined teaching may lead to self-determined learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 99*(4), 761-774. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.99.4.761

Rumley, M. A. (2010). *Listening to the voices of beginning teachers: Providing meaningful administrative support is a moral act and results in increasing retention among beginning educators* (Doctoral dissertation). University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000a). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*, 54-67.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000b, January). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 68-78.

Ryan, R., & Sapp, A. (2005). Considering the impact of test-based reforms: A self-determination theory perspective on high stakes testing and student motivation and performance. *Unterrichtswissenschaft, 33*, 143-159.

Santoro, D. A. (2011). Good teaching in difficult times: Demoralization in the pursuit of good work. *American Journal of Education*, *118*(1), 1-23.

Santoro, D., & Morehouse, L. (2011). Teaching's conscientious objectors: Principled leavers of high-poverty schools. *Teachers College Record, 113*(12), 2670-2704.

Sass, D. A., Flores, B., Claeys, L., & Pérez, B. (2012). Identifying personal and contextual factors that contribute to attrition rates for Texas public school teachers. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *20*(15), 1-25.

Scott, H. (2009). Data analysis: Getting conceptual. *The Grounded Theory Review, 8*(2), 89-111. Retrieved from http://groundedtheoryreview.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/GT-Review-Vol8-no2.pdf

Scafidi, B., Sjoquist, D., & Stinebrickner, T. (2007). Race, poverty, and teacher mobility. *Economics of Education Review, 26*(2), 145-159.

Scafidi, B., Sjoquist, D., & Stinebrickner, T. (2010). *Child policy brief: Why do young teachers leave teaching?* Atlanta, GA: Georgia State University.

Schafer, L., Long, J., & Clandinin, D. (2012). Questioning the research on early career teacher attrition and retention. *Alberta Journal Educational Research, 58*(1), 106-121.

Shen, J. (1997). Teacher retention and attrition in public schools: Evidence from SASS91. *The Journal of Educational Research, 91*(2), 81-88.

Shin, H. (1995). Estimating future teacher supply: Any policy implications for educational reform? *International Journal of Educational Reform, 4*(4), 422-433.

Simmons, O. (1993). The milkman and his customer: A cultivated relationship. In B. Glaser (Ed.) *Examples of Grounded Theory: A Reader.* (pp. 3-31). Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Simmons, O. (2003). *The theory of orienting.* Unpublished manuscript.

Simmons, O. (2006). Some professional and personal notes on research methods, systems theory, and grounded action. *World Futures, 62*, 481-490.

Simmons, O. (2008a, November). Reflections on why I am a Classic Grounded Theorist. Proceedings from The Oxford Conference on Classic Grounded Theory, Oxford, England.

Simmons, O. (2008b) *Stages of a classic (Glaserian) grounded theory study.* Retrieved from The Grounded Theory Institute website: http://www.groundedtheory.com/what-is-gt.aspx

Simmons, O. (2010). Is that a real theory or did you just make it up? Teaching classic grounded theory. *The Grounded Theory Review, 9*(2), 15-38. Retrieved from http:// groundedtheoryreview.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/GT-Review-vol-9-no-21.pdf

Simmons, O., & Gregory, T. (2003, September). Grounded action: Achieving optimal and sustainable change. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 4*(3). Retrieved from http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs/

Sisask, M., Värnik, P., Värnik, A., Apter, A., Balazs, J., Balint, M., & ... Wasserman, D. (2014). Teacher satisfaction with school and psychological well-being affects their readiness to help children with mental health problems. *Health Education Journal*, *73*(4), 382-393.

Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2014). Teacher self-efficacy and perceived autonomy: relations with teacher engagement, job satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion. *Psychological Reports*, *114*(1), 68-77. doi:10.2466/14.02.PR0.114k14w0

Skinner, E., & Belmont, M. (1993). Motivation in the classroom: Reciprocal effects of teacher behavior and student engagement across the school year. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *85*, 571–581.

Smith, T. & Ingersoll, R. (2004). What are the effects of induction and mentoring on beginning teacher turnover? *American Educational Research Journal*, *41*(3), 681-714.

Stern, P. (1995). Grounded theory methodology: Its uses and processes. In B. Glaser (Ed.), *Grounded Theory 1984-1994*, Vol. 1 (pp. 29-39). Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Stillman, S. (2006). Grounded theory and grounded action: Rooted in systems theory. *World Futures, 62*, 498-504. doi: 10.1080/02604020600912830

Stinebrickner, T. R. (2002). An analysis of occupational change and departure from the labor force. Evidence of the reasons that teachers leave. *Journal of Human Resources, 37*(1), 192-216.

Stone, D., Deci, E., & Ryan, R. (2009). Beyond talk: Creating autonomous motivation through self-determination theory. *Journal of General Management, 34*(3), 75-91.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Strunk, K., & Robinson, J. (2006). Oh, won't you stay: A multilevel analysis of the difficulties in retaining qualified teachers. *Peabody Journal of Education, 81*(4), 65-94.

Suar, D., & Khuntia, R. (2010). Influence of personal values and value congruence on unethical practices and work behavior. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *97*(3), 443-460. doi:10.1007/s10551-010-0517-y

Supeli, A., & Creed, P. A. (2014). The incremental validity of perceived goal congruence: The assessment of person–organizational fit. *Journal of Career Assessment*, *22*(1), 28. doi:10.1177/1069072713487849

Swanson, P., & Huff, R. (2010). The relationship of Georgia's rural foreign language teachers' sense of efficacy to teacher attrition. *Rural Educator, 31*(3), 16-29.

Tillema, H. (2005, March). Collaborative knowledge construction in study teams of professionals. *Human Resource Development International, 8*(1), 81-99.

Trépanier, S., Fernet, C., & Austin, S. (2013). The moderating role of autonomous motivation in the job demands-strain relation: A two sample study. *Motivation & Emotion*, *37*(1), 93-105. doi:10.1007/s11031-012-9290-9

Truscott, S. D., Kreskey, D., Bolling, M., Psimas, L., Graybill, E., Albritton, K., & Schwartz, A. (2012). Creating consultee change: A theory-based approach to learning and behavioral change processes in school-based consultation. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice & Research*, *64*(1), 63-82. doi:10.1037/a0027997

Tyink, S. D. (2006). *Driven altruism: A grounded theory study.* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3230494).

Urell, E. (2006). Simulating benevolence: Obstructing systemic problem solving. *World Futures, 62*, 524-532.

U.S. Department of Education. (2014, March). Race to the top: Georgia Report: Year 3: School Year 2012-2013. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/performance/georgia-year-3.pdf

Vallerand, J., Pelletier, L., Blais, M., Briere, N., Senecal, C., & Vallieres, E. (1993). On the assessment of intrinsic, extrinsic and amotivation in education: Evidence on the concurrent and construct validity of the academic motivation scale. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 53,* 159–172.

van Tonder, C., & Williams, C. (2009). Exploring the origins of burnout among secondary educators. *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology, 35*(1), 204-218. doi:10.4102/sajip.v35i1.762

Vander Linden, K. (2005). *Navigating a new experience: A grounded theory* (Doctoral dissertation). Fielding Graduate University, Santa Barbara, CA.

Vveinhardt, J. & Gulbovaite, E. (2013). Comparative analysis of the researches on personal and organizational value congruence. *Management of Organizations: Systematic Research*, *67*, 127-142. doi:10.7720/MOSR.1392-1142.2013.67.9

Waddell, J. (2010, May). Fostering relationships to increase teacher retention in urban schools. *Journal of Curriculum and Instruction, 4*(1), 70-85. doi:10.3776/joci.2010.v4n1p70-85

Wagner, B., & French, L. (2010). Motivation, work satisfaction, and teacher change

among early childhood teachers. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 24*, 152-171.

Wang, C. K. J., & Liu, W. C. (2008). Teachers' motivation to teach national education in Singapore: A self-determination theory approach. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 28*(4) 395-410.

Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Wininger, S., & Birkholz, P. (2013). Sources of instructional feedback, job satisfaction, and basic psychological needs. *Innovative Higher Education*, *38*(2), 159-170. doi:10.1007/s10755-012-9229-9

Appendix: Example of Open Coding

I had taught even some of them fifth grade and third grade and one young lady came through that I had taught third and fourth and then here she's sixth grade, and so it was really cool. It was a really good experience that first year, even though the eighth grade teachers didn't think I should be there. I was only a sixth grade teacher. I didn't have the skills needed to teach eighth grade and, um, luckily there was another new teacher there who was, you know, she and I bonded! We kind of held each other together. But I only had to teach that one year because then we went to the brand new school, so then everybody was on the same playing field. It was our school, rather than.... because the eighth grade teachers thought it was their school and that the sixth grade teachers had invaded. They really were not happy with us about that. And, um, so when we went to the new school, everybody was on the same playing level. I still taught eighth grade, had that brand new lab. Things are still awesome. Teaching is still this wonderful thing. And, then they came in with, oh, what did the come in with first? And I would hear the older teachers say, oh, this is just the pendulum swinging. They'll do this for a while and then we'll go back and we'll do something else. And then we'll do something else. And I was thinking, these teachers are so cynical. You know, why do they keep teaching if they're so negative. And how did they get negative? Why do they still not think they can change the world? Cause I still thought I could! I had been teaching five years and I still...

DEVALUING

RELATEDNESS

EXCLUDING

BRIGHT-SIDING

"PENDULUM SWINGING"

REFLECTING

I still haven't properly learned that I can't! I'm waiting on it to hit me...

Yeah! But the more I was in public school, the more frustrated I got, especially when they stopped giving teachers raises, they stopped helping us get our certifications, they... some of the things that we thought was good for education – us going back to school and getting higher degrees – they didn't value that anymore. When I first started teaching, they would pay up to so much for you to take classes. Some people wound up not even having to pay to get their masters degree, or their doctorate degree. You know, all these degrees. At this

DEVALUING

time I'm still working on my masters and still loving teaching, still loving bringing new things into the classroom and still able to bring new things into the classroom. About, you know I don't even know dates, but about my fifteenth year teaching was when they started saying, oh, you have to do it this way. You have to teach out of this book and you have to make sure they know this, this, this, and this. And we had always had CRCT, but that was, that was.... and, you know, I was in those grade levels starting from the first year where they had to pass the CRCT. And eighth grade was one of those grades. And I never felt, oh, my God, they're not going to do this. Oh, my God, I've got to do this different. Oh, my God, I've got to teach this test. I taught and then they would say, okay next week we're giving the test. Okay, we'll give the test. We gave the test and whatever happened, happened. I was just a way to document what the kids had been doing. And then they started saying they've got to pass, you've got to teach this material so that they know how to take this test. In your classroom you've got to make sure you're doing this, this, and this because it's gonna be on the test. And you know that just wasn't me. And at that time we could still kind of close the door and we could teach. And there were some teachers who would close the door and chaos happened, but there were a lot of us that we closed the door and we taught. And the kids were learning, and we were doing, you know, we were making these kids think. We were making them do things that stretched their minds rather than just memorizing. But we were also having fun. We were teaching them how to have beautiful handwriting, how to remember things, you know –capitols, where states were, what the capitols of the states were. The things that were not going to be on a basic standardized test, but you know it's those really cool things that you know. Um, and I guess it just started down hill from then. It was, oh, you've got to teach this way. If the other math teachers are on that page, your group has got to be on that math page. You weren't teaching the kids anymore, you were teaching the subject, or you were teaching the content.

MANDATING (top down mandates dictating teachers' actions/ professional choices)

"TEACHING TO THE TEST"

MANDATING

MISALIGNING

SHELTERING

TEACHING AUTHENTICALLY

DECLINE

MANDATING

INAUTHENTICITY

Curriculum Vitae

Jenny L. Sanders

EDUCATION

Ed.D. Teacher Leadership February 2014
Walden University, Minneapolis, MN
- 3.57 GPA
- Doctoral Study Title: *A Grounded Theory Study of Navigating the Cycle of Decline in Public School Teaching*

MAT Secondary English May 2005
Piedmont College, Demorest, GA
- 4.0 GPA
- Capstone Title: *Caring More, Expecting More: The Complimentary Roles of Compassion and Rigor in the Humanistic Classroom*

BA English May 2000
Brenau University, Gainesville, GA
- 4.0 GPA, *Summa Cum Laude*
- Ranked 1st in Brenau University Women's College Class of 2000

EMPLOYMENT

English Instructor Fall 2013-Fall 2014
Piedmont College, Demorest, GA
- Taught *English 1101* and *English 1102*
- Tutored students in writing and English through the Piedmont College Learning Center

English Instructor Fall 2011-Fall 2013
Brenau University, Gainesville, GA
- Taught *English 99: Writing Laboratory* and *English 101: Written Communication*
  - Deliver course content in traditional classroom and online settings
  - Trained in online instructional platforms *Canvas* and *Blackboard*

Graduate Writing Consultant Spring 2011-Spring 2014
Brenau University, Gainesville, GA
- Provided writing support and instruction to Brenau graduate students

- Developed and presented workshops on graduate writing, scholarly research, and APA style
- Collaborated with graduate program directors and professors
- Designed and distributed promotional materials
- Maintained the Graduate Writing Service website and Facebook page
- Maintained client and financial records
- Collected and analyzed usage data
- Compiled semi-annual assessment and usage reports

Private Tutor — Fall 2010-Summer 2011

- Provided personalized instruction to students of various grade levels in a range of academic subjects
- Developed differentiated lesson plans and assessments for students
- Prepared reports and updates for student and parent use

Theater Program Director and Drama Teacher — Fall 2007-Spring 2010

Habersham Central High School, Mount Airy, GA

- Taught *Introduction to Drama* and *Advanced Drama* courses
- Maintained records of student achievement
- Selected and directed plays for students
- Supervised technical production
- Managed theater program publicity, finances, and fundraising
- Sponsored International Thespian Troupe #4860
- Participated annually in the Georgia High School Theater Association's One Act Play Competition
- Developed the drama curriculum in accordance with national and Georgia Performance Standards

Education Instructor — Fall 2007-Fall 2008

Piedmont College, Demorest, GA

- Taught *EDSE 366: Foundations and Practicum in Secondary Education*
    - Coached undergraduate students considering graduate degrees in education
    - Coordinated observations for students with teachers in their discipline

English Teacher — Fall 2003-Spring 2010

Habersham Central High School, Mount Airy, GA

- Taught 9th, 10th, and 11th grade English classes
- 10th Grade English Department Chair, 2003-2005
- Developed 10th grade curriculum in accordance with national and Georgia Performance Standards
- Maintained records of student engagement and achievement

- School coordinator for Young Georgia Authors Writing Competition
- Sponsored *HCHS Dance Dance Revolutionaries*, 2003-2006

Learning Center Tutor Fall 2001-Spring 2003
Brenau University Learning Center, Gainesville, GA
- Created customized learning plans for college students with learning disabilities
- Provided academic support and instruction to students with learning disabilities

Instructor Fall 2000-Spring 2001
North Georgia Technical College, Clarkesville, GA
- Taught *Business English 111* and *112*
- Taught *Entrepreneurship 101: Planning for Success*
- Developed and implemented online curriculum for *Entrepreneurship 101*
- Utilized distance-learning technology to teach across campuses simultaneously

Writing Center Tutor Fall 1998-Spring 2000
Brenau University Writing Center, Gainesville, GA
- Helped students develop and hone writing skills in an individual conference setting
- Collected, analyzed, and reported usage data

TEACHING CERTIFICATION
- GA Level T6, English 6-12

PROFESSIONAL & ACADEMIC MEMBERSHIPS
- American Educational Research Association
- National Council of Teachers of English
- International Women's Writing Guild
- Academy of American Poets
- Phi Beta Sigma Scholastic Fraternity
- Sigma Tau Delta English Honor Society

SCHOLARSHIP & ACCOMPLISHMENTS
- Vice President, Habersham Central High School Theater Booster Club, 2014-15
- Published original poem, "Mommy's Little Heartbreaker," *Winning Writers Newsletter*, 2011
- Coached first student in HCHS history to attend the Georgia Governor's Honors Program for theater, 2010
- 8-AAAA Region One Act Play Champion director, 2009
- Volunteer director for *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, Abridged*, 2009

- Voted “Most Influential Teacher” by Habersham Central High School student body, 2005-2006
- Presented *Measuring Student Engagement,* Working on the Work Conference, Orlando, FL, 2005
- Attended Summer English Programme at Oxford University, UK, 2000
- Presented *Building Credibility Inside and Outside the Writing Center,* Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference, Savannah, GA, 2000
- Received Delta Scholarship for International Study, 1999