What “Invested Leavers” Can Tell Us About Why Experienced Teachers Exit the Profession

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Major Professor: Janine Darragh, Ph.D.

Committee Members: Tonia Dousay, Ph.D.; Melissa McConnell, Ed.D.;

Rodney McConnell, Ph.D.

Department Administrator: Raymond A. Dixon, Ph.D.

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Abstract

This case study seeks to examine the exit-decisions of "invested leavers," teachers who have taught for five or more years and then left the profession for reasons other than retirement. As traditional studies of teacher attrition tend to focus on new teachers, (teachers in their first five years of teaching), their findings may not help explain the high attrition rate of experienced teachers, an understanding which may be important to addressing the problem of the high rate of teacher attrition.

To examine this phenomenon, this study identified and interviewed, from a sample of convenience, six former Idaho teachers who had all taught for five or more years before leaving education for reasons other than retirement. The interview transcript data were thematically coded in order to identify emergent themes.

The data were examined through the conceptual lens of "Attrition as Resistance," which speculates that many "invested leavers" may exit the profession because ill-considered policies mandate that they must teach in ways that are not in the best interests of the students they serve, and they cannot in good conscience continue to violate their own sense of professional ethics.

The interview responses did not show strong support for Attrition as Resistance by that definition, but they did suggest that the interviewees left the profession for reasons different from those most-commonly cited in traditional attrition studies, such as student misbehavior, lack of administrative support, workload burnout, and financial insecurity.

The "invested leavers" interviewed discussed their love of students and teaching more than any other subject. Lack of administrative support was not a strongly-cited factor. They expressed more a sense of injustice over the unreasonable workload than a feeling of

burnout, which suggests a sense of inadequacy. A sense of the injustice of a teacher's compensation was discussed twice as much as feelings of financial insecurity.

The study findings suggest that experienced teachers may exit the profession for reasons different than those most-cited in traditional studies, but that a conceptual expansion of Attrition as Resistance may be necessary to help explain exit decisions. Invested leavers may exit as often over perceived injustices against teachers as they do over those against students.

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Coach, I hit the jackpot when they assigned you to be my mentor. (Mentor is a much nicer title than “Major Professor,” don’t you think!) You were always there for me – whatever I needed: instruction, encouragement, ideas, just someone kind to talk to! You always saw the best in me. I am honored and proud to have been your first mentee. I’ve said this to you a couple times, and now I want it down here, published in writing: Coach is a sacred word in my vocabulary, and the only person in my life whom I call “Coach” when I’m not on the field or court, or on the stage, is you!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The rate of teacher attrition has long been recognized as an important and costly problem and one that requires more research. Most studies have focused on teachers in their first five years, drawing attention to the challenges of learning to cope with financial strain and frequent burnout as the primary drivers of attrition. However, perhaps an important and surprising group has gone understudied. More recent findings suggest that experienced teachers who have taught for over five years, and who have come to terms with the low salaries and burnout, continue to leave the profession at high rates and more frequently than professionals in comparable sectors. The relatively new conceptual framing that sees "attrition as resistance" may offer a way to examine the reasons why.

Teacher attrition has been defined as the rate at which teachers "depart the profession for reasons other than retirement" (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 499). This is a serious and growing problem, and scholars have increasingly spoken about the "revolving door" of teacher employment (Ingersoll 2001, 2002; Ingersoll et al., 2018; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). The literature has also noted how teacher attrition is costly and exacerbates many other challenges in the field of education. However, as this research has focused predominantly on "new teachers," or those who leave in the first five years of teaching (Donley et al., 2019; Gardner, 2006; McCann et al., 2005), this narrow perspective leaves a number of questions regarding why "experienced teachers" also leave the profession at high rates. (Glazer, 2018; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014; Synar & Maiden, 2014; Vagi & Pivovarova, 2016). Glazer (2018) found that "seasoned" teachers who have made it through the first five years and who have "significantly invested" in teaching careers are also abandoning the field of education at high rates and increasingly so (Glazer, 2018; Ingersoll et al., 2014b).

To be sure, experienced teachers still face immense pressure and burnout, which may contribute to exit decisions. These pressures include unmanageable workloads, a lack of administrative support, inadequate school facilities, and unreasonable expectations for student achievement (Byrd-Blake et al., 2010; Goldring et al., 2014; Williams & Dikes, 2015). Despite this, the rates at which experienced teachers are leaving the field are still surprising (Glazer, 2018). Teachers who have built their credentials, acquired skills and experience, and achieved a feeling of competence in the field might be expected to remain in the profession (Glazer, 2018). The relatively small body of literature on the attrition of experienced teachers therefore does not adequately explain why this group continues to leave the profession at a high rate.

A handful of researchers (Dunn, 2018; Glazer, 2018; Santoro, 2017) have begun to uncover a phenomenon that may change our understanding of why experienced teachers exit the profession in high numbers: namely, in protest. Santoro (2017) used the term "conscientious objectors" to refer to experienced teachers who leave the profession because they are unwilling to work in ways that are incompatible with what they feel is in the best interest of their students (Santoro, 2017). Santoro (2017) therefore points to the importance of maintaining high standards of teaching. While Santoro (2017) has spoken of "conscientious objection," Dunn (2018) has referred to the same tendency as "resignation as activism" and "resignation as resistance." Similarly, Glazer (2018) has termed this "attrition as resistance," referring to the act by which experienced teachers (who have typically taught for over five years, who have a feeling of competency in the field, and who feel a strong sense of responsibility to uphold the standards of good teaching) suffer from demoralization

as a result of job expectations or policies that violate the best interests of students. They choose to leave the profession rather than compromise their professional ethics.

Their ideas have roots in the work of Hirschman (1970), who viewed departure from a profession as an act of loyalty to professional ethics and as a statement that resignation is the only remaining response to a "profession that has lost its way" (p. 104). In essence, a teacher who departs has determined that "[t]o exit will now mean to resign under protest and, in general, to denounce and fight the organization from without instead of working for change from within" (Hirschman, 1970, p. 104). Santoro (2017) applied Hirschman's work to teachers who find that counter-productive policies prevent them from upholding their own high standards and professional ethics and who therefore take a stand by exiting the profession in an act of protest.

Despite these new ideas about the motivating factors driving teacher attrition, studies have not yet been comprehensive enough to truly give a clear idea of why teachers leave their professions, particularly later in their careers. Indeed, Glazer (2018) has called for researchers to collect more data on teachers who exit the field, observing that this will help us "develop larger understandings of the lives and experiences of teachers in general, and deeper understandings of the factors contributing to teacher exit" (p. 69). This study is a response to that call. To better understand the reasons why seasoned teachers are leaving the profession, this study will draw on a convenience sample population of former teachers in southern Idaho and the inland Northwest who meet the study's definition of invested leavers. It will seek to answer the following questions:

(1) What are the teachers' rationales for leaving the profession?

(2) What are the most frequently cited influences that drive teachers to leave the profession?

(3) What are the implications (emotional, professional, financial) for teachers who leave the profession?

This study will use the term "invested leaver" (Glazer, 2018) to refer to teachers who have taught for over five years and who chose to leave the profession for reasons other than retirement. The term "conscientious objector" (Santoro, 2017) will be used to describe invested leavers who report having developed a feeling of competency as teachers and who state that one of the most important factors in their decision to leave was an unwillingness to teach in ways that, in their view, were incompatible with professional integrity and/or the best interests of their students.

Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this study is the following:

(1) To give voice to former teachers from southern Idaho and the Inland Northwest who can contribute to the emerging description of the phenomenon of attrition as resistance.

(2) To better understand why experienced teachers, specifically teachers in the Inland Northwest, are leaving the profession and the implications of their decision to do so.

This study will contribute to existing scholarship on teacher attrition in general and help to fill a gap in the literature regarding the phenomenon of attrition as resistance. If there are significant differences in the reasons for the attrition rate between those who leave the profession in the first five years and those who do so after, as the research suggests, then policymakers and school administrators will need a new set of tools to give this problem the

attention it deserves. The results of this study may therefore inform policymakers and school administrators at the local, state, and national levels as they attempt to the address the problem of teacher attrition.

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

Introduction

In Chapter One, this study was introduced as an exploration of why experienced teachers, in large and problematic numbers, exit the education profession before retirement. Chapter One also introduced the conceptual lens of attrition as resistance, an emerging tool for examining the exit-decisions of "invested leavers." Chapter Two will explore the broad problem of teacher attrition: a glance at the history of attrition studies, an attempt to grasp the cost and scope of the problem, how demographic variables affect teacher attrition, and some of the most often-cited reasons why teachers exit the profession. Chapter Two will then examine how traditional studies focus heavily on teachers who exit in their first five years, leaving a gap in our knowledge. It will provide an in-depth examination of attrition as resistance, its theoretical roots, the short and recent history of its development, and how the arguments it makes will help us to understand the exit-decisions of invested leavers if early findings continue to be substantiated.

Teacher Attrition Studies, A Background

Teacher attrition has been a subject of concern and study since at least as early as the late 1800s (Boe & Gilford, 1992; Sedlak & Schlossman, 1986). Public schools noted in the days of one-room schoolhouses that the restrictive rules teachers (usually women) were obligated to live by appeared to drive teachers away from education and into other occupations (Boe & Gilford, 1992; Sedlak & Schlossman, 1986). Sedlak & Schlossman (1986) note that studies in these early decades tended to be regional and anecdotal. The findings of such inquiries tended to result in recommendations for school boards to ease the

restrictions under which teachers were expected to live, thereby hopefully persuading them to remain in teaching.

The U.S. Department of Education, not raised to a cabinet-level position until 1980, existed under various government departments from its foundation in 1867, and it kept teacher and student data (somewhat erratically) into the early 1900s, in order to help school districts "establish effective school systems" (Wallechinsky, 2016). Even in these early years, school districts understood that high teacher turnover often created difficulties in maintaining highly qualified staff. (Dworkin, 1980; Wallechinsky, 2016).

In the 1959-60 school year, the National Center for Education Statistics began periodically administering a nation-wide School and Staffing Survey, which asked teachers to report their intentions to stay in their current posts, make a move within their profession, or exit the profession (Ingersoll, 2001). Though these are reports of intention and not verifiable action, these survey results provide some of our best national data on teacher attrition into the current day (Ingersoll, 2001). These data showed that teacher retention peaked in the early 1970s but has been in decline ever since (see Table 1).

Table 1

Historical Data on Teachers' Intention to Stay, Move From, or Leave Their Current Position

	Number of Teachers				Percent of Teachers		
Year	Total	Stayers	Movers	Leavers	Stayers	Movers	Leavers
1959-60	1,600,000	139,200	80,000	128,000	87	5	8
1966-67	1,933,000	1,720,370	96,650	115,980	89	5	6
1968-69	1,864,400	1,553,600	188,700	122,100	83	10	7
1988-89	2,386,500	2,065,800	188,400	132,300	86.5	7.9	5.6
1991-92	2,553,500	2,237,300	185,700	130,500	87.6	7.3	5.1
1994-95	2,555,800	2,205,300	182,900	167,600	86.3	7.2	6.6
2000-01	2,994,700	2,542,200	231,000	221,400	84.9	7.7	7.4
2004-05	3,214,900	2,684,200	261,100	269,600	83.5	8.1	8.4
2008-09	3,380,300	2,854,900	255,700	269,800	84.5	7.6	8.0
2012-13	3,377,900	2,846,500	271,900	259,400	84.3	8.1	7.7

Data from Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results from the 2012-13 Teacher Follow-Up Survey (NCES 2014-077), by R. Goldring, S. Taie, and M. Riddles, 2014, Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics: U.S. Department of Education

From the late 1970s, researchers have been referring to high teacher turnover as a "problem" (Charters, 1970; Mark & Anderson, 1978) From their 1978 study to their 1985 study, Mark and Anderson found that the rate of teachers who left the profession withing the first three years increased from 16% (1978) to 67% (Mark & Anderson, 1978). Note that some of this attrition included teachers who earned certificates but never took posts in education.

In the early 1980s, a series of highly publicized reports began to focus national attention on the high rate of teacher attrition and the danger of coming teacher shortages in K-12 (e.g., Darling-Hammond, et al., 1983). Researchers found that the majority of the problem was not poor teacher recruitment but high numbers of teachers leaving the profession, as compared to the attrition in other professions. Findings showed that teachers cited job dissatisfaction over low administrative support, poor student discipline, a decline in

teacher autonomy, and poor salaries as the most common motivating factors (Ingersoll, 2001). By the early 1990s, studies found that the majority of vacancies in teacher posts were caused not by expanding school district sizes nor by retirements but by the large number of teachers exiting the profession (Bempah, et al., 1994; Boe, et al., 1992; Boe, et al., 1997). Boe, et al. (1997) put the figure at 80.5%

Today an ever-increasing number of scientific studies continue to show that teacher attrition is a nation-wide and growing problem. A recent study by Nguyen, et al. (2020) puts the national average rate of teacher attrition at 15% per year – this is not teachers who move from one school to another or who retire from the profession; this is the number of teachers who exit the field of education before retirement. The problematically high rate of teacher attrition drives and exacerbates other difficulties in the field of education. In their landmark studies, Ingersoll et al. (2014, 2018) found that nearly half of teachers leave the field before retirement, accelerating the move toward a less-experienced or "greener" (Ingersoll et al., 2014b, 2018) educational workforce. This unhealthy turnover rate leads to demoralization for both teachers and students (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Donley, 2019; Ingersoll, 2001). High teacher attrition has been found to harm student achievement, not just because experienced teachers leave and the newcomers are inexperienced, but because turnover itself has a disruptive effect, particularly in districts with high proportions of minority students (Clotfelter et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Hanushek et al., 2005; Ronfeldt et al., 2013).

Cost and Scope of the Problem

How Many Teachers Are Lost to Attrition?

About 90% of the nationwide annual demand for teachers is created when teachers leave the profession, with two-thirds of teachers leaving for reasons other than retirement. (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Numerous studies report an attrition rate of 50% or even higher. Synar and Maiden (2014) found that about half of "new teachers" (in their first five years) leave the profession, while Ingersoll et al. (2018) found that nearly half of teachers leave the profession before retirement, and the majority depart in the first five years. DeAngelis and Presley (2011) likewise found an alarmingly high number of teachers who leave the profession before retirement, reporting an attrition rate of 46% for teachers in the first five years alone. In summary, a vast body of literature finds that nearly half of teachers leave the profession before retirement, a majority of that figure within five years (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF], 2003). By comparison with other professions, Ingersoll, et al (2014) found that 30% of teachers who had entered the profession in 1997 had left by 2003. For police, that number was 28%, for architects 23%, for nurses and lawyers 19%, for engineers 16%, and for pharmacists 13%. (Ingersoll et al., 2014a) Of note, however, is that other professions, such as child care workers and secretaries had attrition rates even higher than that of teachers. (Ingersoll et al., 2014a)

The Monetary Cost of Teacher Attrition

Estimates of the annual monetary cost of teacher attrition vary widely (Muller et al., 2014; Synar & Maiden, 2014). Synar & Maiden (2014) noted the range in two widely-reported studies: from $ $4.9 billion (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005) to $7.3 billion annually (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). Retraining costs

comprise an estimated 41 to 48% of this monetary burden (Synar & Maiden, 2014). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) estimated that it costs a school over $20,000 to replace a departed teacher, and this is true even if the teacher left for another post in the field.

A high rate of teacher turnover also means a less-experienced staff, or what Ingersoll et al. (2014, 2018) refer to as a "green" work force, which is becoming "greener" as the trend accelerates. This trend hits hardest in districts with high percentages of minority, low-income, and low-achieving students, meaning that the highest-needs students are often taught by less-experienced faculties (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2013; Podgursky et al., 2004). High attrition also results in teacher shortages and chronic staffing difficulties for school districts that are looking to replace the steady stream of "fleeing" teachers; again, these burdens disproportionately affect schools with large minority and low-income student populations, undermining these schools' ability to improve (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Boyd et al., 2005, Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2011).

The Cost in Student Achievement

There is no consensus on how to measure the cost of high teacher attrition in terms of student morale and achievement, but researchers agree that the costs are significant (Hanselman et al., 2007; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Since at least 1993, it has been argued that teacher mobility and teacher attrition negatively impact student morale and student achievement (Bempah, et al., 1994), and the findings continue to support this conclusion. According to Ronfeldt et al. (2013), "Studies show that high teacher turnover directly affects student performance in math and ELA… This effect remains even after controlling for different indicators of teacher quality, suggesting that turnover itself has a disruptive effect"

(p. 4). This, too, most strongly impacts minority and low-income students (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2011; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010; Ronfeldt et al., 2013).

Attrition and Demographic Variables

Attrition and Teacher Gender, Ethnicity

Consensus is hard to come by in the field of attrition and teacher demographics. In 1970, for example, Charters found that male teachers were more likely to remain in teaching than were their female counterparts (Charters, 1970). By 1978, in a follow-up to this study, Mark & Anderson found that the attrition rate among male teachers had risen to the level that teacher gender no longer made any significant difference (Mark & Anderson, 1978). A few years later, the same pair found that the gender gap had gone in the other direction: female teachers remained longer and were less likely to exit the profession than were their male counterparts (Mark & Anderson, 1985). Adams and Dial (1993) found that there might be significant differences in teacher attrition based on teacher gender and ethnicity: they found males more likely to leave the profession than females and African-American and Hispanic teachers significantly more likely to exit than white teachers.

But Borman and Dowling (2008) conducted a meta-study on 34 studies with 63 attrition moderators and found no significant predictors in the demographic characteristics of teachers. As they noted, “demographic variables such as gender of teachers, ethnicity of teachers, regional or socio-economic background of teachers, and the like, do not seem to make much difference in attrition rates” (pp. 379–380). Similarly, Loeb et al. (2005) studied attrition rates in teachers by age, gender, ethnicity, and other variables and also found no significant differences in attrition by these variables.

Attrition and Teacher Subject Areas

There may be more consensus in the area of teacher attrition and subject area. Recent studies suggest that teachers in math, science, and tech fields may be exiting the profession at statistically higher rates than their counterparts, possibly because they can easily find enticing salaries outside the education field (Nguyen, et al., 2020). But one group that few seem to doubt are subject to significantly higher attrition rates are special education teachers (Boe, et al., 1993; Nguyen, et al., 2020). With respect to turnover, teachers of students with learning disabilities were less likely than other special education teachers to leave their schools, but more likely to do so than general education teachers (Boe, et al., 1993).

Attrition and Student Body Demographics

However, the demographics of the student body do seem to have an obvious effect on teacher attrition rates. Teachers "especially highly qualified teachers" do flee at higher rates from districts with high proportions of low-income or low-achieving students, although this is not always for the expected reasons (Boyd et al., 2005, p. 171). This phenomenon means that the students with the highest need are often taught by the least experienced teachers, and the best teachers (who tend to have more options) are blamed for abandoning the neediest students. However, the Boyd et al. study (2005) approached the question differently and found that the two main reasons teachers leave low-income, low-achieving schools were the "punitive evaluations" they received while teaching low-performing students and the teachers' desire to live in neighborhoods with better schools for their own children. Thus, it appears that demographic variables, even among the student body, are not the main causes of teacher attrition but contribute indirectly, alongside other causes like teacher evaluations and neighborhood zoning.

Reasons Why Teachers Leave

The studies on why teachers leave the profession before retirement consistently place the same factors at the top. In a list that reflects the consensus of the literature, Ingersoll and Smith (2003) gave the top four reasons as: poor salary and the lure of better jobs, student discipline and motivation, a lack of administrative support, and a lack of adequate time and resources.

Poor Salary

As early as the 1980s, researchers were aware that teacher dissatisfaction with their salary was a major driving factor in teacher decisions to exit the profession (Bempah, et al., 1993; Schlechty & Vance, 1983), and more recent studies continue to confirm these findings. Teacher wages compare unfavorably with those of other professions with comparable professional requirements, and teachers frequently express dissatisfaction with their financial compensation as the reason why they are seeking higher-paying jobs (Donley, 2019; Feng, 2009; Goldhaber et al., 2007; Ingersoll et al., 2018). Furthermore, teachers are required to continually educate and train themselves. Then, rather than being rewarded with the respect and prestige found in "more highly valued" professions, teachers receive poor professional treatment, limited autonomy, and unfavorable financial compensation. (Donley, 2019; Grady et al., 2008; Hanushek et al., 2004).

Student Discipline and Lack of Administrative Support

Other commonly cited reasons teachers give for job dissatisfaction are negative student behaviors and poor student motivation, which can make schools feel like an abusive or even threatening work environment (Buckley et al., 2005; Ladd, 2009). These factors are magnified when teachers feel an accompanying lack of support from parents and

administrators (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Tye & O'Brien, 2002). Teachers who flee the profession commonly cite a lack of support from building and district administrators, noting that they fail to adequately protect teachers from abusive students and parents or provide the necessary resources and that administrators voice constant judgment and unfair evaluations (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Curtis, 2012; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Ladd, 2009).

Poor Working Conditions, Especially Lack of Time Resources

Teacher perceptions of their working conditions are more predictive of their decision to leave a school or leave the profession than is salary. Teachers frequently report that inadequate resources for the job requirements, especially time resources, were major factors driving the decision to leave education (Ladd, 2011; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Johnson et al., 2005; Johnson et al., 2011). Overcrowded classrooms, unreasonable workloads, lack of instructional resources, and unsafe facilities are all frequent complaints (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Buckley et al., 2005; Johnson et al., 2005; Johnson et al., 2011; McCann et al., 2005). These findings suggest that job satisfaction for teachers depends upon workplace factors more than salary: autonomy, administrative support, safe facilities, and adequate resources.

Limitations of the Traditional Studies and a Way Forward

Attrition studies have tended to focus on market forces (poor pay and better-paying jobs elsewhere) or teacher burnout, especially among new teachers, who do have the highest attrition rate. But none of that explains the high rate of attrition among "seasoned" teachers who have made it through the "survival phase" of the early years, achieved a feeling of competency in the field, resisted the lure of better pay, and who might therefore be expected

to remain in teaching. Numbers in this understudied area are hard to estimate. The Economic Policy Institute, in their 2019 study (García & Weiss, 2019), estimated that about 42% of teachers with more than five years of experience exit the profession before retirement. Few other sources are available. A 2017 study by the state of Wisconsin (Wisconsin Superintendent of Public Instruction [WSPI], 2017) found that 5,709 of the state's 63,211 public school teachers, (or about 9% of the total public school teacher population) exited the profession in or after the 2015-2016 school year after having taught for five or more years. The report did not distinguish between retirees and those who made a career change. However it called for further research, noting that this number "certainly contains a large number of retirees, but it does invite further inquiry to confirm this conjecture" (WSPI, 2017, p. 3).

Traditional attrition studies focus on concerns over salary or "burnout," suggesting that teacher departures reflect a lack of capacity, a lack of commitment, or a lack of a sense of mission (Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Okubanjo, 2014). While these studies do not seem to explain the decisions of "invested learners" to leave, "work by Santoro (2017) based on Hirschman's theory does resonate with their stories and suggests a way forward" (Glazer, 2018).

The relatively new conceptual lens of "attrition as resistance" offers some explanation for this phenomenon. According to this field of study, many or most "seasoned" teachers who leave do so as an act of resistance, because they can no longer reconcile their conscience with the ways they are asked to teach, and because they feel compromising their principles does violence to their own professional sense of best practices and the best interests of students. This is to say that experienced teachers often leave the profession, not because of

burnout or for economic reasons, but because they leave as a form of resistance. If early findings in "attrition as resistance" research continue to be corroborated and strengthened, we may illuminate a previously hidden driving force in the high rate of attrition, which, in turn, might inform policy and help address the problem of the unhealthy rate of teacher attrition.

Attrition as Resistance

Overview of Attrition as Resistance

Attrition as Resistance is the inspiration for this study, and its purpose is to discover if early findings in this research continue to hold up. This section thus explores attrition as resistance in some detail, beginning with its theoretical roots. Attrition as resistance as a conceptual lens has its roots in a number of intersecting theoretical frameworks:

Agency Theory argues that actors in any system will in part be shaped by that system, but will also act to evolve the system. In the context of education, this principle was perhaps best stated by Biesta and Tedder (2006), who argued that teachers are shaped by the norms and practices of the education profession but also act as agents of change for the profession. Similarly, Exit-Voice Theory (Hirschman, 1970) argues that the act of exiting an organization can actually be an act of loyalty to that organization, or, more properly, loyalty to what that organization ought to represent. When an organization, such as the public education system, has lost its way, teachers may see exit as the only "voice" remaining to them. Relatedly, Resistance Theory (Focault, 1978), (Giroux, 1983) argues that wherever there is power there is resistance. The exercise of control can never be total. In the context of education, Resistance Theory argues that wherever there is a gap between policy mandates and teacher buy-in, teachers are bound to resist. Resistance need not be dramatic or confrontational. It may be very subtle.

Craft Conscience Theory (Green, 1985) evolved from Agency Theory, Exit-Voice Theory, and Resistance Theory. It argues that the practitioners within an organization will tend to develop a high degree of loyalty to the best interests of that organization. Teachers, for example, will become very loyal to the best interests of students, other teachers, and best educational practices. They will uphold standards and oppose threats to the integrity of education. Demoralization, as distinct from burnout, is an important concept for understanding attrition as resistance. Santoro (2011) argued that teachers are motivated by a moral dimension, the sense of doing "good work." When they are barred from doing good work by policies that are counter to the best interests of students, they feel demoralized. It will be necessary then to examine the policies most-often cited by "invested leavers" as the greatest driving factors in their exit-decisions: high-stakes testing, Common Core, unfair evaluations, and scripted curricula.

Putting it all together, this review will examine how this body of work provides the foundation for the conceptual lens of attrition as resistance (Dunn, 2018; Glazer, 2018; Santoro, 2017). Attrition as resistance argues that when experienced teachers, who are loyal to the best interests of students, are prevented from "good teaching" by bad policies, including high-stakes testing, they will resist and attempt to uphold high educational standards. When "good teaching" remains impossible, they may become so demoralized that they leave the education profession as an act of resistance.

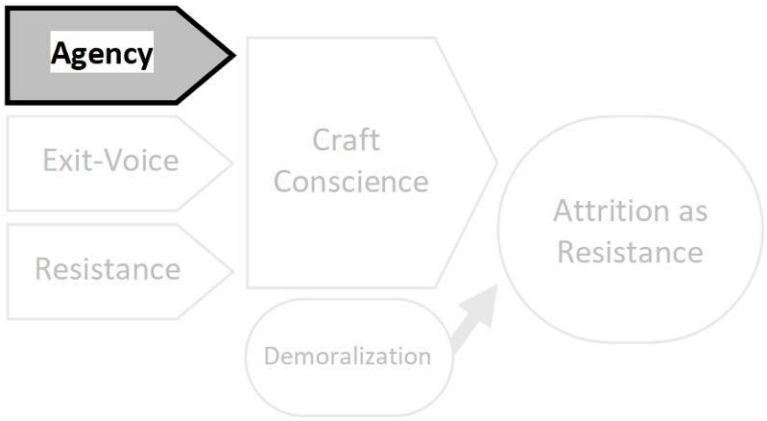
Theoretical Roots of Attrition as Resistance

Attrition as resistance, as a conceptual lens, builds on Craft Conscience Theory, which itself builds on Agency Theory, Exit-Voice Theory, and Resistance Theory (see Figures 1–3.)

Agency Theory.

Figure 1

Theoretical Roots of Attrition as Resistance: Agency Theory



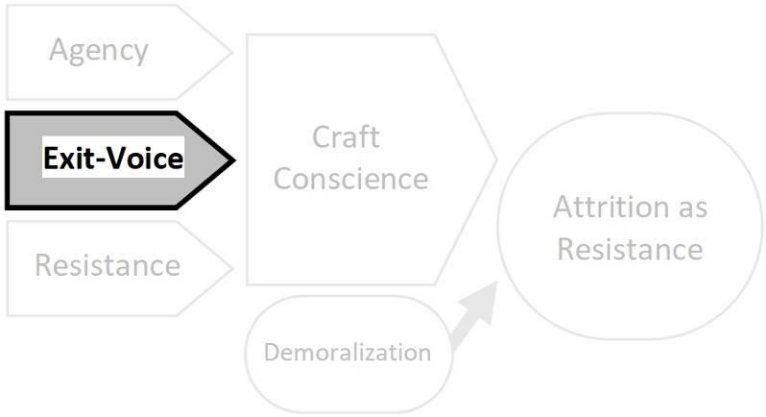
Agency Theory has its roots in 17th-century philosophy and has an arm in virtually every social science. In the educational context, it is perhaps best defined by Biesta and Tedder (2006), who argued that teachers are actors and agents of change, even as they are also acted upon by the norms and expectations of the professional field. In other words, they are informed by their own motives and experiences, and their judgments and actions will necessarily lead to the ongoing evolution of the education profession. Agency is, by definition, an interaction between individuals and their environment (Biesta & Tedder, 2006; Calhoun, 2002; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Calhoun (2002) emphasized agency as a capacity for social action, that is, the decision to conform to or act independently of "the determining constraints of social structure." Emirbayer and Mische (1998) defined agency as "the capacity of actors to critically shape their own responsiveness to problematic situations." Likewise, Lasky (2005) defined agency as "the belief that human beings have the ability to influence their lives and environments while they are also shaped by social and individual factors" (p. 412)

Agency Theory, like Craft Conscience Theory, is a theory of self-reflection and self-evolution. It argues that actors within a scheme are shaped by interaction with their environments. Moje and Lewis (2007) defined agency as "the strategic making and remaking of selves, identities, activities, relationships, cultural tools and resources, and histories, as embedded within relations of power" (p. 18). Agency Theory argues that actors within a system will in part be shaped by it but will also evolve new possibilities for thought and action (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998); this anticipates Craft Conscience Theory's assertion that professionals develop both a sense of good practice and the determination to better that practice through professional interaction. Anderson (2010) argued that teachers are "agentic" when they use their "capacity to make choices, take principled action, and enact change." Cardozo (2015) saw agency in teachers' "space to manoeuvre" and "the consequent strategies they adopt as potential agents of change" (p. 3). All this echoes the assertion that craft conscience is felt and upheld at the individual level but develops in collaboration as teachers create together a morally rewarding educational environment (Green, 1985; Hargreaves et al., 2015).

Exit-Voice Theory.

Figure 2

Theoretical Roots of Attrition as Resistance: Exit-Voice Theory

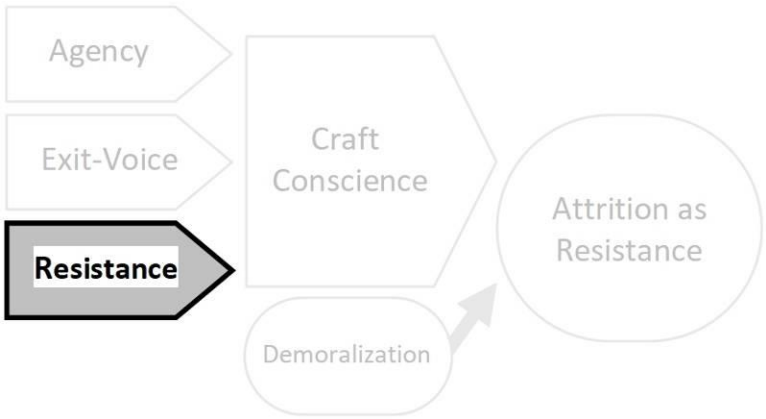


The influential political economist Hirschman (1970) introduced the concept of the "exit-voice." He argued that "exit" (the decision to leave an organization) and "voice" (the attempt to maintain standards and enact change from within the organization) are usually seen as exclusive (Hirschman, 1970). However, when practitioners have a "high degree of loyalty to the organization," they may use the "exit" as "voice" ("exit-voice") to enact change on the organization (Hirschman, 1970, p. 104). Ominously, Hirschman (1970) held that exit-voice could be a measure of decline in an organization; if an organization fails to recognize and adequately respond to exit-voice, it risks falling into further decline and failure. Hirschman applied his theory primarily to states, government organizations, and businesses, but his ideas have been applied by many other thinkers throughout the social sciences.

Resistance Theory.

Figure 3

Theoretical Roots of Attrition as Resistance: Resistance Theory



Resistance Theory argues that although various agents will attempt to exert power or domination in any system or organization, their domination can never be total. Focault (1978) argued that where there is power, there is resistance. Giroux (1983) argued that "Resistance Theory assigns an active role to human agency and experience as key mediating links between structural determinants and lived effects" (p. 285). Set in an educational context and put simply, Resistance Theory says that wherever there is a gap between educational policy and teacher buy-in, there will be resistance. Policymakers cannot have complete domination, nor will the "oppressed" simply remain passive in the face of oppression (Giroux, 1983).

An idea inherent to Resistance Theory is that of "everyday resistance." Resistance does not have to involve a direct confrontation of power. Everyday resistance need not involve the drama of violence, protests, or riots, and it need not be organized. It is likely to be subtle, hidden, and hard to identify (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). Scott (1985) introduced the idea of everyday resistance and provided a list of commonplace everyday resistance

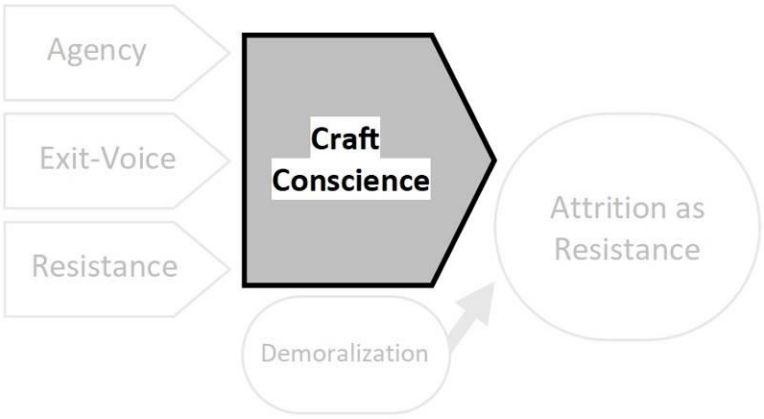
behaviors, such as foot-dragging, passivity, laziness, disloyalty, slander, and even theft. These acts, he argued, may not appear to just be signs of disinterest or sabotage but may rather be acts of resistance against oppression, resorted to when open rebellion is too risky. Acts of everyday resistance, Scott (1989) added later, are small-scale and "relatively safe."

In response to these definitions, Dunn (2018) advised scholars to be cautious in their interpretations of what does or does not constitute resistance to oppression or domination. Resistance Theory states that opposition need not involve direct clashes with power, and it therefore anticipates Glazer (2018) and the notion of attrition as resistance. Because resistance involves a power differential, Glazer (2018) noted, open defiance may be too great a threat, but a definition of resistance that recognizes more subtle acts of resistance to oppression allows researchers to posit that exiting a profession, quietly but in large numbers, may also be an act of resistance. Resistance Theory can therefore be compellingly and specifically predictive. Wherever there is a gap between educational policy and teacher buy-in, there will be resistance, even if it is not necessarily public or dramatic. For example, in schools where teacher dissatisfaction is high, one expects to find high levels of "everyday resistance" on the part of teachers, such as criticism, absenteeism, low productivity, and perhaps even a high rate of attrition.

Craft Conscience Theory.

Figure 4

Theoretical Underpinnings of Craft Conscience Theory



Green (1985) noted a missing piece in Hirschman's "exit-voice" theory, which is the distinction (or, at least, the clear distinction) between the organization and what the organization "ought to represent" in the mind of a member who exercises "exit-voice." It would seem contradictory to assert that one could leave an organization out of a "high degree of loyalty" to the organization but not at all contradictory to exit in response to a higher loyalty to values, asserting that the organization has "lost its way" (Green, 1985). Green (1985) argued that a profession arises in response to a human need or societal good and is thus likely built on moral aims that are integral to the profession. Professionals in the field will therefore naturally tend to establish a set of norms and values that represent best practices in the field and that carry great moral authority (Green, 1985).

Green (1985) defined craft conscience as an individual practitioner's set of values and norms about the best practices in a profession and the individual's loyalty to those values and norms. These values and norms carry great moral authority for the individual and group. They are deeply concerned with the best interests of the clients and the practitioners and with

the integrity of the profession (Green, 1985). In the education profession, craft conscience might be viewed as "the values that teachers attach to their practice in order that it could be understood as 'good work'" or more simply a sense of "good teaching" (Santoro, 2017).

This strong sense of professional values necessarily develops over time, evolving as teachers achieve competency in their field and enjoy the moral rewards of doing good work and helping students (Santoro, 2017). Craft conscience is felt and upheld at the individual level but necessarily develops in collaboration with a professional community, as teachers interact to create a successful and morally rewarding educational environment (Green, 1985; Hargreaves et al., 2015). Craft conscience, or this loyalty to the values of "good work," then becomes the "voice" of the profession's conscience in the individual and a moral imperative for the practitioners who "uphold the integrity of the profession" (Santoro, 2017). Craft conscience demands that practitioners face threats, uphold standards, and resist attacks against the integrity of the profession; in other words, they must oppose whatever violates the best interests of the profession and those it serves (Gardner et al., 2001; Santoro, 2017). In education, then, this suggests that a community of experienced and highly competent teachers will develop a strong loyalty to the best interests of students and a moral sense that these interests must be defended.

Craft Conscience Theory lends a compelling moral imperative to the project at hand. If the work of Hirschman (1970) is to be taken seriously, then his assertion that exit-voice can be a measure of decline in an organization suggests that it is morally urgent that we understand why experienced teachers might leave the profession. Furthermore, Green (1985) argued that craft conscience is a profoundly moral consciousness, and members who exit a

profession from a sense of craft conscience are making a moral judgment that must be heeded:

> It is, in fact, the rootedness of that voice [craft conscience] in membership that gives the judgment [exit] its sting. That judgment hurts because it comes to us as the voice of an insider, speaking out of a shared memory and turning it against us to reveal how great a distance there is between the ideals we espouse and the realities into which, willy-nilly, we always seem to lapse. (p. 23)

Building on Agency Theory, Exit-Voice Theory, and Resistance Theory, then, Craft Conscience Theory adds an important element: the conscientious loyalty to moral concerns. Craft practitioners with a high degree of commitment to the best interests of the profession and its stakeholders are loyal to what the organization should represent. However, they are loyal to the organization or institution only as long as it actually represents what it professes to. If it deviates from its proclaimed values, the professionals in the field must use their agency to express resistance to the threat, perhaps even by leaving.

Demoralization as a Motive Force. What Craft Conscience Theory perhaps lacks is a clear notion of the urgent motivating force for the exit decision. This is embodied in the concept of "demoralization."

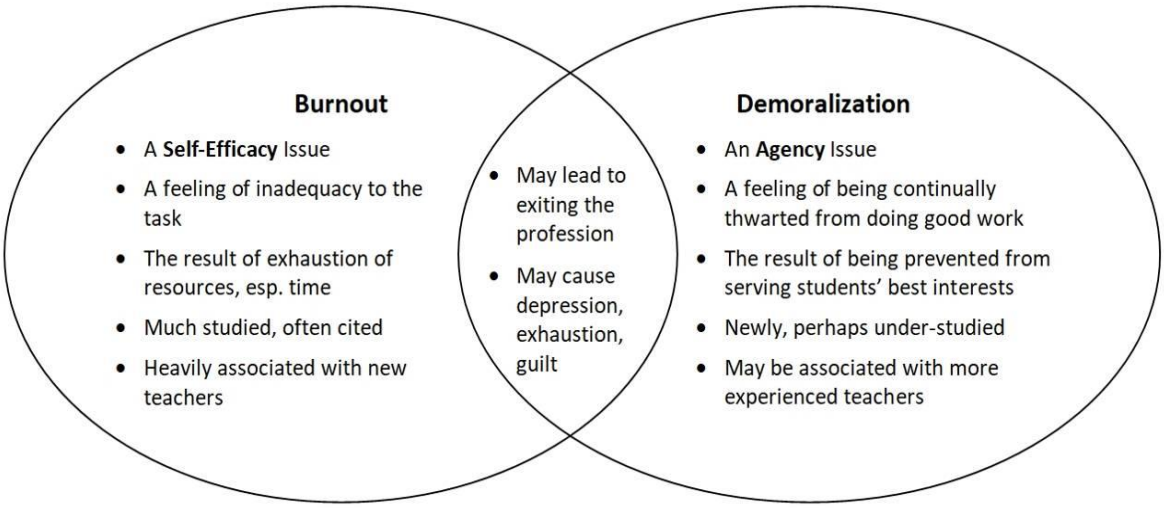
To understand why "invested leavers" are abandoning the field of education at higher rates than those in comparable professional careers, Santoro (2011), Glazer (2018), and a handful of other researchers have started to disentangle burnout and demoralization. They have found that experienced teachers are often "fueled by the moral dimension of teaching" (Santoro, 2011, p. 2) and by the rewards and satisfaction of doing good work, helping students, and the sense of contributing to a better world. Good teachers often refer to their

work as “altruism” or as a “mission” (Crocco & Costigan, 2007). Campbell (2008) argued that all teachers must necessarily be concerned with the moral dimension of teaching—a moral obligation to serve the best interests of the profession and of students. Burnout is considered a self-efficacy issue or a feeling of being inadequate for the task, and it is often cited as a factor driving attrition among new teachers (Glazer, 2018). Burnout “suggests that a teacher has exhausted or failed to replenish her personal resources and as a result has nothing left to offer” (Santoro, 2011, p. 17).

Demoralization should not be conflated with burnout, though it may often be accompanied by some of the same emotions (depression, discouragement, exhaustion) (Santoro, 2011). Demoralization comes not from a feeling of inadequacy but from a lack of agency, the result of being continually thwarted in one’s attempt to do good work (Glazer, 2018; Santoro, 2011). When ill-advised policies dominate, and teacher agency and autonomy is diminished, moral rewards like the satisfaction of doing good work decline. Demoralization is therefore the result not of inadequate preparation or resilience but of continually affronted moral responsibility. Although burnout and demoralization may lead to some of the same feelings and decisions, they have distinct causes and must be disentangled (see Figure 5.)

Figure 5

Burnout vs. Demoralization



Policies that Drive Dissatisfaction and Demoralization

Neoliberalism as a Driver of Attrition. What policies, then, could violate the best interests of teachers and students to such an extent that educators with a highly developed craft conscience are driven to show resistance by abandoning education altogether? Dunn (2018) and Dunn et al. (2017) argued that resignation as an act of resistance results from neoliberalism, defined as "a set of economic beliefs favoring market-based competition and privatization." The reason for this is that, "when neoliberalism's market principles are applied to education, parents and students become the buyers or consumers, and instruction (and thus instructors) become the products and services rendered" (Dunn, 2018). Dunn (2018) identified two of the most commonly cited neoliberal policies that drive teacher resistance as attrition: high-stakes testing and Common Core.

High-Stakes Testing. High-stakes tests are standardized assessments that are used to make important decisions that affect the futures of schools, teachers, and students. Their aim is to "make students, teachers, and administrators responsible for a high standard of teaching

and learning" (Heubert, 2000), but at their worst they lead to severe punishments, like denying student diplomas, firing teachers, or even closing schools. In Idaho specifically, student mastery of Idaho Content Standards is assessed via the ISAT (Idaho Standards Achievement Test), which was developed for Idaho and 28 other states by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. For this reason, the test is also known as the SBAC assessment, a standardized, high-stakes test. The equivalent test in Montana is the Montana Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS), also by SBAC. Wyoming has a locally developed equivalent, the Wyoming Test of Proficiency and Progress (WY-TOPP), while Utah uses the Readiness Improvement Success Empowerment (RISE) test for Grades 3 through 8 and the Aspire Plus for Grades 9 through 12, both of which are local tests.

Dunn (2018) conducted interviews with teachers and examined teacher resignation letters and observed that the most commonly cited frustration was high-stakes testing. Testing was commonly identified as one of the chief reasons behind teacher job dissatisfaction and as a major factor in their decisions to quit their professions (Dunn, 2018; Dunn et al., 2017). Teachers routinely described an "obsession with testing" and an "over-reliance on testing" that stifles learning and creativity, reduces children to numbers, puts unreasonable pressure on children, elevates children's anxiety, and damages children's self-esteem (Dunn, 2018; Valli & Buese, 2007). "Invested leavers" who leave the profession as an act of resistance often report that they feel they have lost their sense of agency as teachers or that they have been reduced to "test-preppers" and have been forced to cooperate in practices that were harmful to students (Dunn, 2018; Glazer, 2018; Santoro, 2017). Numerous studies agree that an increase in high-stakes testing has led to a decrease in student

and teacher morale and a rise in teachers who are leaving the profession (Darling et al., 2003; Hahs-Vanghn & Scherff, 2008; Hill & Barth, 2004; Strunk & Robinson, 2006).

Common Core. The Common Core curriculum is also commonly given in interviews and resignation letters as a reason for teacher frustration and even for the decisions to leave education (Dunn, 2018; Santoro, 2017). Teachers frequently complain that Common Core forces teachers to teach to a one-size-fits-all set of standards, regardless of whether students are or are not developmentally ready for them (Byrd-Blake et al., 2010; Dunn, 2018; Santoro, 2017). A common refrain is that Common Core "asks the impossible" (Santoro, 2017).

As this proposed study seeks to examine attrition among experienced teachers in the inland Northwest, it is necessary to note that Common Core standards (sometimes revised and adapted) are known in Idaho as "Idaho Content Standards," in Montana as "Montana Common Core Standards" or just "Montana Standards," and in Utah as "Utah Core Standards." In Wyoming, the unchanged name "Common Core Standards" is used. It is also important to note that the sources examined in this review, including Dunn (2018) and Santoro (2017), used the phrase "Common Core," as the teachers they studied commonly used it. In other words, the term "Common Core" has become a shorthand for the way in which these standards have been implemented (perhaps misapplied) and assessed, but it is possible that the standards as originally published may not be at fault. This is a matter beyond the scope of this review, and "Common Core" will be used here in similar fashion to refer to the implementation of high-stakes testing at the high-school level.

Unfair Teacher Evaluations. Another topic related to high-stakes testing and Common Core standards concerns teacher evaluations. Teachers are often reviewed based on measurements of student performance that they consider unreasonable and unjust (Ladd,

2011). When teachers see that the only way to ensure favorable evaluations is to spend their time teaching to standardized tests and Common Core standards, regardless of whether this teaching is in the best interests of students, they can become frustrated and demoralized, and this adds to their determination to abandon teaching (Buckley et al., 2005; Donley, 2019; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). As some scholars have noted, "Teachers feel 'constantly judged' by measurements of student performance which take no account of how invested the students were in learning or how ready they were to learn when they arrived, measurements like testing (high-stakes state tests or college entrance exams)" (Day et al., p. 572). Clearly, teacher evaluations based on student performance in standardized tests can have a powerful negative impact on teacher morale, threaten teachers' sense of agency and autonomy, and become a serious driving factor in the decision to exit the profession.

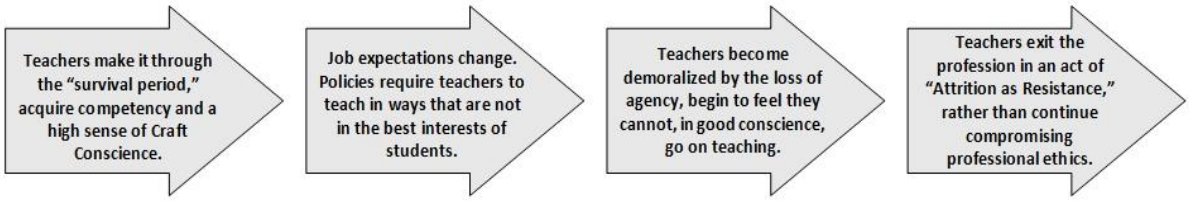
Scripted Curricula. A scripted curriculum is a course of commercially-developed instructional materials that require educators to teach systematized lessons and sometimes even to read from prepared scripts. Scripted curricula focus on developing explicit, direct, systematic skills in students. They are typically mandated by building or district policy and are often found to be sources of frustration for teachers and antagonistic to teachers' sense of agency (Sutton, 2004). Dunn (2018) and Santoro (2017) found scripted curricula to be commonly cited factors in teachers' decisions to leave teaching. Under the curricular and pedagogical impositions of scripted lessons and mandated curricula, teachers find their personal and professional identity thwarted, creativity and autonomy undermined, and ability to forge relationships with students diminished—all critical factors in their expressed job dissatisfaction (Crocco & Costigan, 2007).

Putting It All Together: Theoretical Underpinnings of Attrition as Resistance

A glimpse of some of the policies that drive teacher demoralization and understanding how demoralization differs from burnout can shed light on experienced teachers' motivations for their exit decisions. Teachers are expected to teach in ways that are incompatible with their idea of good educational practice, looking to meet unreasonable standards and assessment demands. Teachers then do not feel the moral rewards of good work and realize that remaining in the profession may no longer offer a way to honor their commitment to the best interests of students. This then leads them to attrition as an act of resistance and as a moral rejection of policies that threaten the integrity of the education profession. Having described this driving moral force, we can now examine attrition among experienced teachers through the conceptual lens of attrition as resistance (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Attrition as Resistance

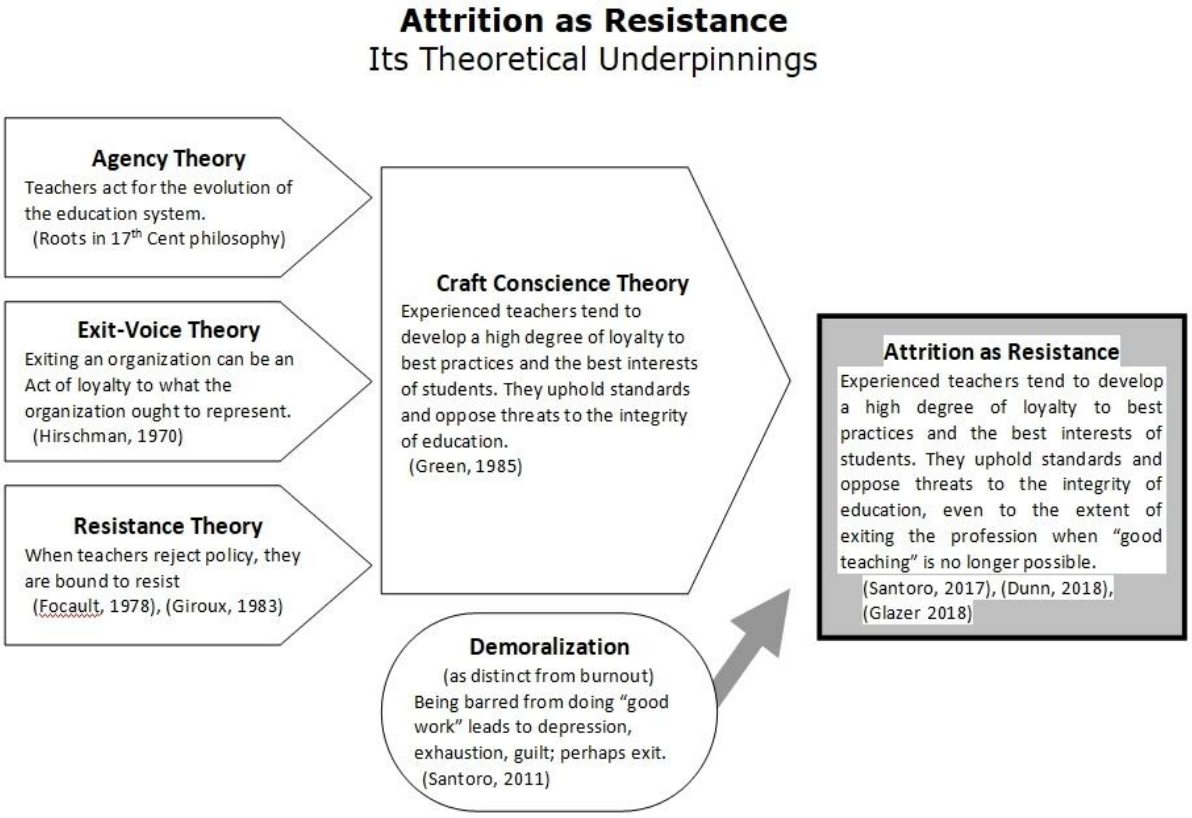


The framework for this proposed study draws on the conceptual lens of attrition as resistance, which holds that some experienced teachers may choose to exit the profession because their craft conscience and high degree of loyalty to best practices and the best interests of students lead them to resist policies that violate these standards. The constant frustration that arises when teachers are prevented from living up to their own standards of "good work" or "good teaching" leads to demoralization, which may cause depression, exhaustion, and feelings of guilt. When the pressure becomes unsustainable, experienced

teachers choose to exit the profession, because they can no longer reconcile bad practice with their consciences. They may hope that resignation will inspire change, but, at the very least, they will be free of the failing education environment. Restated simply, Attrition as Resistance holds that experienced teachers often develop a high degree of loyalty to best practices and, when confronted with bad policies, become demoralized to the point that many exit the profession in protest (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Theoretical Underpinnings of Attrition as Resistance



The Arguments of Attrition as Resistance

Building on these foundations, Santoro (2017) asserted that experienced teachers who have a high degree of loyalty to the profession may leave education not from a lack of commitment but out of their loyalty to best practices and determination not to continue

upholding policies that are harmful to students. Santoro (2017) called these teachers "conscientious objectors" and noted that "conscientious objection in teaching occurs when a teacher takes a stand against job expectations that contradict or compromise her professional ethics." The conscientious resistance, then, might go as far as resignation from the profession.

Dunn (2018) built upon the work of Giroux (1983) concerning "Resistance Theory." Giroux argued that in education, as in any sphere, the dominance of power structures (like the government or administration) can never be total. Teachers who feel oppressed are bound to respond with acts of resistance, whether they be great or small, overt or disguised; this is how they express their hope for change. Dunn (2018) referred to "resignation as resistance" and "resignation as activism," noting that experienced teachers who are loyal to the needs of their students and the integrity of the educational profession choose to leave because they can no longer participate in a system that violates these loyalties. Such teachers may continue to work for change after resigning and hope that the act of resignation itself will inspire change. At the very least, they will no longer be part of a system that is failing its mission.

In a significant number of cases, then, fleeing the profession might be an act of conscientiously resisting counterproductive policies that have come to jeopardize the well-being of teachers and students. Glazer (2018) built upon the work of Santoro and Dunn and outlined the theory of "attrition as resistance" in its clearest and most comprehensive form. He detailed how the theory incorporates the work of influential scholars and theories that have come before, and he cogently explained how this new conceptual lens gives us a way to explore otherwise inaccessible phenomena in attrition studies. Glazer (2018) built on Santoro's work with conscientious objectors and named this action "attrition as resistance."

The present study recognizes that Glazer's (2018) "attrition as resistance," Dunn's (2018) " resignation as resistance," and Santoro's (2017) "conscientious objection" all revolve around the same ideas and concepts and contribute different names for the same conceptual framework.

Attrition as resistance is seen when experienced teachers who feel a strong sense of craft conscience choose to exit the profession rather than compromise their professional ethics. This is important because "bringing this lens [of attrition as resistance] to [the study of] attrition gives us a way to understand exit choices by experienced teachers who felt competent and then decided to leave, choices often unaccounted for in existing research" (Glazer, 2018, p. 63). If the claims of attrition as Resistance Theory can be substantiated by further research, we might be much closer to understanding why even experienced teachers flee the field in problematic numbers. If economic factors and burnout are the primary driving factors in the attrition of teachers in their first five years, we may come to see attrition among teachers who have made it through the "survival phase" as often an expression of craft conscience, an act of agency and conscientious objection, and an explicit refusal to keep participating in a system that violates professional ethics.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This exploratory study utilized a case study design and a qualitative thematic analysis of response data gathered in semi-structured interviews in order to answer the following questions:

(1) Given a sample population of southern Idaho and inland Northwest former teachers who meet the study's definition of *invested leavers*, what are teachers' rationales for leaving the profession?

(2) What are the most frequently cited influences that informed teachers' decisions to leave the profession?

(3) What were the implications (financial, professional, emotional) of exiting the profession for the teachers?

Characteristics of a Case Study Design

A case study design explores a few instances (cases) of a phenomenon in great depth and detail, aiming to describe and explain how a phenomenon is experienced within a specific context (Yin, 2009). A case is "a unit of human activity embedded in the real world, which can only be studied or understood in context" (Gillham, 2000, p. 1) A case can be an individual, a group, an institution, or even a large-scale community, such as a town, an industry, or a profession. Case studies usually examine people through interviews, personal accounts, or personal documents, to examine how people were affected by a phenomenon, an event, or a related group of events, but the phenomenon itself remains at the "core" or "center stage" of the investigation (Yin, 2009). In this study, the phenomenon is exit-decisions by experienced teachers, and each interview participant's experience is a case.

Rationale for a Case Study Design

Case study research designs are often used when a research topic has been understudied and the qualitative researcher seeks to understand more about a phenomenon within its context and from the perspective of the participants (Merriam, 2002). Merriam (2002) further noted that a case study design is especially appropriate when a researcher seeks to examine how external forces influence particular problems and situations. Case studies emphasize non-experimental methods, hypothesis-seeking as opposed to hypothesis-testing, and subjectivity rather than objectivity (Gillham, 2000). They also recognize the importance of context in shaping behavior and seek evidence within context (Gillham, 2000).

Case study research designs are broadly respected in the social sciences for their descriptive power (Yin, 2009). In the context of the proposed project, a case study approach might be visualized as holding the middle ground between the narrow but deep description that might emerge from a narrative study of a single invested leaver (one experienced teacher who left the profession for reasons other than retirement, possibly in moral protest), and the more broadly focused but less in-depth and less individually contextualized description acquired through a phenomenological approach. A case study would focus on a few invested leavers and would tell their stories in more descriptive (and thus likely more compelling) detail than a phenomenology design, although it would be less broadly applicable and less descriptive of the phenomenon as a whole.

A further benefit of the case study design is the potential it has to inform and empower change: “The meticulous description of a case can have an impact greater than almost any other form of research report… The case is unarguable: it happened, and something must be done” (Gillham, 2000, p. 101).

Thus, the case study design is a natural fit for this study because it seeks to explore the causes of the understudied phenomenon of "invested leavers," because context is crucial to growing this understanding, and because one of the stated purposes of the study is to inform policymakers and school administrators at the local, state, and national levels as they attempt to the address the problem of teacher attrition.

Theoretical Framework for This Study: Agency Theory

Biesta and Tedder (2006), who defined Agency Theory in the context of education, argued that teachers are shaped by the education profession but are also necessarily agents of change and help evolve the profession. Teachers have their own thought processes and motivations. They formulate their own judgments and actions, and these are bound to inform and influence the environments around them, including the education profession itself. Anderson (2010) argued that teachers are "agentic" when they use their "capacity to make choices, take principled action, and enact change" (p. 541). Whether or not "invested leavers" are motivated by issues related to "conscientious objection," the agency of these decision-makers implies that their motives and decisions both reflect and act upon the state of the profession. Thus, examining their exit-decisions may offer powerful insights into the question of attrition among experienced teachers, and more broadly, into the state of the education profession.

Why Idaho and the Inter-Northwest

This study is, in part, a response to Glazer (2018) and other researchers who have called upon the research community to build our understanding, region-by-region, of why experienced teachers so often choose to exit the profession into which they have invested so much of their time and expertise. This is, as well, a call to give voice to human stories that

deserve to be heard and may address gaps in our understanding that, in turn, may help us address the crippling problem of teacher attrition and the resulting teacher shortage.

This researcher has made an educational career primarily in Idaho, with professional contacts in Montana, Utah, and Wyoming, and thus has an interest in the educational climate of the region. Here too is where this researcher relied on contacts to provide the sample of convenience for this study's interviews.

Idaho teachers are 95% white and 74% female (Snyder, et al., 2019), so a sample that reflects these demographics might be expected. Further, as administrators in Idaho are only 42% female, the issue of gender equality in educational leadership may well prove to be a factor in interview responses. In addition to earning a degree and certificate, an Idaho teacher must continue to earn college credits and reapply for certification every five years. Idaho has about one teacher for every 20 students (Snyder, et al., 2019), so the large class sizes that drive dissatisfaction in teachers in many areas may be less of a factor in Idaho. On the other hand, Idaho has the second-lowest per-pupil expenditure among the 50 states, so the subject of lack of classroom resources might be expected to arise.

Interview Instrument

Participants who indicated their willingness to be interviewed received the Interview Consent Form (see Appendix A). When that had been returned, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews, which were semi-structured with questions. The interviews averaged just over 30 minutes in length, using protocols adapted from Glazer (2018) (see Appendix B). Glazer (2018) compiled interview questions for invested leavers, focusing on how and why the participants entered the teaching profession, what their experiences as classroom teachers

were like, why they made the decision to leave the profession, and what their subsequent experiences were like.

The interview protocols contained questions directly related to this study's research questions (1) and (2), concerning teachers' rationales for exiting the profession. One example is the following:

- When did you begin to think about leaving the classroom? What prompted you to think about leaving? (Glazer, 2018)

The interview protocols also contained questions directly related to this study's research question (3), concerning the implications (financial, professional, emotional) of exiting the profession for the teachers. For example, they included the following:

- What do you enjoy about your current job?
- What challenges do you find in your current job?
- How do you feel about your choice? (Glazer, 2018)

The interview protocols were adapted for the purposes of this study. The major modification was the separation of questions into the "Introduction" list and the "If Time Permits" list in order to ensure that the questions most relevant to the research questions were prioritized, and questions deemed less important would be left out if the interview were to be cut short to show respect for the interviewee's time. Three questions were removed from the list for the purposes of saving time and shortening the interviews. Two of the removed questions were judged to be speculative so that replies to them would add less information to the discussion and were thus expendable:

- What do you think your life would be like if you had kept teaching?
- What do you think your life would be like if you had never taught?

- Another question, How do you identify yourself professionally?,

was also removed. It was deemed unnecessary, as the answers to other questions would provide this information, making the question redundant. Finally, one question was modified:

- Do you feel guilty about your choice?

This was changed to the following:

- How do you feel about your choice?

This was done to be less of a leading question and to let the interviewee, rather than the questioner, be the one to choose the emotional tone of the reply. No questions were added to the list from Glazer (2018).

Table 2

Alignment of Interview Questions to Research Questions

Alignment of Interview Questions to Research Questions

Research Question	Interview Questions
Background Information	• How long were you a teacher? • When and where did you teach? • Tell me about your decision to become a teacher. What motivated you? What did you expect? • Tell me about your experience teaching. Where did you begin and what were you first teaching? • How did your early experience compare to your expectations? • How would you know if you were successful as a teacher? • What kinds of preparation did you undergo before you began teaching? • What kinds of training did you receive while you were teaching? • After your first year, did you remain in the same school? Tell me about that. • Did you continue to teach the same classes? Tell me about that.
(1) Given a sample population of southern Idaho and inland Northwest former teachers who meet the study's definition of invested leavers, what are teachers' rationales for leaving the profession?	• What were your biggest challenges? • When did you leave? Tell me about the process. • What would you say to someone who asks you about going into teaching?

Table 2 (Continued)

Alignment of Interview Questions to Research Questions

Alignment of Interview Questions to Research Questions

Research Question	Interview Questions
(2) What are the most frequently cited influences that informed teachers' decisions to leave the profession?	• When did you begin to think about leaving the classroom? What prompted you to think about leaving? • What would have needed to change for you to stay in the classroom? Why do you think this didn't happen? • What did you enjoy most about the job? The least? • What school environment would be attractive to you? • What were your relationships like with colleagues? • Can you describe a particularly difficult colleague? A particularly helpful colleague? • How often did you see other teachers teach? How often were you observed?
(3) What were the implications (financial, professional, emotional) of exiting the profession for the teachers?	• Tell me about a time when you felt successful as a teacher? • What was a good teaching day for you? Would you describe one? • Have you ever thought about returning to the classroom? Tell me about that. • What would make a return to teaching attractive to you? What would that teaching situation look like? • What do you enjoy about your current job? • What challenges do you find in your current job? • How do you feel about your choice? • What kinds of things were you looking for in your next career? • Tell me about your professional career since (positions held, duration). • Is there a change in the number of people you see every day? How does this change your daily routine/feelings?

Interview Procedures and Analysis

The researcher recruited a convenience sample of former teachers who met this study's definition of invested leavers. To do so, the researcher used the Facebook social media platform as well as text messages and emails to reach out to contacts suggested by co-teachers and administrators from school districts where this researcher has taught Grades 7 through 12. Contacts and participants were also asked if they knew other former teachers

who meet the study's definition of "invested leavers" and who might be willing to be contacted. Snowball sampling therefore increased the size of the sample as the study continued. This resulted finally in a pool of seven interviewees.

The seven participants who indicated their willingness were interviewed via Zoom meeting, which may be joined via computer or phone, with audio and video, or with audio only, depending on the preferences of the participants. With the interviewees' consent, the meetings were recorded via Zoom's built-in recording software. The recordings were converted to transcripts for data analysis with the use of Colibri transcription software. The interviews were conducted over an eleven-week period from May to August of 2022. One interview showed that the participant had exited the profession by "doctor-ordered, early disability retirement" due to health problems related to the pressures of teaching. Though this exit had not been the teacher's planned retirement, it was felt that this participant might not strictly meet the study's definition of "invested leaver" (Glazer, 2018): referring to teachers who have taught for over five years and who chose to leave the profession for reasons other than retirement. That interview was thus excluded.

The resulting six interview transcripts were coded for commonly used terms and themes that emerged from the data. Thematic coding is a form of qualitative analysis; it identifies passages of text that are linked by a common theme or idea, allowing the text to be indexed into categories (Gibbs, 2007). Thematic coding is not separate from interpretation but is itself part of interpreting the qualitative data (Gibbs, 2007), and the researcher then analyzes the themes that emerge. Thematic analysis is one of the foundational methods of qualitative data analysis, a method of identifying and examining patterns and themes, levels of meaning, within the data (Bruan & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis allows the researcher

to develop “rich” detail of the case, thoughts and feelings, descriptions and actions, interactions with social conventions. (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

All information gathered during the interviews for this study was treated as confidential. All of the participants signed an inform consent form (Appendix A) showing that they were aware of the study, its aims, the researcher, and how the data was to be used. Data was used to complete this study and was then destroyed by the deletion of electronic files. Findings are presented here in summary form. The participants are described and quoted by pseudonym.

Positionality, Potential Bias, and Potential Conflicts of Interest

In the interest of full disclosure, this researcher identifies as a Caucasian, cis-gender male, is 49 years old, and has been a full-time secondary teacher of language arts and social studies for the last 13 years. In the course of that teaching career, this educator has come to identify with the craft conscience Green (1985) described and has also experienced the demoralization Santoro (2011) identified as a result of being barred from living up to his own standards of “good work” by policies he judged to be against the best interests of students and teachers. Some of these very experiences first prompted the interest that has developed into this study. This study controlled for potential bias by sticking strictly to the instrument described in this chapter and given in full in Appendix B.

This study involves no financial or other personal considerations that might compromise or appear to compromise the researcher’s professional judgment in conducting or reporting research. There is no potential conflict of interest to report.

Chapter 4: Results

Participants Overview

The sampling method described in Chapter Three yielded six interview transcripts suitable for coding and analysis in this study. All six former teachers met the study's definition of an "invested leaver;" that is, a teacher who had taught for five or more years and then exited the profession for reasons other than retirement. All six participants had lived and taught in southern Idaho for the majority of their careers, including their final years. Three self-identified as male, and three self-identified as female. All were white, non-Hispanic. Age, education level, and subject areas taught ranged broadly.

Table 3

Participants' Demographic Information

Demographic Introduction to the Study's Participants

Name (Pseudonym):	Rose	Lane	Nicole	Kyle	Brian	Sophia
Ethnicity:	White, Non-Hispanic	White, Non-Hispanic	White, Non-Hispanic	White, Non-Hispanic	White, Non-Hispanic	White, Non-Hispanic
Education:	Bachelors	Bachelors + some Graduate	Masters	Bachelors + some Graduate	Bachelors	Bachelors
Employment (Current):	Not Employed	Declined to Answer	Vice-President and General Manager of Philharmonic Orchestra	Self-Employed School Fundraising Consultant	Self-Employed Lighting Installer	Department of Health and Welfare (Unspecified Role)
Age:	25-34	45-54	25-34	45-54	35-44	35-44
Sex:	F	M	F	M	M	F
Taught for how many years:	5	23	10	31	5	13
Left how long ago:	1 year	2 years	3 months	2 years	1 year	1 week
Subject Areas:	English, Language Arts	Science	Music	Music	Health, PE	Elementary Classroom, English Learners
Grades:	Elem, Mid, High	Mid	Elem	Elem, Mid, High	Mid, High	Elementary
Taught where?	Eastern Idaho	Southwestern Idaho	Southwestern Idaho	Southern California, Southwestern Idaho	Eastern Idaho	Alaska, Southwestern Idaho

Rose's Story

Rose (pseudonym) enjoyed traveling the world in college and after graduation. She became a volunteer English teacher in the Ukraine and then in Mexico, primarily teaching children and youth, but also sometimes adults. She found that she had a talent for teaching through games, helping learners overcome their initial shyness with an unfamiliar language, helping them grow their confidence and then their skills. When she came back to the United States, she decided to become an EL (English Learners) teacher, and she earned her credentials.

When Rose became a new full-time EL teacher in Idaho, she found the job fun and rewarding. "I loved it. I loved being able to help the kids find joy in learning… helping them to feel comfortable and seeing them start to break out of that shell… I think that's really what hooked me into teaching – was understanding that I can help these kids to love learning."

Rose spoke at length, with joy and animation, of how much she loved her students and her work with them. "Just being able to interact with the kids. It was so much fun to get to learn their different personalities and to get to learn about them, and you just… you form those relationships with your students… [find] those things that they love, and put it towards our learning, and see them get excited about it, and then learning wasn't hard anymore. It was just fun."

But she also found teaching "mentally and emotionally exhausting." The workload seemed unreasonable. "[T]here is so much paperwork, and so that was a huge thing, especially coming into ESL [English as a Second Language] my first year teaching. We were given literally hundreds of folders, and these folders had all of this information on the students. But these folders hadn't been updated in years, and most of the students probably

shouldn't have ever been in the program. And so, that first year, I spent hours, and hours, and hours just going through these folders, learning how these folders are supposed to work, because there were certain things that the state required to be in there. But then there was a lot of fluff that was in there as well… [W]e probably had six to seven hundred of these folders, and that first year we whittled them down to about 300. And so part of it was just that the system was a mess, and the state had realized it as well."

By her second year, Rose found that she was receiving pushback from classroom teachers who seemed to resent her interventions. "[T]here was so much being asked of those teachers already by administration. And so then, for me to come in and say, 'Well, you know, my job is to, you know, help you, and give you more information on how to teach these kids…'" Many teachers seemed to feel that, not being trained in ESL themselves, they ought not to have these students in their classrooms, and they seemed to blame Rose for this.

But the real exit-decision-maker for Rose came when she and her husband had their first child. Now, at the end of a workday, teaching seemed to leave her with inadequate time and energy for her family. "[I am] emotionally and mentally exhausted at the end of the day when I am teaching full-time. It just takes a lot out of me, and then I feel like I don't have the… I don't have the capacity that I want to have, as a mother, when I get home. And so that's a huge concern for me."

After teaching for five years, and then leaving to be a full-time mother, Rose has "mixed emotions" about her decision. She knows she made the right decision for her family, but "honestly, I felt really guilty walking away. It was so hard to leave my students…I still have students that will email me, or text me, and be like, Hey, are you teaching this semester? When are you going to start teaching again? Right?"

Lane's Story

Lane graduated college with degrees in botany and zoology, and he worked in forestry for five years. But he wanted to teach. He earned his credentials in secondary science. He hoped originally for a high school job, but landing in a middle school in Southwestern Idaho, he found that he enjoyed the energy of this age group, and here he stayed for 17 years.

"[T]he successes weren't necessarily the nuts and bolts, the pedagogy, you know, the lessons taught. It was actually just spending time with the kids, and getting to know them, and building those relationships, and you could see them opening up…And then, of course, the learning came after that, after they realize, hey, there's a guy that cares, there's somebody that is in there for the right reasons…and so, in science, you have the fun lessons, the labs, recreating things, you know, inquiry type stuff, where kids are super curious, and they just light up. You know, they just latch onto things, and they run with it, and you know, they're not jaded. They're still little kids in middle school, and there's that kernel that you can appeal to, but they're old enough to understand, you know, the higher-level stuff, so that was also very rewarding."

The workload was demanding and finally exhausting. "It's, you know, it's kind of all consuming when you're in it…you know, 12, 13-hour days, and that was OK when I was younger, and I didn't have my own family. But then when, you know, you start to have a family of your own, you have kids, you have responsibilities…There's all these competing priorities where you have to draw some lines. You have to make some decisions and say, Look, you know, I can only do so much, and, you know, I have to go home at 5:00, whatever. I don't think you ever solve it…I was at a point where I was managing it well, up until my

final year, where I ended up quitting about a month into the school year." Lane realized that he had lost his former passion for teaching. Exhaustion had gotten the better of him, and he found himself "on autopilot." It was time to move on to something else.

He became a mediator with the Department of Health and Welfare, but he soon found himself missing the students and missing teaching. After three years, an emergency opening appeared at a Southwestern Idaho school in mid-year. An administrator there, who was a friend and former colleague, reached out, and Lane took the opportunity. He taught middle school science again for six more years.

But again, he felt the passion for the profession slipping. More than any single cause, Lane described it as "death by a thousand cuts." His school district pushed him out of a building where he had built a successful program into a new building with an inexperienced staff that had difficulty establishing the team environment that he missed. The push for all instruction to become digital was forcing students into exhaustive use of screens that was beginning to sap their attention-span abilities and make them lose interest in education. They kept sneaking away to game sites. It was too easy for them to detach and disengage from classmates, the teacher, the entire classroom environment.

The workload was more exhaustive than ever, and being the only experienced teacher in his new department, he found the administration asking him to take on more and more responsibilities. "So you want me to work seven-and-three-quarter-hours a day and have all those expectations, while I'm telling you it's taking 13 hours a day to do that; so you know, something's gotta give…And teachers are notorious for saying yes to everything, because we care, because we want the best for our kids, for our students…It was an unhealthy situation, and I had to get out."

And by now, the public attitude toward teachers in Idaho was becoming more toxic. “If you look at where the state legislature is in Idaho right now and some of the more dominant voices, teachers are being vilified. You know, we're groomers. We’re pedos…You know, you've devoted your life to children essentially and making their lives better, and then you're being name-called by people who control the purse strings for education in the state…It's a gut punch.”

But even after two years away, and quitting education for the second time, Lane found he couldn’t stay away. He loved the students that much. “When I say our kids, they are like our kids. I mean, they truly are. I care about them to that depth, to that level.” By the summer of this interview, Lane was already making plans to return to the classroom.

Nicole’s Story

Nicole went back and forth between music performance and music education in her college years, but she settled finally upon teaching. She taught elementary music, grades K-5, in a Southwestern Idaho school for ten years.

From the beginning, she met resistance. Classroom supplies were inadequate. “What do you mean? I only have four tambourines, like I have six hand drums. I've got classes of 30 kids, like how I can't spend an entire class time sharing six drums, so that everybody gets a chance.” Classroom teachers didn’t seem very supportive of a music teacher’s time, and community members seemed determined to control her program. “[T]here's different approaches to elementary music…and one of the approaches is very much we're going to put on a program, and so every grade level has a program, and you're going to sing all these songs, and you're going to do all these choreographed dances, and people are going to recite lines, and it's like a musical, and all these things at the elementary level! My focus is very

much on teaching content, making sure that I was able to spend my very limited time with students, focusing on getting them literate in music and getting them the appreciation beyond what they heard on the radio…I absolutely resisted as much as I can, but some parents that had loud voices and were on the PTO were very adamant that they wanted programs for their kids, and they wanted the music teacher to put them on."

But also from the beginning, Nicole enjoyed successes working with students, and she knew she was hooked. One early project, teaching 4th and 5th graders to write their own music, had trouble getting off the ground at first. But she redesigned it, focusing on their collaborative strengths, and soon… "Yes, they get it! They can write music. They can read music. They're working together collaboratively. And I was like, This is the holy grail of everything that I'm supposed to do with my life and music. And so that was just a really, really great feeling for me!"

Nicole didn't especially set out to leave teaching. She intended to teach to retirement, but when an opportunity opened, the Vice-President and General Manager of the city Philharmonic Orchestra, it was too good to pass up. To her surprise, Nicole was offered the position, and she gladly accepted. Immediately she was astonished by the difference in the job expectations.

When Nicole offered to put in extra unpaid time training herself for the position before she officially stepped into it, she was told, "Absolutely not! You'll get paid for the time you're working." Used to any amount of unpaid demands upon her time as a teacher, Nicole said she could hardly take this in. "It's like getting out of an abusive relationship, where I didn't see how much was bad for me individually until I left. Like there's all the memes and stuff you see on the internet about, like teachers going to the bathroom during

summer, and you know how horrible it is to retrain yourself once you go back to school…you have to physically train your body to only need to go to the bathroom for very specific times throughout the day…I still work through lunch now without noticing it, because that was what I did teaching. Like I either didn't eat lunch, or I sat at my desk answering emails, taking a couple bites here and there."

About Nicole's choice to leave teaching, "I feel right, really good about it for my own personal health. Like, the hardest part for me was saying goodbye to the people I worked with. I've built some really good relationships with my team for those ten years…but like the biggest sadness, I guess…[is that] I know that I'm going to miss the students too. It's the people, even if sometimes they were causing grief. But it is the people and the kids that that are the only reasons I would have stayed. But because everything else was just so much for me, I'm happy with where I am, and I'm happy I made this choice."

Kyle's Story

Kyle was focused on music performance in college, but a mentor professor encouraged him to consider music education, and he took the advice. He student-taught in Idaho and took a position teaching elementary music in Southern California. He was startled by the difference in the kids. He found "a significantly lower amount of respect for authority, respect for adult authority, with those kids…It certainly felt as though I had to work a lot harder to manage and control the students in my classroom there. It felt as though the kids there came with a lot more difficult life experiences than the kids that I taught in Idaho."

But Kyle persisted. The work was rewarding, both in California and later back again in Idaho: "singing with the kids, having moments in my day, where having aha moments, where the kids, either individually or collectively, would discover new art, new expression in

themselves, would discover success, would hear it themselves, and realize that it was something that they controlled, that it was something that they created. Had lots of those moments, even in the days where there was challenge in terms of student management. I could look back at moments where we found success…those were the good days, when I would finish a day, and I was exhausted, but I knew that we had accomplished something that was a good day of teaching."

Kyle spoke continually of his love of kids and music. "The singing, and the music, the… the emotional and spiritual joy that I found in watching kids create music, and watching them grow…their own self-confidence in being able to create music and being able to express themselves through our art. That. That's why I did it. That's why I continued to do it, because those were great. Those were moments that carried me through difficult times…Watching the kids accept each other and watching them go from moments of pain, and hurt, and discord within a classroom to acceptance and growth as a unit, as a group, as a community. That's… that's what I loved the most about teaching, about my career."

Kyle taught elementary, middle school, and high school music for 31 years, and he too wasn't especially looking to leave the classroom. But the demands of the job and his level of exhaustion was growing, and he was reaching his limit. "There's so much need here from so many of the students now…because of the breakdown of the family, because of the fact that the world is at their fingertips now, with their phones, and their computers, and all the information that they get, much of which is contrary to the truth. It doesn't seem to be to support the idea of adult authority being good…All of those other things, the meetings, the requirements, the paperwork requirements, going from… going from traditional grading to standards-based grading, and all of that uncertainty, you know, that I was facing…the limits

that I began to see in myself in terms of my own physical and emotional energy at my age, and the toll that that took on my ability to run a high school program, which requires a lot of energy from a director, not just during the day, but because of the performances, and the trips, and the other things that you have to take, the fundraising and all of that. It's, it's a job that is… that requires a lot of energy."

If the opportunity of his current career hadn't come along when it did, Kyle feels he might well still be teaching music. "I had an opportunity to buy, to purchase a franchise international company. Had I not done so, I probably would still be teaching." Kyle works now as a fundraising consultant for schools, and he knows he made the right choice.

"I feel like it was the time in my life to do that. I have zero regrets. I feel positive about where my new career is taking me..I believe, in five or six more years, I can set myself up financially to have a good retirement. I've always been looking forward to retirement…I work to live; I don't live to work, so I have learned to leave work behind me when I get home. I have learned to separate my work life from my personal life, and I enjoy my personal life. I enjoy spending time with my family."

Brian's Story

Brian coached high school wrestling for years before he became a teacher, so he already knew that he loved working with the kids. "I enjoy teaching kids and being around kids. I enjoy helping kids to reach new levels to improve and become better. I enjoy the kids' company and being part of their lives."

As a secondary Health / PE teacher, Brian found plenty of rewards and successes. In Health class, he found that giving students a variety of topics and letting them choose which they would research for presentations, gave them more ownership and helped them feel more

engaged. “That was always really rewarding: having some of the more high-risk students seem to be a little more eager and involved to get into it. But then, they got more out of it as well, because they dug a little bit more in, because it was something that they were a little more interested in. And so, as a teacher, that was always really rewarding.”

In PE class, Brian helped students get past the competitive need to win and see the joy in togetherness, using games and athletics to build community. “It was always really, really rewarding seeing students get that light bulb turned on: it's more fun to play and have competition than it is to win. And so seeing students purposely let the other team have a little, a little advantage, so it would become more competitive, that was always really, really rewarding, because they got past that I-need-to-win, I-need-to-win and saw what games are about. They're about having fun and enjoying being together and playing together.”

Throughout the interview, every topic came back around to love of kids and the joy of teaching for Brian. He admitted to his occasional frustrations with bossy parents or with student misbehavior, but his only real regret seemed to be that he didn’t have more individual time with each student. “So I had between 300 and 360 students. I mean, I felt bad…It took me half the school year to get all of my students’ names down…some of these kids, how do I reach them? And that would be probably the most challenging is in individualizing the lessons a little bit more for each student.”

Brian taught for five years, but when he and his wife started to grow their family, he ran into the limitations of a teacher’s financial security and his ability to provide for a family in Idaho. “We'd get CHIP for the kids. We'd get… We had WIC as well, and if I worked too much in the summer, we got kicked off…You work all summer long, and every moment, and every vacation, you have to get ahead. Or you only work a little bit in the summertime and

take advantage of the government benefits. And so I don't… I like to earn my own keep and… and reserve any extra, let it go more to families that are more needy."

Brian finally chose to build his own business for the financial security of his family. He works in Texas now, a self-employed lighting installer. He misses teaching. He'd even like to go back to teaching one day, if his business takes off to the point that it can pay for his freedom to teach. "If it [our business] gets to where we can manage it remotely and do that on the side, it's basically supplementing our income on our own to be able to come back to teach."

But until that day, Brian knows he made the right choice, leaving the education profession. "I feel pretty good about it right now. I mean, I love it and enjoy it…We have a lot more freedom working in the private sector. We are able to do a lot more. I loved it. I loved teaching. But I think, and I believe all teachers would say that too, teachers are kind of shackled financially."

Sophia's Story

Sophia taught in Alaska and in Southwestern Idaho for a combined 13 years. She taught migrant preschool, Elementary English Learners, and elementary classroom instruction for grades K-5. "I absolutely love teaching. It's something that's just a part of who I am. And I also very much enjoy children of all ages. I think that I had a lot of joy and a lot of success in my early years of teaching. It was invigorating. It was very demanding. Of course, I didn't realize how much of my life would be wrapped up in the identity of teacher – how much time outside of the classroom my career would demand from me. But it was invigorating, and I did it wholeheartedly, with much enthusiasm."

As with all the other participants in this study, for Sophia, the great joy was working with the kids. “I think I enjoyed the kids’ success the most. I really reveled in watching them become comfortable with the culture of school and experiencing success. That was just… It was just intoxicating to watch someone who was paralyzed with fear and anxiety, because they didn't know the culture, the country, the language, and just blossom and feel confident about themselves.”

But, when Sophia ran an EL Department in an Idaho elementary school, she felt buried in “legal red tape, the paperwork that was required. There never seemed to be someone who knew how to train me on that.” No one trained her to meet the paperwork requirements of the state of Idaho, despite her repeated requests. Then the state would punish her district for delinquencies in paperwork, and her administrators would blame her department. Aides did not want to stay, and the department suffered. “The turnover was horrific, because the district office was not willing to compensate at a certified level for more than just my position. So we had a revolving door of paraprofessionals that were equally untrained and equally in the dark on how to do things. And so I think, all that put together, it really made a poor communication environment that just compounded problems and led us down a path of being fined and restricted by the state.” For such advice as she was able to gather, Sophia was forced to reach out to departments in other districts for help.

About a year before Sophia walked away, she was assaulted and permanently injured by a violent student. “I don't think it's something that the district could have seen coming. I think it was exacerbated by large numbers of kids. But no, this was a five-year-old student who was clearly emotionally disturbed, clearly had behavioral issues that were to a level that I would consider as a professional a disorder. And he picked up a desk and threw it at me. He

picked up a chair, and he threw it at me, and he missed. And then he picked up his desk and threw it at the back of another child, and I stepped in and attempted to redirect the desk, to catch it, to redirect it, so it wouldn't hit this other child on the back of their head, and it tore the muscles in my rotator cuff. And I had to get emergency surgery to get my bicep muscle and rotator cuff reattached. My final appointment with Workman's Comp is coming up next week, and they will measure it for disability, and they will tell me how, by what percentage. I am now disabled. So I would say that I am 90% healed, but I will have, in my estimation, a 10% range of motion less and strength less. It's my dominant arm."

It was when she realized that schools had no intention of spending the money it would take to protect her that Sophia made up her mind to leave. "I want to be protected from volatile, violent, and disturbed students. And I also want to be protected from that mad gunman that every teacher has in the back of their mind when they are teaching." Sophia herself has several solutions to suggest: smaller class sizes, personnel in every school who are trained to suppress violence, getting violent students the help they need. The reason why schools won't do these things? "No money. There's really no other reason, because the data shows it. In formal settings, we have testified to the needs we have. We have put out scientific studies from scientific journals and educational sources that are highly valued and respected and shown that more support is an academic return, and will help support educators, and will make it a more positive environment. And it all just comes down to money."

At the time of this interview, Sophia had been out of education for only one week, and she felt great pain and sadness over the necessity of the decision. "So I gave 110% percent. I trained, and I retrained, and I proved my worth, and I learned, and I pivoted, and I

was authentic, and I was observed, and I was evaluated, and I feel like I got nothing in return. I did not. I got micro-managed instead of supported. I was left to deal with it by myself instead of being given resources that I so desperately needed. I was told to do more with less instead of being given the minimum. And that's how I feel like the all-mighty dollar was always more important than me."

Thematic Coding Process

The interview transcripts were subjected to four rounds of thematic coding. As common themes emerged in multiple passages across the transcripts, they were identified and color-coded.

Figure 8

Sample of Thematic Qualitative Coding of Transcripts

Interviewer	Interviewee	Codes	Categories of Codes
Okay, all right, so tell me about your decision to become a teacher. What motivated you and what did you expect?		Prompt – Background Information	Prompt
	A huge part of what motivated me was that it was very family-friendly, a schedule my kids, if I were to teach in their school district... and it was, it's just a good option. In worst case, if my husband died, and I needed to work to provide for my family, it seemed like a great way to be able to still make the most of the time with my kids, so that was a huge factor in it. Another was just that I really enjoyed helping people when I was younger. I liked being able to tutor people, and I found that I was good at helping people understand content, and so that was another driving factor to wanting to become a teacher. I didn't think about ESL until I wanted to teach abroad somewhere. And so I went and taught in Ukraine, and after I came back, I realized that English as a Second Language was something that I really, really enjoyed. And so English as a Second Language only came onto the table after I went and experienced it first hand.	Adequate time for family / Family-friendly schedule --- Love of Success Teaching Content	Commitment to Family --- Love of Working with Students
Wow, great experiences – that's fantastic! Where did you begin?		Prompt – Background Information	Prompt
	So I began with a volunteer teaching experience in Ukraine. So that was the first time that I had ever taught, and I was probably halfway through my degree. So I knew a little bit, but I didn't know a ton. But I thought, if I can teach English to people who don't... that's not their native language, and if I can do that and love it in a different country, with a different culture, where everything was different, then I could certainly come back to the states and love teaching. So that was kind of how I was testing the waters. But I found that I loved interacting with the kids, and it was really fun to work with the littles. Those age groups were five to twelve year olds. And so that was kind of my first experience just trying to figure out how kids learned and what kind of things kept them excited. So we learned about lots of different games we could play. I realized how important your attitude is and how much little kids especially feed off of just the energy that you bring to the table. And so it was a really neat experience. I learned a lot of teaching tricks without, I think, realizing that they were teaching tricks. And then I came back and finished, and I went and taught in Mexico after I graduated, and they were both kids in that same age range. But also I took on some adult students as well there. And so that was the first time I got to interact with adults and see the difference in their learning styles and the way that they process things. And so that was a really interesting experience: to be able to teach it at a different level.	Love of Success Teaching Content --- Fun Working & Playing with Students	Background / Demographic Information --- Commitment to Family --- Love of Working with Students
Okay, let's see, how did your early experience compare to your		Prompt – Background Information	Prompt

This process finally resulted in 53 codes for participant responses in nine categories, organized by Literature Review findings: Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks into three over-arching themes:

- Traditionally Most-Cited Reasons (incl. Burnout)
- Craft Conscience (incl. Agency Theory, Resistance Theory, Exit-Voice Theory)
- Attrition as Resistance (incl. Demoralization)

The interviewer questions were counted as a tenth category with five question codes.

Table 4

Categories, and Codes

Categories and Codes:

Interviewer

Prompts	Background / Demographic Information
	Research Question 1 (Teachers' Rationales)
	Research Question 2 (Frequently Cited Influences)
	Research Question 3 (Implications of Exiting)
	Follow-Up Question

Interviewee

	Category	Codes	Participants	Lines
Traditionally Most-Cited Reasons (incl. Burnout)	Pressures Associated with Burnout	Student Misbehavior	2	16
		Negative Interactions with Parents	1	34
		Exhaustion (Mental or Physical Unspecified)	3	37
		Physical Exhaustion	1	1
		Mental Exhaustion / Stress	6	61
		Excessive Workload / Time Commitment	6	71
		Excessive Class Sizes	3	21
		Inability to Leave Classroom as Needed	1	10
		Meetings: Excessive / Pointless (Perceived as)	1	11
		Pandemic	2	19
	Commitment to Family	Adequate time / Family-friendly schedule	3	16
		Support for parents / daycare	2	9
		Adequate energy for family	1	6
	Financial Concerns	Fairness of Compensation / Invest vs Return	6	65
		Financial Security	3	39
		Pay for Supplies Yourself	1	1
	Inadequate School / Classroom Resources	Inadequate Classroom Supplies	1	9
		Inadequate Program Funding	1	8
		Inadequate Training / Guidance	2	23
		Unsafe Classroom / School	1	33

Table 4 (Continued)

Categories, and Code

Category	Codes	Participants	Lines
Craft Conscience (incl. Agency Theory, Resistance Theory, Exit-Voice Theory); Feeds into Attrition as Resistance	Feelings About Exit Decision		
	Lack of Classroom Autonomy	5	39
	Misses Teaching	3	14
	Right Decision	4	6
	Guilt for Leaving	1	8
	Punished for Leaving	1	4
	General Love for Teaching	4	15
	New Job: Less Stress	1	4
	New Job: Positive Treatment	1	4
	Attraction to Work Outside School System	2	35
	Challenges of Current Job	1	9
	Lost Passion for Teaching	1	9
	Love of Working with Students		
	Love of Student Growth: Skills / Content	6	85
	Love Student Growth: Maturity / Confidence	5	84
	Fun Working and Playing with Students	4	37
	Building Rapport with Students	3	28
	Relationships with Colleagues		
	Lack of Cooperation from Regular Teachers	2	31
	Positive Relationships with Colleagues	3	6
	Negative Relationships with Colleagues	2	4
	Passion for Teacher Advocacy	1	5

Category	Codes	Participants	Lines
Attrition as Resistance (incl. Demoralization)	Pressures Associated with Demoralization		
	Excessive Screen Use	1	15
	Ineffective / Abusive Admin	1	8
	Feels Let Down by Profession	2	5
	Poisonous Atmosphere, Within and Without		
	Hostile / Demeaning Social Media	1	2
	Disenchanted Teachers	2	21
	Low Prestige	1	9
	Teachers' Commitment Exploited	1	4
	Public Vilification	1	9

Participants means the number (of the six) interviewees who spoke on this topic.

Lines is the (approximate) number of lines of text devoted to this topic between the six transcripts.

Emergent Themes

Love of Teaching and of Students

The interview participants spent more time talking about their love of teaching and their love of students than about any other subject and by a wide margin. In an interview about an exit-decision, participants might have been expected to dwell upon negative topics, but again and again, the discussion kept coming back around to how much these teachers loved teaching and loved their students. All six interviewees discussed this love at length. All six expressed the joy of watching students grow in skills. Five of the six focused specifically on the students' growth in confidence and maturity, and four of the six spoke in general terms of just how much fun it was to work and play with the students. The codes "Love of Student Growth: Skills / Content" and "Love of Student Growth: Maturity / Confidence" accounted for the highest and second-highest number of lines of transcript text, 85 lines and 84 lines respectively. To put that into perspective, the next three most popular topics by that measure accounted for 71, 65, and 61 lines, and the other 48 of 53 codes accounted for less than 40 lines each.

"I love education. I love teaching," said Rose. "I loved being able to help the kids find joy in learning… Just being able to interact with the kids. It was so much fun to get to learn their different personalities and to get to learn about them, and you just… you form those relationships with your students… It was just fun!" Speaking with great enthusiasm of her success teaching music, Nicole nearly shouted, "Yes, they get it! They can write music. They can read music. They're working together collaboratively. And I was like, This is the holy grail of everything that I'm supposed to do with my life and music. And so that was just a really, really great feeling for me!" "We want the best for our kids, for our students," said

Lane. “And when I say our kids, they are like our kids. I mean, they truly are. I care about them to that depth, to that level.”

This study sought to understand why experienced teachers are leaving the profession, and in the cases of these six interviewees, dissatisfaction with students was plainly not the issue. These teachers clearly loved teaching, and they loved their students.

Justice and the Exhausting Workload

A striking theme to emerge from these discussions was the teachers’ hunger for justice in the profession. All six interviewees spoke of exhaustion and the unreasonable work load; and at first blush, this might seem to align with the findings of burnout in traditional studies, usually focusing on less experienced teachers. “Burnout is considered a self-efficacy issue or a feeling of being inadequate for the task, and it is often cited as a factor driving attrition among new teachers (Glazer, 2018). Burnout “suggests that a teacher has exhausted or failed to replenish her personal resources and as a result has nothing left to offer” (Santoro, 2011, p. 17). But inadequacy did not seem to figure large in these interview discussions. Rather there was usually a sense of frustration at the profession’s unreasonable demands. The exit-decision often seemed to come when the teachers, having acquired a sense of competence, looked around and realized that no amount of effort on their part would ever be enough. The injustice was simply too great.

“It's, you know, it's kind of all consuming when you're in it,” said Lane, who had by the time he was describing, taught science successfully for 17 years. “It's, you know, for me, it was, you know, 12, 13 hour days… you have to draw some lines. You have to make some decisions and say, Look, you know, I can only do so much, and, you know, I have to go home at 5:00, whatever... I don't think you ever solve it. You manage it.” Rose complained of

the unfairness of the paperwork. Sophia spoke of virtually begging for the training and guidance she needed to tackle the state's unreasonable demands upon her program. Nicole said that she would advise new teachers, "they absolutely have to set boundaries for themselves. They have to set up, you know, I'm only going to work between this hour and this hour when I get home. I'm not taking home anything on the weekends. I used to joke about not learning the security code to get into my building for the first seven years that I worked there." Nicole compared leaving education to leaving "an abusive relationship," and Sophia mourned, "the level of disrespect and disregard for healthy boundaries at the same time that they're telling you to work on the mental health and the environment in your classroom is just so hypocritical, and it's wildly inappropriate."

In summary, the exhaustive workload was a subject of much discussion in these interviews, but not for reasons of burnout or inadequacy; rather the interviewees were frustrated at the injustice of workload demands that could not be met. They felt this was no way for professionals to be treated.

Justice and Financial Compensation

Financial compensation was another source of much dissatisfaction in these interviews, which again seems at first to align with the findings in traditional studies. Poor salary and the lure of higher wages is usually cited as a top driving factor in teacher attrition studies (Ingersoll et al., 2018), and these studies typically focus on teachers who leave in their first five years (Santoro, 2017; Okubanjo, 2014). So a first glance might suggest that "invested leavers" may not be so different from new teachers who leave the profession. Yet again, the dissatisfaction here seemed to be primarily with the injustice of a teacher's financial compensation. Three of the six participants spoke of a need for greater "financial

security," (this code accounting for 39 lines of transcript text,) but all six participants spoke of the unfairness of teacher compensation, (this code accounting for 65 lines of transcript text.)

"[M]y kid's 22-year-old babysitter just graduated with her nursing degree, was offered a job at $70,000 a year at St. Luke's," said Lane. "Oh, it took me 15 years to go from 50,000 to 60,000 a year in the state of Idaho. I have eight more years before I retire. I'd never even make it to 70,000 based on that, you know that progression. And so here's again, somebody with 11 years of full-time university, multiple degrees, certificates, highly-qualified master teacher, and I'm not even making as much as the 22-year-old with a four-year degree, and it's like that with a lot of other professions. So it's really disheartening in some ways, in some respects, being devalued from that standpoint. So when you're hearing it from the media, from the legislature, you know, you're being told by your district admin, Yeah, we're not throwing any more money at you. We're not valuing you that way. It becomes a burden that for me became unsustainable."

An interesting aspect of this finding was that two of the three female participants seemed to feel a bit apologetic or even guilty about asking for more financial justice. "I feel like, when I say it to other people, it sounds shallow sometimes," said Rose, "but I really do feel like it would make a huge difference. Just knowing that I'm not worried about supporting my family, and I can put forth the work and the effort in order to live a comfortable lifestyle with my loved ones, right?" "You know, we're not here for the money," said Sophia, "and none of us are here for the money. However, that's not an excuse to not compensate your professionals." None of the male participants seemed to feel apologetic about asking for greater financial fairness.

A Toxic Environment

This finding is a bit hidden in the above system of coding. The five codes in the category "Poisonous Atmosphere, Within and Without" were Hostile / Demeaning Social Media, Disenchanted Teachers, Low Prestige, Teachers' Commitment Exploited, and Public Vilification. Disenchanted Teachers appeared in the responses of two participants, and the other codes were discussed by only one participant each. But these five codes were spread among five of the six participants. One focused on demeaning social media, one on the low prestige endured by teachers in the community, one on the state legislature, and so on; but taken together, five of the six participants, though pinpointing different sources, noticed and expressed dissatisfaction with the negative atmosphere surrounding education.

"I'm glad that you're doing a research on that [why teachers exit] to find what the teachers are saying and document that," noted Brian. "Because if not, it's just talked amongst the teachers and they bicker and poison their own watering hole sometimes by focusing on the wrong things or not talking about the things that are the big issue." "[T]here are going to be times where you are absolutely demoralized," Nicole said she would advise new teachers, "and those times are fewer if you don't read articles about education, do not get on social media and look for articles on education. Do not join chat groups unless it's needed, and even then, don't necessarily join teacher chat groups about education, like try to. It's important to know what's going on, but I have found that those groups and those avenues just start to fester."

"If you look at where the state legislature is in Idaho right now and some of the more dominant voices, teachers are being vilified," mourned Brian. "You know, we're groomers. We're pedos. I mean, that's in the national news, it's in the local news, right?" Nicole too

commented on the politics of vilification in Idaho and how it manifests itself in the larger community, even in her own family. She would confide in her father some of her dissatisfactions in her job, but the conversations reached "the point where he didn't want to hear it, because he's like, Well, this is kind of your own doing, like you got yourself into this. And that was, I think, one of the other things too. It's demoralizing, right?"

The sources of negativity surrounding education are spread wide: from the legislature, to the public, to social media, to teachers themselves, according to this study's participants. But five of the six noticed and mentioned a negative atmosphere surrounding education. They described it as "poison[ous]," "vilify[ing]," "toxic," "demoralizing," "disrespect[ful]," and "beating you down."

The Right Decision

Asked how they felt about the exit-decision they had made, four of the six interviewees answered directly that they knew they had made the right decision, and another, while still struggling with the emotional loss (Sophia had only been out of teaching for a week at the time of the interview) was clear-minded about the necessity of leaving education. "Yeah, I'm sad. I'm really sad about it. I feel like it failed me. I feel like the career failed me." Similarly, Nicole said, "[N]ow I see it's almost, it's like getting out of an abusive relationship, where I didn't see how much was bad for me individually until I left."

"I feel pretty good about it [leaving] right now," said Brian. "I mean, I love it and enjoy it. But the… we have a lot more freedom working in the private sector." "I feel good about it," echoed Kyle. "I feel like it was the right choice. I feel like it was the time in my life to do that. I have zero regrets. I feel positive about where my new career is taking me." Lane

was the extreme exception here. At the time of our interview, he was actually making plans to return to teaching.

All six of the participants remembered the students fondly. Four went as far as to say they missed teaching, and Lane was planning to return. But four were enthusiastic about their new careers, and Rose was happy about the choice to stay at home with her young children. Four of the six described being happy with the increased freedom of their new lives, three described being valued more and enjoying more autonomy in their new jobs, (while none said their new jobs treated them less well,) and four were more confident about their futures financially, (while none said they were less confident).

This study sought to understand the implications of the exit-decision for the "invested leavers." For all but one of the study's six interviewees, the decision was necessary and right, and they weren't looking back.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

This Study's Findings and Traditional Attrition Studies

The top four reasons traditional studies find for teacher attrition have been repeated many times before and since, but perhaps nowhere more succinctly than Ingersoll and Smith (2003): poor salary and the lure of better jobs, student discipline and motivation, a lack of administrative support, and a lack of adequate time and resources. There is much in the findings of this case study to align with traditional findings. Student discipline and motivation were little-mentioned in these interviews. Lack of administrative support was an important factor for two of this study's "invested leavers."

The exhausting demands of a teacher's workload was a topic of much more discussion; though it was argued in Chapter Four (see p. 64-65) that the context of these discussions points more often toward an outraged sense of justice than toward a sense of inadequacy, making "burnout," (a driving factor so often mentioned in traditional studies,) perhaps an uncomfortable fit here. Financial dissatisfaction was also much discussed, as traditional attrition studies would have predicted; but again, it was argued in Chapter Four (see p. 65-66) that the context of the discussions points toward dissatisfaction with the justice gap about twice as often as it points toward anxiety over financial security or the lure of higher salaries, which suggests again some difference between the exit-decisions explored in traditional studies, (such as Ingersoll et al., 2018 and Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017,) and those of the "invested leavers" interviewed in this study.

This Study's Findings and Craft Conscience Theory

The findings of this study align well with the predictions of Craft Conscience Theory. Green (1985) defined craft conscience as an individual practitioner's loyalty to the best practices in a profession, to the integrity of the profession, and to the best interests of the clients and the practitioners of the profession. Craft Conscience Theory predicts that experienced teachers are likely to have developed a sense of competency in the field and are likely to have great loyalty to the interests of the students. The great love of teaching, love of students, and enjoyment of student success expressed by this study's participants and detailed in Chapter Four speaks powerfully to the craft conscience of these "invested leavers" as predicted by Green (1985).

Recall Hirschman's (1970) assertion that exit-voice can be a measure of decline in an organization, suggesting the morally urgency of understanding why experienced teachers might leave the profession. Building on Hirschman, Green (1985) argued that craft conscience is a profoundly moral consciousness, and members who exit a profession from a sense of craft conscience are making a moral judgment that must be heeded:

> It is, in fact, the rootedness of that voice [craft conscience] in membership that gives the judgment [exit] its sting. That judgment hurts because it comes to us as the voice of an insider, speaking out of a shared memory and turning it against us to reveal how great a distance there is between the ideals we espouse and the realities into which, willy-nilly, we always seem to lapse. (p. 23)

If the six interviewees in this study have indeed developed a high sense of craft conscience, as the transcript data strongly argues, then Craft Conscience Theory argues that their exit-decisions may be moral judgments, wake-up calls to the profession that ought to be

heeded (Green, 1985). The implication that competent, strongly-invested insiders have judged the profession, at least locally, to have lost its way demands, at the least, that further investigation is a matter of some urgency.

This Study's Findings and Attrition as Resistance

Exit-Decisions

The alignment of this study's findings with the predictions made by the conceptual lens of Attrition as Resistance, as defined and explored by Glazer (2018), Dunn (2018), and Santoro (2018), is more problematic. That this study's participants had a strong sense of craft conscience seems inarguable. Did they exit the profession as a moral judgment, for reasons rooted in that craft conscience?

Attrition as Resistance, as conceptualized by Glazer (2018), Dunn (2018), and Santoro (2017), predicts that "invested leavers" who exited the profession as an act of attrition as resistance left education as a response to ill-considered policies that violate the best practices of teaching and the best interests of students. (See Figure 6.) In such an act, "invested leavers" exercise their "exit-voice" because they cannot, in good conscience, go on teaching and violating professional ethics. The strongest reasons given by this study's participants for their exit-decisions do not align well with these predictions. Common Core and high-stakes testing, for example, two of Dunn's (2018) most-frequently cited policies driving Attrition as Resistance, never appear in the transcript data.

Table 5

Most-Frequently Cited Driving Factors in Attrition Studies: Traditional vs Attrition as Resistance

Traditional Attrition Studies (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003)	**Attrition as Resistance** (Dunn, 2018)
• Poor salary and the lure of better jobs • student discipline and motivation • lack of administrative support • lack of adequate time and resources.	• High-stakes testing • Common Core • Unfair teacher evaluations • Scripted curricula

Table 6

Strongest Reasons Given by Interviewees for Exit-Decisions

Rose	**Brian**	**Nicole**	**Kyle**	**Lane**	**Sophia**
financial compensation is unsustainable; teaching is too exhausting.	pay and benefits are inadequate for supporting a family	teachers lack autonomy, schools underfund music programs, teachers face unreasonable demands to take work home, give time without compensation, take unpaid professional development	Wasteful meetings devour a teacher's precious time, needed a job that demands less energy, offers more autonomy	tired of being undervalued by the legislature and the public, tired of the insulting wages, tired of positions, assignments constantly changing underfoot	assaulted and injured, feels physically unsafe, unreasonable work expectations

The participants did, at times, complain of policies that negatively impact students and undermine good teaching practices. Lane decried the over-reliance on screen-use and increasingly scripted digital curricula, which he argued are not conducive to student learning. Other participants noted at times the negative impact of being "micro-managed" on the quality of education. But of the six participants, only two, Nicole and Kyle, gave this lack of autonomy; that is, the denial of the agency necessary to provide the best quality education, as one of the most important reasons they left the profession.

Recall that Dunn (2018) specifically identified four related policies / practices as the most common driving factors in attrition as resistance: high-stakes testing, Common Core (as evaluated via high-stakes tests), unfair teacher evaluations (based on test performance), and scripted curricula. Two of these policies, high-stakes testing and Common Core were not mentioned in these interviews. Sophia mentioned unfair teacher evaluations, though not in the context described by Dunn (2018). Sophia was referring to being evaluated on paperwork practices she had not been trained for, not on mandated teaching or testing practices. Only Lane complained of scripted curricula, and he did not give it as one of his most important reasons for leaving.

The interviewee discussions of financial concerns and unsustainable workloads seem to align better with the predictions of traditional attrition studies than with the predictions of Attrition as Resistance, though it was argued in Chapter Four that this fit is more problematic than it would seem at first glance. (See p. 64-66.)

Burnout vs Demoralization

Here alone, in its emphasis on demoralization as distinct from burnout (see Figure 5 on p. 25), the predictions of Attrition as Resistance align well with the findings of this study. Five of the six interviewees complained of a lack of classroom autonomy; that is, agency. Feelings of inadequacy or lack of self-efficacy were little if ever mentioned, perhaps only by Sophia, and even then in the context of being denied proper training and guidance in state paperwork requirements. She did not seem to doubt her adequacy to the task were she given a fair chance. Here alone, the findings of this study seem to align better with the predictions of Attrition as Resistance, as elaborated by Glazer (2018), Dunn (2018), and Santoro (2017), than with those of traditional attrition studies.

Conclusions

This study was conducted, in part, as a response to Glazer's (2018) call for researchers to collect more data on experienced teachers who exit the field, to help us better understand the reasons why seasoned teachers are leaving the profession. Would some fascinating findings in the area of the relatively new conceptual lens of Attrition as Resistance hold up? Would this case study continue to support the emerging findings of Glazer (2018), Dunn (2018), and Santoro (2017)?

Support for Attrition as Resistance?

The findings in these interviews do not seem to strongly support Attrition as Resistance as defined and explored by Glazer (2018), Dunn (2018), and Santoro (2017); and yet, the underlying question that seemed to first fascinate Glazer and lead him to propose this conceptual framework still seems very much alive in the interpretation of this study: are there differences between the reasons given for exit-decisions by experienced teachers and those most-frequently cited in traditional studies, focusing, as they typically do, on new teachers? The relatively small body of literature on the attrition of experienced teachers does not adequately explain why this group continues to leave the profession at a high rate, argued Glazer (2018), and in the six cases studied here, his argument seems to hold.

Lack of administrative support, one of the four most-often cited factors in attrition studies (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003), was little mentioned by this group of participants, suggesting that these experienced teachers had found ways of working with or around difficulties with administrators or perhaps had navigated their way into positions where relationships between administration and faculty were relatively healthy. Student discipline and motivation, another of the top four reasons cited in

traditional studies (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003), was again little mentioned; and, so far from being a driving factor in the exit-decision, relationships with students were overwhelmingly positive and remembered with tremendous fondness by all six of these interviewees.

Poor salary was unquestionably a major factor in the exit-decisions studied here, but not for the reasons usually given in traditional studies. The lure of higher wages was little mentioned, and financial security, though a significant worry for two of the six participants, was clearly secondary to another factor across the transcripts: the injustice of a teacher's financial compensation, especially when considered in terms of investment vs return. Four of the interviewees seemed to have adapted their lives to a teacher's salary; but in these four cases, the unfairness, even the professional insult, were too great to bear indefinitely and figured largely in the exit-decisions. So here too a difference between the exit-decisions of new teachers and those of "invested leavers" seems to emerge.

The fourth factor usually found at the top of the list in traditional attrition studies (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003) is burnout / exhausting workload, and here again, a difference seems to emerge. All six interviewees spoke at length of the stressful workload, and they all acknowledged the exhaustion of trying to keep up with the demands of it. But all six seem to have managed that workload successfully for years to the point of developing a feeling of competency in the field and enjoying many successes in teaching their students. Again it was the injustice of the unreasonable demands, rather than any feeling of inadequacy, that seemed to drive this factor in the exit-decision. It was not so much burnout (a feeling of inadequacy, a self-efficacy issue) as demoralization (a feeling that autonomy is thwarted, an agency issue.)

One interpretation of these findings might be that there are indeed differences in the exit decisions made by experienced (as opposed to new) teachers, but that Attrition as Resistance, as conceptualized by Glazer (2018), Dunn (2018), and Santoro (2017) does not help explain most or many such cases. Perhaps a competing set of reasons emerges, reasons focused more upon justice than upon policy objections.

An Expansion of Concept for Attrition as Resistance?

An alternate interpretation might be that the conceptual lens of Attrition as Resistance needs some expanding. Attrition as Resistance, as defined and explored by Glazer (2018), Dunn (2018), and Santoro (2017), focuses upon an experienced teacher's response; (that is, the response of a teacher with a high degree of craft conscience) to injustice; but focused overwhelmingly upon unjust policy, unjustly mandated poor pedagogical practices, which unjustly burden students with an inadequate or even harmful education. In other words, injustices against the students are the clear focus.

Glazer (2018) focuses on exit as an act of resistance, out of a feeling of loyalty to students and best practices, because "they were unwilling to work in ways incompatible with their core beliefs about good teaching" (p. 63). Dunn (2018) gives the clearest focus on policies that drive Attrition as Resistance: high-stakes testing, Common Core, unfair teacher evaluations, and scripted curricula – all pedagogical mandates, it should be noted, except for unfair teacher evaluations, which are based upon the pedagogical mandates of high-stakes testing and Common Core. Santoro (2017) too is focused upon pedagogical mandates. "Conscientious objection is one possible response to conflicts between educational policy mandates and teachers' professional commitments" (p. 751).

But Attrition as Resistance is built upon Craft Conscience Theory, and nothing about Craft Conscience Theory necessitates that Attrition as Resistance in the context of education should focus overwhelmingly on injustice against students at the expense of considering other injustices. Indeed, Green (1985) proposed that professionals with a high degree of craft conscience are deeply concerned with the best interests of the clients and the practitioners and with the integrity of the profession. In the context of education, that means the best interests of both students and teachers.

Nor is there a lack of precedent for such an expansion of concept. Santoro (2018) summarized her findings in three categories. Two were "Concerns with Pedagogical Standards" (p. 755-756), which focused heavily on Common Core and testing, and "Concerns with Democratic Standards" (p. 758), which focused on Common Core and lack of sufficient supports for the neediest students. But the middle section, "Concerns with Professional Standards" (p. 756-757), focuses upon injustices against teachers, especially unreasonable workload demands, unjust and unprofessional financial compensation, lack of classroom autonomy, and the "lack of respect" for teachers rampant in public and government expression.

Santoro's (2017) concerns about injustices contract almost entirely to those against students by the time she reaches her "Conclusion" (p. 757-758) section. Glazer (2018), who builds heavily upon Santoro's (2017) work takes little notice of that middle "Concerns with Professional Standards" (p. 756-757) section, and Dunn (2018), as previously noted, is heavily focused on pedagogical policy. But re-expand the conceptual lens of Attrition as Resistance in the direction briefly explored by Santoro (2017) to include resistance against

policies that violate the best interests of teachers, and now how neatly does Attrition as Resistance fit this study's findings?

Nicole, Kyle, and Sophia might then recognize a strong Attrition as Resistance component in their exit-decisions, driven by lack of autonomy and increasingly unreasonable workload expectations. Lane might then see walking away in disgust over the unjust wages and the insulting public treatment by Idaho legislators as an act of Attrition as Resistance. Rose and Brian might resonate with Santoro's (2018) "Concerns with Professional Standards" when they reflect on their decisions to reject an Idaho teacher's unsustainable financial compensation, and they might conclude that walking away was an act of "conscientious objection" or Attrition as Resistance.

Love and Justice

As described extensively in Chapter Four (Emergent Themes: Love of Teaching and of Students on p. 59), all six participants spoke enthusiastically and at great length of their love for teaching and their love of the students. The overwhelmingly positive tone of interviews about exit-decisions was perhaps the most surprising finding in this study! Yet each of these "invested leavers," love their students as they might, had again and again to confront injustices toward teachers. They each described an Idaho teacher's financial compensation as either unsustainable, or unfair, or both. They each described the vast and ever increasing workload as unsustainable, unreasonable, stressful, and exhausting. In the end, all six of these experienced former teachers had to choose between love and justice, and all six walked away.

Limitations

This study, being a case study, is necessarily subject to a case study's limitations in generalizability. In this case, a convenience sample of six experienced former teachers told their stories. The findings indicate that more research in this area is needed. This study, then, echoes Glazer's (2018) call for researchers in other localities to collect more data on teachers who exit the field, helping us "develop larger understandings of the lives and experiences of teachers in general, and deeper understandings of the factors contributing to teacher exit" (p. 69).

Recommendations for Practitioners and Policy Makers

At this early stage, the conceptual lens of Attrition as Resistance is perhaps too new and not yet sufficiently established to support many recommendations for practitioners and policy makers. From this study, perhaps all that can be concluded and recommended to teachers and former teachers is that, if they are struggling with considering an exit-decision, or with an exit-decision already made, they may take some comfort in knowing that they are not alone. They may love teaching, and they may love their students, but they may still face a choice between love of craft and justice to themselves. If they find the demands of the workload unreasonable, this need not be a reflection on their commitment or level of ability. They need not, perhaps, feel a sense of inadequacy. It may be that the demands upon a teacher's time are simply unjust. If they find a teacher's financial compensation unfair, especially in terms of return vs investment, this need not, perhaps, make them feel selfish or apologetic. It may be that the financial compensation is actually an injustice. And if these considerations can be recommended, then there is no reason why the recommendation should be limited to experienced teachers. It may be that a seasoned teacher has a clearer view of

this choice between love and justice, but a new teacher must surely face all these same realities.

From this study, perhaps all that can be concluded and recommended to policy makers, from the building level to state and federal governments, is that, if they are serious about curbing the extensive losses inflicted by the high rate of teacher attrition, (monetary and otherwise,) they ought to consider that the findings of traditional attrition studies may not fully explain the problem or give sufficient recommendations for the solutions. It appears that more experienced teachers may be weighing exit-decisions for reasons not sufficiently explored by the attrition studies commonly available and widely read, and policy makers would perhaps be well-advised to seek counsel from those who know the struggles of experienced teachers the best: the experienced teachers themselves.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this study suggest that Glazer's (2018) suspicions, that new teachers and experienced teachers may exit the profession for different reasons, may be well-founded. It may well be that traditional attrition studies, focused primarily upon new teachers, have largely failed to explain why experienced teachers so often leave education. This study argues that Glazer's (2018) call for continued study in this area is still germane and salient.

The findings of this study further suggest that the lens of Attrition as Resistance, as conceptualized by Glazer (2018), Dunn (2018), and Santoro (2017) may require some expansion, not in any tangential direction, but in a direction entirely within the spirit of the Craft Conscience Theory upon which Attrition as Resistance is built. Teacher exit-decisions driven by injustices against teachers, every bit as much as those driven by injustices against

students, may be acts of attrition as resistance and may equally be warning signs that the profession has lost its way.

Suggested Further Studies:

- Continued studies of "invested leavers" in other locales around the country are needed.
- Studies that examine the exit-decisions of "invested leavers" through an expanded Attrition as Resistance lens, may be suggested. Herein the resistance may be against policies unjust to both students and teachers.

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Appendix A: Interview Consent Form

What "Invested Leavers" Can Tell Us About Why Experienced Teachers Exit the Profession

Informed Consent for Follow-Up Interviews

Eric DuPuis, from the Department of Curriculum and Instructions Graduate Studies is conducting a research study. The purpose of the research is to gather data regarding why experienced teachers (who have taught for five or more years) choose to exit the teaching profession for reasons other than retirement. You are being asked to participate in this study because you recently indicated your willingness by email.

Your participation will involve joining an interview by distance via Zoom. You may join with a computer or phone, with audio only, or with both audio and video, according to your preferences. The interviews will be recorded, using Zoom's built-in recording software and converted to transcripts, using Colibri transcription software. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences as a teacher, specifically why you chose to leave the profession and what might have encouraged you to stay. The interview should take about 20-30 minutes to complete. The interview includes questions such as "Tell me about your decision to become a teacher. What motivated you? What did you expect?" and "What would have needed to change for you to stay in the classroom? Why do you think this didn't happen?" The transcript data will be analyzed for emerging themes with the help of Dedoose software. The researcher will have accounts with Zoom, Colibri, and Dedoose, and you will not be asked to pay for any service. Follow these links for Terms of Use and Privacy Policy pages for Zoom, Colibri, and Dedoose:

Zoom	Terms of Use: https://explore.zoom.us/en/terms/	Privacy: https://explore.zoom.us/en/privacy/
Colibri	Terms of Use: https://colibriwp.com/terms-of-use/	Privacy: https://colibri.ai/privacy-policy
Dedoose	Terms of Use: https://www.dedoose.com/resources/terms	Privacy and Security: https://www.dedoose.com/about/security

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate. You can refuse to answer any of the questions at any time. There will be no names or identifying information associated with your responses. There are no known risks in this study, but some individuals may experience discomfort or loss of privacy when answering questions. Interview data will be stored for five years on University of Idaho OneDrive (cloud storage), and then will be destroyed by deletion of electronic files.

The findings from this project will provide information on the causes of attrition among experienced teachers. If published, results will be presented in summary form only, if quotes are used, they will be attributed to a pseudonym or reported as "anonymous."

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call my supervising professor, Janine Darragh, at (208) 885-0353. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, or about what you should do in case of any harm to you, or if you want to obtain information or offer input you may call the Office of Research Assurances at (208) 885-6340 or irb@uidaho.edu.

By electronically signing and returning this consent form, you certify that you are at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in the above- described research study.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Adult Participant	Signature of Adult Participant	Date
Eric DuPuis	_____	_____
Name of Research Team Member	Signature of Research Team Member	Date

Appendix B: Interview Questions

[Adapted from Glazer's (2018) Published Interview Protocols]

Introduction.

We're going to have a conversation about your teaching experience and your subsequent professional experience. I'm going to ask a series of questions to get you talking about these subjects. I'm here mostly to listen, though. You're the expert on your experiences, so I want to hear as much as possible directly from you.

- How long were you a teacher?
- When and where did you teach?
- Tell me about your decision to become a teacher. What motivated you? What did you expect?
- Tell me about your experience teaching. Where did you begin and what were you first teaching?
- How did your early experience compare to your expectations?
- Tell me about a time when you felt successful as a teacher?
- What was a good teaching day for you? Would you describe one?
- How would you know if you were successful as a teacher?
- What did you enjoy most about the job? The least?
- What were your biggest challenges?
- When did you begin to think about leaving the classroom? What prompted you to think about leaving?
- What would have needed to change for you to stay in the classroom? Why do you think this didn't happen?

- When did you leave? Tell me about the process.
- Have you ever thought about returning to the classroom? Tell me about that.
- What would make a return to teaching attractive to you? What would that teaching situation look like?
- What school environment would be attractive to you?
- What do you enjoy about your current job?
- What challenges do you find in your current job?
- How do you feel about your choice?
- What would you say to someone who asks you about going into teaching?

If Time Permits.

- What were your relationships like with colleagues?
- Can you describe a particularly difficult colleague? A particularly helpful colleague?
- How often did you see other teachers teach? How often were you observed?
- What kinds of preparation did you undergo before you began teaching?
- What kinds of training did you receive while you were teaching?
- After your first year, did you remain in the same school? Tell me about that.
- Did you continue to teach the same classes? Tell me about that.
- What kinds of things were you looking for in your next career?
- Tell me about your professional career since (positions held, duration).
- Is there a change in the number of people you see every day? How does this change your daily routine/feelings?