How Teachers Facilitate Academic Commitment in Elementary School Students: A Phenomenological Study

Lindsay T. DeFeo-Feibus

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Lindsay T. Feibus

CANDIDATE FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Trish Lichau, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee
Jill Williams, Ph.D., Content Specialist
Suzette Zientara, Ph.D., Content Reader
How Teachers Facilitate Academic Commitment in Elementary School Students: A Phenomenological Study

Lindsay T. Feibus
Concordia University–Portland
College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Transformational Leadership

Trish Lichau, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee
Jill Williams, Ph.D., Content Specialist
Suzette Zientara, Ph.D., Content Reader

Concordia University–Portland

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Abstract

As the demands for success in 21st century have changed, the United States education system has begun to adjust its focus in preparing students for their futures. Character education programs were implemented to address the changing demands of the 21st century. Character education research reveals possession of traits such as persistence, grit, self-awareness, and self-control contribute to students’ future success. In accordance with the research on character education programs and success in the 21st century, the school district at the focus of this research implemented a set of dispositions. The disposition of academic commitment was chosen for its roots in persistence, grit, and resilience towards academic challenges. Recruiting six elementary school teachers as participants, this phenomenological research study aims to illuminate teachers’ views on and definitions of academic commitment, and determine how these views and definitions influenced teacher facilitation of this disposition. After interviewing the participants in a three-cycle process, the interview transcriptions are analyzed and coded, employing the qualitative data analyses of spiral-Colaizzi’s method and horizontalization, and the ATLAS.ti computer software for qualitative data analysis. The analyzed interviews illuminate the understanding that academic commitment is defined by one’s grit and perseverance towards academic challenges with an optimistic attitude. When it comes to facilitating academic commitment, the participants believe in establishing a goal-setting process in their classrooms while being role models of academic commitment. This research emphasizes the importance of teachers as role models when it comes to facilitating academic commitment in students.

Keywords: academic commitment, teacher facilitation, 21st century success
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband and my parents for their unwavering love and encouragement throughout this process. You three have been so instrumental in my completion of this work, and I thank you so very much.

Additionally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the many other doctoral candidates who have persisted, and are currently persisting, through the challenges of developing their dissertations. I wish them well in ultimately reaching their goals.

“You have given so much; you have worked so hard; you have fought through so many things just to make it here. You have taken the leap and you have waited. You have not given in to shortcuts, but sometimes the soul just needs to be reminded: keep going, keep believing, keep trusting, the work you’re putting in is not in vain.”—Morgan Harper Nichols
Acknowledgements

This dissertation could not have been possible without the dedicated support and encouragement of my loving husband, my devoted parents, my encouraging advisor Dr. Trish Lichau, and my supportive content specialist and content reader Dr. Williams and Dr. Zientara.

To my husband, who has stood by my side through the challenges of this process with the most optimistic outlook: I am forever grateful for your talents in crafting sentences and discovering the exact word I was looking for. You were always willing to listen and encouraged me to continue. Every day, I am so grateful for you.

To my parents, who have dedicated their lives to supporting me in reaching my dreams and goals: throughout my life, your support, encouragement, and love have guided me to consistently achieve more. For this, I am forever grateful.

To my advisor, Dr. Trish Lichau, whose persistently positive encouragement and guidance supported the completion of this dissertation and elevated its scholarly degree: your support has guided my writing and my outlook to reach levels I never dreamed possible. And to Dr. Williams and Dr. Zientara, for their devoted feedback and positive comments which greatly enhanced this process and dissertation: I extend my deepest gratitude to the three of you. Thank you, thank you, thank you!
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In recent years, the disparity in learning and learning styles across global education systems has sparked much research and transformation regarding educating our youth (Ripley, 2014). United States education remains particularly stagnant in regard to improvements and test scores compared to other nations such as Finland, Korea, and Poland (Ripley, 2014). Though the requirements for 21st century life success have drastically changed, the United States education system values have not caught up with the major changes in the professional world, leaving United States students minimally prepared for the 21st century workplace (Ripley, 2014).

This underperformance has raised many questions concerning how to best, or better, prepare United States students for success in the 21st century. What matters most when it comes to successfully preparing students for 21st century life? In analyses of the education systems and values of other nations such as Finland, as well as research conducted within the United States, it has been noted that education on character traits (also called noncognitive skills), 21st century life skills, and dispositions like perseverance, grit, and self-control better prepare students for 21st century life than just academics alone (Scelfo, 2016; Tough, 2012). However, this raises the question: how do teachers assist students in being committed to obtaining these traits? This research investigation focuses on how teachers can assist students in developing 21st century life skills.

The recognized value and importance of these outlined traits have permeated the United States education system’s current learning standards. The Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), fully implemented into United States schools in 2012, are comprised mainly of academic standards attempting to address the underperformance of United States schools (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012). However, a subset of the standards—called anchor standards—
were developed to prepare students (K–12) for college and career readiness. College and career readiness is understood, in this investigation, as success in the 21st century. These anchor standards are new to the United States education system and were not previously included in United States academic standards. The college and career readiness anchor standards are composed of indicators that reference traits such as perseverance, resilience, and self-awareness (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012).

As a response to the changing demands of 21st century requirements and the CCLS, school districts across the United States are implementing programs, categorized as character education programs, to support students in developing the traits outlined for 21st century success (Tough, 2012). The character education programs being implemented support schools in educating students in noncognitive skills and personality traits that are separate from cognitive and academic skills through various learning experiences and opportunities (Farrington et al., 2012).

In general, many character education programs have been regarded as successful and supportive when it comes to developing 21st century life skills within various school districts and across a wide-range of ages (Bavarian et al., 2013; Durlak et al., 2011; Flay et al., 2012; Lewis, et al., 2016; Smokowski et al., 2016; Snyder et al., 2012; Snyder et al. 2013; Top, 2015). Some popular and highly regarded programs include the Positive Action (PA) program, the Character Counts! program, the Primary Years Programme (PYP), Social Emotional Character Development (SECD), and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs (Bavarian et al., 2013; Durlak et al., 2011; Flay et al., 2012; Lewis, et al., 2016; Smokowski et al., 2016; Snyder et al., 2012; Snyder et al., 2013; Top, 2015). In analyzing and interpreting the research surrounding character education and these highly regarded programs, it was found that much literature exists
on why the outlined traits or dispositions for 21st century success support students, yet little research exists on how educators can support students in developing these 21st century life skills. Although schools implement and train educators in delivering character education programs to teach these noncognitive skills, teacher instruction involving the delivery of these programs varies widely (Holtzapple et al., 2011). Due to the disparity in instruction style when it comes to educating students in 21st century life skills, this study was established to explore how educators can support students in developing 21st century life skills through the lens of the disposition of academic commitment. Specifically, the researcher designed this investigation to analyze strategies or methods that educators are implementing to facilitate this disposition.

Background, Context, and History for the Problem

Background and history of character education. The roots of character education date back to long before the 21st century. Derivations of character education and noncognitive skills are evidenced in the philosophies of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle. Aristotle philosophized about the highest human mental states and defined these states as humans acting in their most virtuous and moral ways. Acting in the highest mental states and having strong character directly influences human beings’ dispositions, including the ways that humans behave, think, feel, and respond. By acting in the most virtuous and moral ways and having strong character, Aristotle believed that human beings could achieve the best lives possible (Barnes, 2014).

Even in 1924, Poffenberger and Carpenter noted that the traits Americans valued in students, such as obedience, intelligence, and aptitude, were weaker indicators of future success compared to traits such as tenacity or perseverance (Poffenberger & Carpenter, 1924). Poffenberger and Carpenter’s 1924 study revealed that possession of these traits were stronger
predictors of academic success than obedience, intelligence, or aptitude. The findings that the possession of traits such as tenacity and perseverance are stronger predictors of academic success are concurrent with theories and research studies more currently.

In agreement with the Poffenberger and Carpenter’s findings, Lickona, a psychologist known as the “father of modern character education,” believed that moral and character development were highly important when it comes to educating students for their futures (Baehr, 2017, p. 1158). Beginning in 1976, and until his last book was published in 2005, Lickona developed books that supported parents and educators in exposing students to character and civic values and education (Baehr, 2017). Over his 45 years of experience in the field of character development research, Lickona (2014) strongly recommended the use of character education as the driving force to guide students in making advancements towards more successful futures.

In more recent years, American psychologist, educator, and character development theorist Seligman has theorized that human beings possess the power to regulate and transform their thoughts and ways of behaving through a process that he calls learned optimism (Seligman, 2011). Learned optimism operates under the premise that everyone, with the proper tools and support, can develop traits for 21st century success (Seligman, 2011). With the understanding that the development of certain character traits is more beneficial, Seligman joined forces with Peterson (2004) to create a book titled Character Strengths and Virtues. This book outlines traits, or as Peterson and Seligman called them, strengths, which when possessed, are believed to yield happiness and a more successful future (Seligman & Peterson, 2004).

Levin, one of the founders of the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), put Seligman and Peterson’s work into action in his inner city Bronx, New York charter school (Tough, 2012). Levin’s mission was to guide inner city students to 21st century success through high quality
instruction, set upon high expectations, with equal emphasis on academics and character. With the program’s philosophy of high levels of academic and character achievement, KIPP students have extremely high graduation rates from both high school and college compared to the national average (Tough, 2012).

Methodological Context

Over the past 10 years, character education research has become a major emphasis in the educational research sector. Character education research has utilized all three types of research methodologies: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). However, it should be noted that the methodology most often employed for this research is quantitative in nature. This could be due to the national focus on testing and using numerical, quantifiable data to compare the successes of varying schools, states, and countries (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014).

Quantitative studies in character education research explain how specific character education programs support students in improving their grades and their behavior. Utilizing both pretest/posttest models and correlational designs, many quantitative studies collect data using surveys, test scores, scales, behavior, and attendance reports. Overall, quantitative research studies have focused on the impact of particular character education programs that reported at least some improvement in student academic and behavioral outcomes. Specifically, these improvements included higher test scores or grade point averages (GPA), better attendance rates, and increased grit, resilience, or self-awareness (Bavarian et al., 2013; Bedard, 2016; Clark, 2016; Durlak et al., 2011; Flay et al., 2012; Holtzapple et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2016; Martinez, 2015; Seider et al., 2013; Smokowski et al., 2016; Snyder et al., 2012; Snyder et al., 2013; Stewart-Burrison, 2014; Top, 2015; Washington, 2016).
Similarly, the qualitative studies aimed to study the impact that character education programs had on student academics, attendance, and behavior. The most frequently employed qualitative methodology in character education research is the case study methodology. Researchers in qualitative character education research seek to understand the long-term influences that character education programs have on students’ academics and behavior. Qualitative research on character education programs supports the notion that the implementation of character education programs is valuable in improving attendance, drop-out rates, grades, and behaviors in students (K–12) (Goss & Holt, 2014; Shapiro et al., 2016; Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006).

Additionally, character education research studies applying mixed-methods approaches have primarily investigated the degree to which character education programs affect student improvement in academics, behavior, and school connectedness. By collecting data through the use of scales, surveys, interviews, focus groups, and school level archival data, mixed-methods character education studies can gain clearer insights into how programs holistically impact numerical data as well as sentiments towards the programs.

**Relevance to the Current Study**

In response to the increase in character education research conducted over the past 10 years and the implementation of the CCLS, the school district in which the researchers is a teacher developed and implemented a set of dispositions called the Shared Value Outcomes (SVOs). The SVOs require the school community to engage in a set of dispositions framed around traits and skills such as, but not limited to, perseverance, compromising, communicating feelings, having conversations, setting and monitoring goals, and accepting feedback designed to mimic 21st century life outside of the education system. The school district administration is
currently seeking to compile resources on best teaching practices and support for students in engaging in and developing their possession of the SVOs.

**Statement of the Problem**

Most recent research on character education and 21st century life skills has examined the impact of the possession of particular skills on academic and behavior success or how particular character education programs support students in developing particular character traits. Though many studies have been conducted concerning character education, little research exists on how teachers are supporting and facilitating academic and behavior skills for 21st century life success. Understanding how teachers, who are the leaders of classrooms, facilitate academic commitment, which is an attribute of the traits grit and perseverance, will further support other teachers, both within the school district of focus and globally, in facilitating academic commitment.

**Purpose of the Study**

This research study was designed to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers facilitate academic commitment in students at an elementary school level. The purpose of this phenomenological research was to discuss and reveal specific teaching methods and strategies that support students in developing academic commitment. The research was implemented in stages to fully unveil educators’ experiences with the phenomenon of academic commitment and how they expose students to this phenomenon.

In the initial stages of this research, the researcher’s intent was to study the teachers’ sentiments and attitudes towards academic commitment. This would lead to a better understanding of how these factors influence teachers’ modes of facilitating this disposition. Utilizing one-to-one interviews and highlighting personal experiences with academic
commitment allowed the researcher to examine the driving forces behind the strategies that teachers were using to facilitate academic commitment. The objective of this research was to discover how teachers in the school of focus are facilitating the disposition of academic commitment through examining the lived experiences of the participants, who were selected to gain teachers’ perspectives on this disposition.

**Research Questions**

The following questions provided the foundation for the purpose of this phenomenological research: to understand the disposition of academic commitment as it pertains to both 21st century success and how educators are supporting students in developing skills for this success.

How do teachers define and view academic commitment?

How does a teacher’s definition and view shape the way that he or she facilitates academic commitment in students?

**Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

Investigating how elementary school teachers facilitate academic commitment and understanding how this shapes student work may have a positive impact on teaching practices and add to research on character education and 21st century success in various ways. Primarily, other educators could benefit from the findings of this study as it pertains to their practices in supporting students for 21st century success. In turn, the results of this study could also benefit students, as they are the recipients of this facilitation and will experience the strategies that teachers are implementing.

In addition, in gathering and examining teachers’ perspectives and feelings towards facilitating academic commitment, the results of this study could provide the school district of
focus with an understanding of how the teachers define academic commitment. In understanding how teachers view and define academic commitment, the school district administration can target further work towards developing their SVOs.

Lastly, the findings of this investigation may provide the school district of focus with valuable teaching strategies and practices that could support the facilitation of academic commitment, called commitment to self. All stakeholders could benefit from better understandings of the teaching practices and strategies discovered and revealed in this study.

**Definition of Terms**

The following section defines terms are affiliated with the phenomenon that is the focus of this present inquisition. A more elaborate lexicon of the associated terms is included in Appendix A.

*Twenty-first century success:* This term is defined as the possession of traits that help individuals be successful in our world and workplaces today, including collaboration, perseverance, critical-thinking, and problem-solving (Rich, 2017).

*Academic commitment:* This term is the exhibition of traits such as perseverance, grit, and resilience towards academic challenges (Human-Vogel, 2013).

*Facilitation:* This term describes assisting in the process of learning or obtaining a skill, trait, or concept.

*Teacher:* This term will refer to an adult employed by the school district of focus with the responsibility of fulfilling and facilitating the growth of students both academically and behaviorally.
Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

Assumptions. In qualitative research, there are four philosophical assumptions, as outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018), that frame the direction and outcomes of a research study. The four philosophical assumptions provide readers and reviewers with a rationale for the decisions made throughout the research process. For the present research, all four assumptions—ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological—apply (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

First, the ontological assumption is the understanding that reality has varying viewpoints. This assumption is relevant to the present study because the researcher collected data to analyze six different perspectives on academic commitment. Due to this, the researcher reported all the perspectives as they were collected throughout the research, even if the perspectives varied (Moutsakas, 1994).

Second, the epistemological assumption involved obtaining evidence from the participants by developing close relationships to assemble an authentic understanding of the topic being studied. This was pertinent in this investigation due to the interview process outlined. This study was conducted in three elementary schools, which were the locations where the participants worked and where they facilitated academic commitment. The researcher aimed to quote firsthand information from the participants and collaborate closely with them to ensure that the phenomenon was being studied with the fullest integrity.

Third, the axiological assumption is that the researcher has their own values and potential biases that could oppose the participants’ views. This was germane to this study because the interviewees’ personal experiences with the phenomenon in focus were disclosed. The research methodology incorporated reflexivity and bracketing to ensure that the researcher’s opinions and
biases were openly discussed. Bracketing and reflexivity are highly regarded qualitative validation processes that require the researcher to divulge their personal biases, opinions, and experiences with the topic of study throughout the entire research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This is also a limitation to the study, as the researcher was the ultimate constructor of the reality that is conveyed in the findings and discussion of this research.

Fourth, the methodological assumption is accepting that the research is bound by the collected data and requires flexibility throughout the study. This assumption is fundamental to qualitative research as it denotes the need for modification, at any stage, throughout the entire research process. The analysis of this research employed the data analysis spiral and engaged in validation techniques such as reflexivity and member checking to allow for modifications to be made as the research was being conducted (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Limitations.** In addition to the assumptions nested in the present research, there were also a few limitations. The first limitation was that the researcher was familiar with the school district in focus and knew many of the participants, professionally. This may have limited the study, as the researcher did know the teachers and held professional relationships with each of the participants. Additionally, a second limitation to the study was that the research solely represented a teacher-focused perspective due to the need for understanding how educators facilitate academic commitment. Other perspectives from administrators, students, parents, or other stakeholders, were not included in this research. Third, this investigation was limited to one school district in the Northeastern United States—and more specifically, to three elementary schools. This potentially limited the generalizability of the findings to other schools or educational settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, in phenomenological research, the researcher is known by the participants and generally has experience with the given phenomenon
(Creswell, 1998). Thus, the researcher’s ability to fully engage in epoché is a limitation when they have personal experience with the phenomenon in focus (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Delimitations.** Delimitations of this study included boundaries that set the parameters for the conducted research. The present research focuses on the facilitation of academic commitment by six elementary school teachers across three elementary schools from one school district. This focuses the study so that the researcher could delve into a clear picture as to how teachers facilitated academic commitment in elementary age students.

A second delimitation in this investigation was the use of criterion selection to select teachers who have notably facilitated academic commitment. This set a boundary necessary in fulfilling a sound phenomenological research study, as each participant had experience with the phenomenon in focus (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

A third delimitation to this study was the particular focus on the disposition of academic commitment, as opposed to other 21st century traits such as perseverance or self-control. The present research is focused on the disposition of academic commitment as it encompasses grit and perseverance, while also involving self-control.

**Summary**

Over the past century, the demands and requirements for 21st century success have drastically changed. In previous centuries, requirements such as obedience and the mastery of one particular trade were valued as important for success (Ripley, 2014; Tough, 2012). Most recent research in character education has revealed that the possession of traits such as, but not limited to, perseverance, grit, tenacity, and self-control, have influence over academic and behavioral success, as well as success in the 21st century world. Academic commitment, a disposition involving perseverance and tenacity, was the trait of focus for this particular research
study (Human-Vogel, 2013). Due to the benefits of this trait, it is necessary for school districts and teachers to understand how to better facilitate academic commitment in students.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In our ever-changing and developing world, expectations of schools do not remain static. Today, schools are required to meet and exceed high standards in light of global competition, aiming to continue improvement of the quality of our United States school system. However, the United States seems to be underperforming in these requirements compared to other countries in the world (Ripley, 2014). These requirements are centered on the understanding that our education system must prepare our students to be successful in their futures (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). However, with the demands of these high standards, schools must prepare to educate students in more than just academics (Baehr, 2017).

One proposed solution to preparing students to meet and exceed these standards is character education, which supports students in developing 21st century skills for future success (Pattaro, 2016). Character education is defined for these purposes as programs and curriculum designed to support students in noncognitive skills and personality traits that are separate from cognitive and academic skills. These noncognitive skills and personality traits, separate from cognitive and academic skills, are deemed 21st century life skills for the purposes of this research, but they may also be defined as character strengths and social-emotional skills.

The intersection between noncognitive and cognitive skills is where intelligence and future success lie for our students today (Farrington et al., 2012). Schools should develop a seamless connection between the academic skills needed to graduate and the 21st century traits necessary for success in the future (Clement & Bollinger, 2017). In order to develop this seamless connection, schools must prioritize needs through the foundation of strong relationships, modeling the targeted values, and developing a sense of intrinsic motivation (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014).
This literature review will explore the role that character education plays in the development of attributes necessary for 21st century success. The literature analyzed here will reveal a gap where the research surrounding character education and attributes necessary for 21st century success is lacking. This gap includes the lack of studies on 21st century skills other than grit, perseverance, and self traits. A problem still needing to be studied is how other 21st century skills support students in achieving 21st century success. This investigation analyzed the foundations of character education theory and research, traits and attributes highlighted as significant in this research, programs and terms specific to character education, evaluative measures particular to character education research, outcomes of success within this research, particular methodology used in this research, and limitations of the outlined research (see Table 1 and Appendix A).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theorists/Researchers</th>
<th>Character traits</th>
<th>Programs and terms</th>
<th>Evaluation tools</th>
<th>Outcomes of success</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aristotle</td>
<td>Grit</td>
<td>Social Emotional Character Development (SECD)</td>
<td>Surveys, Scales, Questionnaires</td>
<td>Improved: Behaviors (Prosocial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Seligman</td>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)</td>
<td>Pretests/ Posttests</td>
<td>Grades, Test Scores &amp; GPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave Levin</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Positive Action Program (PA)</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Attendance</td>
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<td>Thomas Lickona</td>
<td>Tenacity</td>
<td>Character Counts!</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela Duckworth</td>
<td>Self Traits</td>
<td>Early Act Knight First (EAKF)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Decreased: Substance Abuse, Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timothy Stuart &amp; Cheryl Bostrom</td>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Adversity</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15
Conceptual Framework

The foundations of modern understandings of character root themselves in ancient Greek philosophy. A Greek philosopher whose writings have stimulated current research on character education and development is Aristotle (Barnes, 2014). Aristotle theorized that humans are virtuous, moral, and act in good character when they are in their best states, the best versions of themselves (Barnes, 2014). Aristotle believed that character is a form of being in which humans are doing well in our feelings and actions (Barnes, 2014). This means we are our best selves when we are acting in a state of good character, and this directly and positively influences our choices, relationships, and actions (Barnes, 2014).

In 1924, Poffenberger and Carpenter studied the idea that character traits were important to school success. Their study was conducted during a time when intelligence testing—such as intelligence quotient (IQ) tests—was widely popular in estimating students’ future success (Poffenberger & Carpenter, 1924). Poffenberger and Carpenter (1924) argued that intelligence testing did not determine school success. Rather, character was what truly counted. For the purpose of their study, Poffenberger and Carpenter (1924) defined four categories of traits for success for 21st century schools: an understanding of self, flexibility, care for detail, and self-assurance. The results of this study, from teacher rankings of students and students’ grades, revealed that possession of these traits for success was more correlated with higher grades than an intelligence test (Poffenberger & Carpenter, 1924).

The character and moral development theorist Seligman has studied, researched, and theorized on the ideas of Aristotle. Seligman, in *Learned Optimism* (2011), wrote that human beings have the power to control and change their thoughts. This revealed a critical basis for the defense of character education research and its place in our United States school system: that,
regardless of situation, background, or environment, with the proper set of tools and support, anyone can develop strong character and the potential for 21st century success (Seligman, 2011). Seligman, along with Peterson, in their book Character Strengths and Virtues (2004), discussed the foundations and importance of the development of what they called character strengths. Character strengths are comprised of traits like bravery, citizenship, fairness, wisdom, and integrity (Tough, 2012). Seligman and Peterson considered character strengths to be at the forefront of success in our education system and in our students’ futures.

Inspired by Seligman’s (2011) theories and research, Levin initiated character strengths practices into his schools. Levin, one of the founders of the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), initially started his school with a group of 38 low income minority fourth graders from the Bronx. Levin was on a mission to prove that inner city students could achieve the dream of attending college with the right educational support (Tough, 2012). The motto of KIPP schools, based on character education research, is “One School. One Mission. Two Skills: Academics and Character” (Tough, 2012, p. 53). As Levin tracked and studied his KIPPsters, or graduates of KIPP, he noticed that the students who excelled the most in college were not the students who had necessarily excelled in academics at KIPP (Tough, 2011). Levin found that the KIPPsters who were most successful in college were the ones who had the most exceptional character strengths—the ones who could bounce back, from challenging situations and still thrive (Tough, 2011).

Similar to Peterson and Seligman (2004), Lickona, who spent over 45 years studying character, believed that schools should foster moral and civic values (Baehr, 2017). Lickona (2014) shared that in order for students to make a substantial change in their future, and therefore
the world, students must work hard and strive for excellence. Lickona accepted that character education is the most effective way to do this.

Instead of studying character education through the lens of academic traits like grit, perseverance, and bravery, some researchers have studied the impact of social-emotional and interpersonal character traits. Stuart and Bostrom (2005), in their book *Children at Promise: 9 Principles to Help Kids Thrive in an At Risk World*, discussed the importance of fostering positive, nurturing relationships with children who have dealt with extreme adversity in their lives. Stuart and Bostrom cleverly coined the phrase *at promise* to stand for the nine principles they felt supported students in developing skills necessary for success in their lives. The nine principles are adversity, trust, perseverance, responsibility, optimism, motivation, integrity, service, and engaged play (Stuart & Bostrom, 2005). Cohesively, the aforementioned theorists and researchers provide a foundation for deeper exploration into character education and traits noted for 21st century success. Viewing character education through the perspectives of theorists and researchers provides a more holistic understanding of how character education can support students’ future success.

**Review of Research and Methodological Literature**

The basis of the understanding that character education is a crucial part of educating students for 21st century life skills is rooted in many years of theories and research. However, where do schools begin implementing character education, and which aspects of character development should be implemented in schools? In viewing numerous research studies outlining character education or Social Emotional Character Development (SECD), also defined as social-emotional learning (SEL), the traits or attributes most frequently highlighted were grit, perseverance, resilience, tenacity, self-awareness, self-control, and openness to new situations.
(Tough, 2012). These traits were emphasized as the attributes having the strongest influences on student achievement and behavioral changes (Tough, 2012).

**Grit, tenacity, perseverance, and resilience.** The definition of grit is the investment in and pursuit of long-term goals (Tough, 2012). Grit is a strong indicator of success (Tough, 2012). Tough, in *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character* (2012), shared that grit is the trait focused on most in the KIPP charter schools because of its power to predict more than just high school graduation rates. Grit was found to carry students successfully through college to higher grade point averages (GPA), support cadets through difficult training programs, and even aid students and adults in reaching goals that were quite difficult to attain (Tough, 2012). Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007), who studied perseverance and grit, found it directly connected to adults’ successes when it came to reaching and completing higher levels of education, having higher paying jobs, and attaining long-term goals.

Another trait commonly found in research on character education is tenacity. Tenacity, as outlined by Laursen (2015), is the determination one has to reach their goals. The U.S. Department of Education (2013) explained academic tenacity as the desire to persevere and reach goals despite setbacks and challenges. Tenacity connects greatly to perseverance, as perseverance is the driving force in the determination to attain goals and the unwavering focus on following through and attaining goals (Tough, 2012). Even in research conducted in 1924 by Poffenberger and Carpenter (1924), perseverance was shown to be the strongest indicator of academic success in school as measured by grades. The possession of perseverance has been shown to be a strong indicator in determining GPA more recently as well (Seider, Gilbert, Novick, & Gomez, 2013).
Resilience, according to Martinez (2015), is behavior that opposes adversity. Martinez (2015), in a study involving the impacts of character education, focused on resilience for seventh and eighth graders. Using the Resilience Scale Assessment, she found that in just six months of participating in a character education program, students further developed their resilience.

**Self traits and openness to new experiences.** Self traits involve the understanding of oneself in terms of self-concept, self-esteem, self-development, and self-control (Lewis et al., 2016). Duckworth studied self-discipline, or self-control, and found that self-control scores were a stronger indicator than IQ scores of students’ GPAs (Tough, 2012). Duckworth (2011) defined self-control as “effortful self-governance” (p. 2639). Lewis et al. (2016) found, using the Social Emotional and Character Development Scale (SECDS), that character education supported students’ overall development of self traits. Similarly, Smokowski et al. (2016) found that the Positive Action Character Development Program (PA) improved middle school students’ self-esteem levels over three years.

Openness to new experiences, for the purposes of this paper, will be defined as the willingness to attempt new experiences without judgment or negativity and having a positive outlook about a new situation (Chowdhury, 2016). Duckworth et al. (2007) argued that openness to new experiences is a strong indicator in the achievement of goals and supports individuals in completing higher degrees of education. Similarly, Chowdhury (2016) proposed that educating students on character will help students develop openness, which will support their understandings of various science topics.

**Programs and Terms: How Should Schools Implement?**

Even with understandings of the outlined traits and attributes that are most impactful when it comes to supporting our students in developing 21st century life skills, schools can have
difficulty supporting students and giving them the meaningful opportunities necessary to practice and learn these traits without structured programs (Brannon, 2002). Just as educators teach math, reading, and writing through modeling and practice, students need to see strong models of character traits and have opportunities to practice these traits (Brannon, 2002; Lee, 2013). Firsthand experiences are also valuable when it comes to developing and learning character traits (Laursen, 2015). The current body of research reveals quite a few programs and types of programs that have been formed to support schools in implementing meaningful character education (Bavarian et al., 2013; Bedard, 2016; Flay et al., 2012; Goss & Holt, 2014; Pike, 2009; Snyder et al., 2012; Snyder et al., 2013; Stewart-Burrison, 2014; Top, 2015). Some programs referenced in the research are Social-Emotional Character Development (SECD), social-emotional learning (SEL), the Positive Action Program (PA), the Primary Years Program (PYP), Character Counts!, and Early Act First Knight (EAFK).

Character development programs (SECD and SEL). Many programs and practices in character education are categorized as SECD or SEL to describe the type of support the program provides to a school. SECD or SEL are programs that have strategically designed lessons, activities, and experiences that provide students with the opportunity to practice and explore specific character traits or emotions intended to improve behavior, academic achievement (Snyder et al, 2012). Flay et al. (2012) studied the impact of SECD in elementary students in rural Hawaii and inner city Chicago. Their research revealed that the SECD improved student behavior and school performance overall after three to six years of participation in the program (Flay et al., 2012). Improved student behavior and school performance will be defined and discussed later in this report.
Similarly, SEL programs are defined by Top (2015) as school-wide programs that are created with the intention of minimizing problem behaviors, increasing pro-social behaviors, and improving academic achievement (Top, 2015). Studies involving SEL programs showed significant progress in fifth through eighth grade students’ test scores and a significant decrease in students’ negative behaviors (Top, 2015). Along with academic gains and reductions in negative behaviors, Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011) studied the impact of SEL programs on emotional skills, behaviors, and attitudes of kindergarten through high school students. The results revealed that students involved in the SEL program showed an 11% improvement in their behaviors, emotional skills, attitudes, and grades (Durlak et al., 2011).

**Positive Action Program (PA).** The Positive Action Program is an SECD program that centers on the philosophy that positive thoughts lead to improvements in behaviors and feelings about self and further positive actions in the future (Flay et al., 2012). Many research studies involving SECD and SEL programs study the impact of the PA Program. Results of studies on the PA program revealed positive impacts on students’ attitudes towards school, self-esteem, perseverance, peer connections, and ethics (Bavarian et al., 2013; Flay et al., 2013; Lewis et al., 2016; Snyder et al., 2012; Snyder et al., 2013). The PA program may have more positive impacts when students are exposed more frequently to the program and for longer periods of time (Smokowski et al., 2016).

**Smaller-scale character education programs.** The Primary Years Program, related to the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, involves a focus on instruction and situations to encourage the development of particular traits like “curiosity, tolerance, integrity, enthusiasm, respect, empathy, independence, and commitment” (Mattix-Foster & Daly, 2016, p. 83). The
PYP, when fully integrated, supports students in developing necessary character traits for success (Mattix-Foster & Daly, 2016).

Similar to the PYP, the Character Counts! program focuses on character traits that are categorized into six pillars: citizenship, care, fairness, respect, trust, and responsibility (Stewart-Burrison, 2014). The program involves participation in activities, songs, videos, and reflections that focus on the six pillars (Stewart-Burrison, 2014). The program has a pretest and posttest built into its structure. Studies using this program showed significant results in developing the character traits outlined by the six pillars of the program (Stewart-Burrison, 2014).

The Early Act First Knight (EAFK) program was created by the Kannapolis Rotary Club in conjunction with the Kannapolis Intermediate School to help fifth and sixth grade students begin to develop positive school outlooks, better grades, and stronger characters (Parker, 2016). After three school years of participating in the program, the schools’ suspension rates decreased, and reported character trait acquisition improved (Parker, 2016).

**Evaluation of Programs and Outcomes**

Character education programs intend to support students in developing character traits and social-emotional skills, but how will schools know that the programs are working? Evaluation is a way to measure results using acceptable and approved research methods and to assess the outcomes of given studies, and therefore should be a component of character education as well. To measure the impact that a program has on its participants, Shapiro, Accomazzo, Claassen, and Robitaille (2016) strongly suggested that character development programs be measured directly, meaning evaluation occurs throughout the entire process of the study. In evaluating the literature surrounding character education, three major methods have
been used to evaluate character education programs: surveys, questionnaires, and scales; interviews; and pretests and posttests.

**Surveys, questionnaires, and scales.** Surveys, questionnaires, and scales are common evaluation tools used in research surrounding character education. Various types of these tools have been used throughout character education research. Surveys, questionnaires, and scales can be used to test research hypotheses for character education studies (Stuart, 2003). Some examples include the Resilience Scale (RS), the Academic Motivation and Integrity Survey, the Children’s Empathic Attitudes Questionnaire, the Youth Social Responsibility Scale, the Values in Action Inventory of Character Strengths in Youth, and the At Promise Survey (Martinez, 2015; Seider, Gilbert, Novick, & Gomez, 2013; Stuart, 2003).

The RS, used to assess varying levels of resilience, is compiled of 25 items that center on positive character traits and qualities (Martinez, 2015). The Academic Motivation and Integrity Survey was designed to measure *character strengths*, or positive character traits, such as courage, empathy, integrity, perseverance, and social responsibility (Seider et al., 2013). This survey also collects information about participants’ demographics (Seider et al., 2013).

To solely measure and evaluate empathy, Funk, Fox, Chan, and Curtiss (2008) developed the Children’s Empathic Attitudes Questionnaire, which asks questions categorized as peer relations and social issues (Seider et al., 2013). The questionnaire probed for responses of agreement or disagreement along a five-point Likert scale (Seider et al., 2013). To measure social responsibility, Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger, and Alisa (2007) developed the Youth Social Responsibility Scale, which asks questions about social commitment and support for others (Seider et al., 2013). The Values in Action Inventory of Character Strengths in Youth aims to assess perseverance and courage throughout academic and school-related situations (Seider et al.,...
This inventory also probes for responses of agreement or disagreement along a five-point Likert Scale (Seider et al., 2013).

The At Promise Survey is a synthesis of two other surveys. These two surveys are the Perceived Benefit Scales (PBS) and the Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors Survey (PSL-ABS) (Stuart, 2003). The first portion of the At Promise survey consists of questions referencing difficult situations to measure the perceived benefits of adversity (Stuart, 2003). The second portion of the At Promise Survey consists of questions centered on the perception of significant relationships with an adult (Stuart, 2003).

**Interviews.** Contingent on researchers’ questions and the purpose of the research study, interviews were utilized as evaluative tools in various ways. Interviews for character education studies were conducted with students, teachers, administrators, and parents (Brannon, 2012; Katilimis, Ekski, & Ozturk, 2011; Payne, 2016; Pike, 2009). Some interviews of students consisted of questions that involved particular traits like peace and equality (Katilimis et al., 2011). Interviews of school leaders, teachers, and parents could include questions about what was most important to the community regarding character traits and academics (Pike, 2009). Teacher interviews were used to gauge teacher opinions and practices regarding character education programs (Brannon, 2012; Payne, 2016).

**Pretests and posttests.** Another common evaluation tool used to assess character education programs is the pretest/posttest structure. In character education program research, pretests and posttests have included regular school assessments, behavior scores, research developed achievement tests, and even surveys (Clark, 2016; Durlak et al., 2011; Katilimis et al., 2011; Martinez, 2015; Stewart-Burrison, 2014). Depending on the purpose of the character education study in question, pretests and posttests have included behavioral assessments...
(Stewart-Burrison, 2014), GPAs, school tests, state-wide assessments (Clark, 2016; Durlak et al., 2011), and other study-designed academic and content-specific achievements tests (Katilmis et al., 2011). The pretest/posttest structure has even included surveys (Martinez, 2015). The common goal throughout the analyzed character education literature surrounding pretests and posttests was to analyze how character education programs influenced participants in positive ways.

**Outcomes of Success for Character Education Studies**

Compiling and examining the literature surrounding character education revealed successes in the forms of enhanced behavior (Bedard, 2016; Snyder et al., 2013; Stewart-Burrison, 2014; Top, 2015); increased test scores, grades, and GPAs (Bavarian et al., 2013; Bedard, 2016; Goss & Holt, 2014; Pike, 2009); improved attendance rates (Bavarian et al., 2013; Bedard, 2016; Flay et al., 2012); better school climate and school connectedness (Snyder et al., 2012); and a reduction in violence and substance abuse (Flay et al., 2012). Many studies have also managed to further improve upon these outcomes yielding positive results for character education programs.

**Behaviors.** Many research studies involving character education have found significant results in regard to improved behaviors and attitudes (Bedard, 2016; Holtzapple, Griswold et al., 2011; Snyder et al., 2013; Stewart-Burrison, 2014; Top, 2015). These improved behaviors and attitudes were termed prosocial behaviors, and defined as the possession of traits such as respect, responsibility, citizenship, social skills, peer acceptance, social communication, and cognitive concentration (Top, 2015). Prosocial behaviors also include behaviors surrounding a commitment to oneself and others such as caring, concern, sharing, teamwork, cooperation, and helping others (Holtzapple et al., 2011). Looking at various character education programs, the
findings suggested significant improvement in participants’ peer relations, positive school behaviors, and ability to empathize, and better reactions in social situations (Bedard, 2016; Holtzapple et al., 2011; Stewart-Burrison, 2014; Snyder et al., 2013; Top, 2015).

**Test scores, grades, and GPAs.** Along with improved behaviors and attitudes, research studies surrounding the impact of character education also suggested improvements in academic test scores, grades, and GPA (Bavarian et al., 2013; Bedard, 2016; Goss & Holt, 2014; Lessons in Character, 2006; Pike, 2009). The integration of character education programs seems to increase math and language arts test scores, especially for middle school and high school students (Goss & Holt, 2014; Pike, 2009). Character education programs also significantly increased the GPAs of participating high school students compared to high school students who were not participants in character education programs (Bedard, 2016).

**Attendance rates.** Character education research has also shown significant results in improving attendance rates for many schools (Bavarian et al., 2013; Flay et al., 2012; Goss & Holt, 2014; Parker, 2016). Various programs, like the PA program, showed significant results in attendance rates (Bavarian et al., 2016). Character education programs and the values students learned from them seemed to increase the desires to attend school and to attend school on time (Bedard, 2016).

**School climate and school connectedness.** School climate and connectedness can be defined as the overall school quality in regard to safety, student support, open communication, collaboration, student and staff happiness, and focus on achieving standards (Snyder et al., 2012). Much literature surrounding character education has shown a link between character education and strong school climate and connectedness (Payne, 2016). After a year of
participation in character education, schools indicated improvements in climate and connectedness (Shapiro et al., 2016).

Decrease in substance abuse and violence. An issue that many middle and high schools across the United States face is substance abuse and violence (Flay et al., 2012). High school students exhibited less violence and fewer substance abuse issues after three to six years of participation in the PA program than they did prior to participation (Flay et al., 2012). Character education programs were shown to reduce the number of school suspensions and discipline referrals as well (Goss & Holt, 2014).

Literature and research centered on character education revealed positive outcomes for character education programs in regard to the categories of improved behavior, test scores, grades, GPAs, attendance rates and school climate, while decreasing the use of substance abuse and violence. These revelations and findings provide deeper insight into why schools and districts are implementing these programs to support their students.

Review of Methodological Issues

With the governmental emphasis on data and the need for comparison of various schools, states, and countries using test scores, most of the research conducted involving the impact of character education has been quantitative in research design and methodology (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014). The reasons for using a quantitative research methodology vary based on the particular study; however, common reasons discovered in reviewing the relevant literature included character education program evaluation, the analysis of relationships between particular character traits and academic and behavioral success along with school quality, and determining the impacts of dosage and support in regard to character education program implementation.
Quantitative studies evaluating specific programs. The implementation of character education is becoming more prevalent, and due to this, the various character education programs being implemented need evaluation (Flay et al., 2012). Bedard (2016), using quantitative longitudinal and experimental methodology, explored the effects of the New Jersey Reserves Officers’ Training Corps (NJROTC) program on academic and attendance outcomes for tenth and eleventh grade students. Using a treatment group and a control group, Bedard surveyed the students after two to three years and discovered that the treatment group, who had undergone the NJROTC program, significantly improved in GPAs as well as in attendance rates in school.

A different character education program evaluated by Top (2015) was the Second Step character development program. Top studied how the program impacted positive behaviors and the connection between parental monitoring and student grades. Implementing a longitudinal quasi-experimental design with a treatment group and a control group, Top gathered 5,189 fifth through eighth graders and 783 parents and collected data using the Parental Monitoring Scale (PMS), the Discipline Point Scale (DPS), and the Prosocial Behavior Rating System (PBRS). The study revealed that the treatment group participating in the Second Step program achieved higher school grades and displayed fewer negative behaviors than the control group. Furthermore, parental monitoring showed statistical significance for school success (Top, 2015).

Similarly, in a quantitative design, Flay et al. (2012) utilized a longitudinal study with an experimental design to test the influence of the Positive Action program on academic improvement and student behavior. Through a treatment group and a control group, Flay et al. used school-level archival data and parent and teacher reports to analyze the impact of the PA program. Consistent with the findings of many other studies involving the PA program, the
treatment group revealed a significant improvement in behavior, attendance, and standardized test scores (Flay et al., 2012).

Additionally, Barvarian et al. (2013) utilized a longitudinal research design to examine how the PA program influenced low-income urban students’ academic successes. The participants—kindergarten through eighth grade students enrolled in Chicago public schools—were assessed using school-level archival data and student self-report measures (Bavarian et al., 2013). A matched-pair cluster-randomized controlled design allowed Barvarian et al. to find that the PA program influenced academic performance in the participants and also increased the participants’ motivations towards learning.

Snyder, Acock, and Vuchinich (2013) conducted the last quantitative study evaluating a specific character education program—in this case, the PA program—reviewed for this purpose of this literature review. Snyder et al. implemented an experimental design, utilizing a matched-pair cluster-randomized controlled design, to assess the impact of SECD programs, specifically the PA program, on positive youth development. Using self-reported academic behaviors and teacher-reported academic behaviors, Snyder et al. found that fifth grade students participating in the PA program improved their academic behavior, and in turn, improved their PYD.

Issues with the use of longitudinal studies and experimental design for specific program evaluations involve a lack of generalizability to other populations and the limitation of further research with this particular program (Bedard, 2016). Because students participating in the treatment groups were not randomly selected in a consistent way, these students may possess pre-existing traits that would skew the results of participation in these character education programs (Bedard, 2016; Flay et al., 2012). Other issues could include a lack of participant
reporting and perspectives on the data results, limiting the findings to only collected and archived data (Bavarian et al., 2013).

**Quantitative studies analyzing character traits and success.** From reviewing the literature focusing on character education and specific character traits, in general, these studies seem to hypothesize about the impact character education has on academic success, the development of positive behaviors, and overall school safety and quality (Seider et al., 2013; Stewart-Burrison, 2014; Snyder et al., 2012). One quantitative study focusing particularly on academic success and positive behavior development was coordinated by Seider et al. (2013). These authors aimed to see how character education supported students in improving their academic achievements and conduct. Using a pretest/posttest design and character surveys coupled with school-level data (GPAs and demerits), they discovered that, overall, two specific traits supported the kindergarten through eighth grade participants in predicting their academic success and their conduct. The two traits were defined as perseverance and school connectedness. In another quantitative study, Stewart-Burrison (2014) sought to investigate a possible connection between character education programs and kindergarten student behavior. Using a pretest/posttest model over an eight-month period, Stewart-Burrison found that character education improved kindergarten student behaviors.

School safety and quality is another variable that is relevant in character education research. Snyder et al. (2012) explored the effect that the PA program had on school community perspectives of school safety and quality. This study differed from others that this group of researchers had engaged in because the focus was on school community perspectives—the perspectives of teachers, parents, and students—and the subject was school safety and quality rather than academic achievement or improved behavior (Snyder et al., 2012). Snyder et al.
utilized an experimental design in 20 schools in Hawaii with the participation of school community members like teachers, parents, and students. Data was collected through surveys and school-level archival data and was analyzed using a matched pair t-test and random intercept growth curve models (Snyder et al., 2012). It was found that the schools participating in the treatment group showed overall improvement in community opinions of school safety and quality (Snyder et al., 2012).

**Grit, resilience, self-concept, and commitment.** Specific character traits are also commonly studied in character education research. Grit, for the purpose of the following research studies, is defined as perseverance and passion in achieving goals when facing potential failure and obstacles (Duckworth et al., 2007). Clark (2016) intended to see if grit was an indicator of career success. She studied 423 adults and analyzed data using a one-way ANOVA, correlational analysis, and multiple regressions collected through interviews, scales (the Short Grit Scale and the Career Satisfaction Scale), and employee information (salary and career status). This study revealed that grit is a relevant trait in career success.

In another quantitative study revolving around grit, Washington (2016) aimed to find a relationship between student grit and academic achievement. Studying sixth through eighth grade students in a Missouri charter school, Washington chose to collect data from the students’ Terranova 3 test scores and using the grit scale. The collected data was analyzed using a Pearson product moment of correlational coefficient (PPMCC) and a Fisher’s z-test. Contrasting with the results of Clark (2016), Washington found there to be no significant relationship between grit and student academic achievement.

Another character trait discussed by Martinez (2015) in character education research is resilience. Martinez defined resilience as “an adaptive behavior trait that combats adversity” (p. 
2). Martinez designed a study to see if a relationship existed between resilience and PYD. Using a small sample of eighth grade students in an urban setting and a pretest/posttest model, Martinez conducted resilience scales and found that the female participants in particular improved in resilience, whereas the male participants decreased in resilience from the beginning to the end of the study.

Self-concept, as a focus, is another trait that is commonly investigated in character education research (Lewis et al., 2016). Lewis et al. (2016) collected data using self-report protocols and teacher reports from 14 low-income kindergarten through eighth grade inner city schools in Chicago to study the impact of the PA program on the development of students’ self-concepts. Using a matched-pair cluster-randomized design, they found that the PA program supported students’ self-concepts.

The final character trait included for the purpose of this literature review is commitment. Zheng, Saunders, Shelley, Mack, and Whalen (2002) wanted to understand how precollege characteristics like commitment and other environmental variables influenced the GPAs of college freshmen. After collecting data from 1,167 college freshmen through surveys, registrar student information files, and residence information files, Zheng et al. found that freshman year GPAs are significantly related to student commitment and other environmental factors.

Methodological issues found in quantitative studies, particularly those focusing on a desired character trait, involve how specific traits are defined and how they are analyzed through specific data collection tools. Researchers choose the way that they define a particular character trait and develop their own measures of these traits. Due to this, there exists researcher bias in the way data is collected and analyzed. Sample size could also affect the results found in a given study (Martinez, 2015).
Quantitative studies and the impact of dosage and support. The final three quantitative studies discussed in this literature review involve the importance of dosage, the administrator, teacher support, and the variation of programs on the overall impact of character education programs. Many of these studies involve the use of the PA program, but Smokowski et al. (2016) sought to research the significance of program dosage on student outcomes. Smokowski et al. (2016) carried out a five-year longitudinal study of 7,000 middle and high school students in North Carolina public schools. They used a quasi-experimental design and collected data through the School Success Profile (Youth Self-Report Survey). The research revealed that students who received a higher and longer dosage of the PA program received higher scores for the intended behaviors compared to students who received no dosage of the PA program.

Holtzapple et al. (2011) studied the effects of principal and teacher support and implementation on students, particularly students’ prosocial behavior, using an SECD program. Utilizing an experimental design, Holtzapple et al. collected data from surveys, observation tools, SECD Scales, and Belief and Moral Order Scales. The results of the study showed that the level of administrator involvement and quality of how teachers implement the programs is significantly related to students’ development of the outlined prosocial behaviors.

Using a meta-analysis, Durlak et al. (2011) studied 213 school-based SEL programs with participants ranging from kindergarteners to high school students to assess the success rates of various SEL programs. Through the analysis of test scores and grades, Durlak et al. discovered that, overall, schools with SEL programs saw improvements in grades, attitudes, and behaviors compared to schools with no SEL program in place.
Due to issues collecting data regarding sensitive student information from schools, the quantitative studies involving character education program dosage, principal support, teacher implementation, and the impact of variations of character education programs could impact the sample size and participants’ willingness to partake in the study.

**Qualitative and mixed methods research methodologies.** The majority of studies on the influence of character education have been quantitative studies. Fewer studies have been conducted with qualitative or mixed methods research methodologies. The qualitative studies reviewed employed the use of case studies and longitudinal studies to assess the potential relationships between character education and school-related skills such as academic success, student behavior, and attendance rates (Goss & Holt, 2014; Shapiro et al., 2016; Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006).

**Qualitative research methodology: a case study approach.** In the qualitative research surrounding the effects of character education on academics, behavior, and attendance, case studies were the most widely used methodology. In one qualitative study conducted by Goss and Holt (2014), a case study methodology was utilized to measure the success of character education on middle school students in a rural Midwest school, looking at academic success, behavioral improvement, and attendance rates (Goss & Holt, 2014). To measure the success of the character education program, Goss and Holt used source triangulation, analyzed student work, and conducted peer debriefings, referring to school-level data as pre-implementation data. Their study revealed that the character education program was valuable in improving the academic performance and behaviors of the middle school participants. No significant findings were discussed for improved attendance rates (Goss & Holt, 2014).
Similarly, Shapiro et al. (2016) used qualitative research methodology to assess the impact of out of school time (OST) character education on improving various character skills. The authors utilized scales to analyze behavior and observations. The findings of this particular study revealed that character education programs employed during OST could support students in developing the highlighted character skills (Shapiro et al., 2016).

The two case studies on how character education programs influence student success in academics and behavioral improvements discussed in this literature review are limited to the particular programs defined in the research studies. This poses potential issues for replicating the studies or for continuing research. Shapiro et al. (2014) noted that in order to enhance research on character education, researchers must continue to consistently assess the influence of character education programs on their participants (Shapiro et al., 2014). The findings of character education studies should strive to be generalizable, but should also be used to spark new research and continue to find solutions to improve character education. Character education research is an evolving process (Shapiro et al., 2014). When research is limited to a particular program, this restricts areas for new research.

**Qualitative research methodology: a longitudinal study approach.** Similar to the purpose of both case study approaches, the character education research study conducted by Skaggs and Bodenhorn (2006) questioned if character education was correlated to student behavior and academic achievement. To analyze this relationship, Skaggs and Bodenhorn coded teacher and administrator surveys, viewed attendance rates, discipline referrals, and state assessment data. After four years, the five school districts involved showed improvements in high school students’ behavior, attitudes, and dropout rates. Academic gains were not found to be significant (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006).
Methodological issues in this particular study revolved around the lack of consistency in the selected character education program amongst the five participating school districts and a lack of consistency in the definition of suspension in regard to protocol and action (Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006). The drawback of this situation is lack of ability to generalize the outcomes of the five participating school districts due to the lack of consistency in program choice and practice (Skaags & Bodenhorn, 2006).

**Mixed methods research methodology.** Payne (2016) shared that a mixed methods research approach to studying character education allows for potential findings that could not have been revealed if an isolated quantitative or qualitative research approach had been utilized. Throughout the review of literature on the impacts of character education, mixed methods research was widely employed to study the effects of particular character traits, such as grit and perseverance, and their impacts on professional, academic, and behavioral success and school climate. One study reviewed does not fit into this research purpose category: Pike (2009) utilized mixed methods research to analyze a particular school in England and its use of character education.

Duckworth et al. (2007) studied the influence of grit and perseverance on professional success using a mixed methods approach. Duckworth et al. employed a cross-sectional longitudinal study on undergraduates attending Ivy League colleges, cadets in the United States Military Academy at West Point, and contestants participating in the National Spelling Bee. To collect data, Duckworth et al. implemented the Big Five Inventory, a researcher-developed grit scale, and questionnaires. Findings of this study revealed that grit showed to be a stronger predictor of professional success than IQ, which is a more typical measure of success (Duckworth et al., 2007).
Using a quasi-experimental design, Katilmis, Eksi, and Ozturk (2011) studied the efficiency of character education programs on character traits in social studies lessons and how this influences students’ academic success. Pretest and posttests, scales, interviews, and achievement tests were conducted and analyzed using descriptive analysis and ANCOVA (Katilmis et al., 2011). From the descriptive analysis and ANCOVA, Katilmis et al. discovered that the character education program influenced seventh grade students’ overall knowledge, skills, and behaviors.

Focusing on the Early Act Knight First (EAFK) character education program, Parker (2016) sought to understand the impact of the EAFK program on the behavior of fifth and sixth grade students using a mixed methods approach. The participants were given self-reported surveys, teachers were involved in focus groups, and attendance and suspension rates were analyzed using descriptive statistics (Parker, 2016). A significant relationship was not found to exist between the EAFK program and student behavioral referrals, such as suspensions. However, teachers found the program to be unifying, bringing staff and students closer together, and desired more support in implementing the program (Parker, 2016).

Similar findings were shown in the mixed methods study conducted by Payne (2016) on the effects of character education on school climate. Payne found, using descriptive statistics to analyze focus groups, teacher interviews, surveys, and the Organizational Climate Index (OCI), that teachers believed that schoolwide character education improves school climate and teacher collaboration, but strong leadership is required in order for the character education program to be most effective.

With a highly regarded school in England as the focus, Pike (2009) analyzed how character education supported this particular school’s academic improvement. Using interviews
and test data, Pike found that through holistic character education and the full consent of staff and students, students could achieve higher levels of academic success.

The mixed methods approach to character education allows the integration of data and the perspectives of students, teachers, administrators, and other participants in the research. Several issues arise in utilizing the mixed methods approach for research. One issue is the variation of the scales, interview questions, and surveys used. This variation limits the potential for these studies’ findings to be generalizable and replicated in future research.

**Synthesis of Research Findings**

After reviewing and analyzing the current research surrounding character education and its impacts on students, it was determined that student exposure to character education supports student growth and development in positive ways. Three particular areas of study that were prominent in the current body of character education research were the specific character traits emphasized, the specific character education programs implemented and measured, and the various outcomes of success for these studies. Overall, these three areas were embedded in all of the research gathered and examined for the purpose of this literature review.

In many studies involving character education research, researchers aimed to study the impact of particular character traits on school success, which was defined differently for the purpose of each given study. Common character traits found in character education research are grit, perseverance, resilience, and *self* traits (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth et al., 2011; Laursen, 2015; Martinez, 2015; Seider et al., 2013; Smokowski et al., 2016). These traits were the focus of many studies due to their indicated influence on success. Grit, perseverance, and resilience involve the sustained effort and motivation to reach and achieve goals (Duckworth et al., 2007; Laursen, 2015; Martinez, 2015; Seider et al., 2013). Research surrounding these three
traits revealed that high grit, perseverance, and resilience scores tend to be better predictors of future success and achievement of goals than high IQ scores (Duckworth et al., 2007; Martinez, 2015; Laursen, 2015; Seider et al., 2013). In addition to grit, perseverance, and resilience, studies involving self traits have also yielded similar results (Duckworth et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2016; Smokowski et al., 2016). Self traits, such as self-control, self-concept, and self-esteem, have been shown to have positive impacts on individuals’ success (Duckworth et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2016; Smokowski et al., 2016).

In character education research, these specific character traits are generally analyzed, taught, and measured using character education programs. Research involving character education programs generally measures the impacts of the programs on the development of particular traits or on success, defined as improved grades, attendance, and general improvement in behaviors. Commonly used character education programs threaded throughout this research are SECD and SEL programs. The PA program is an often-studied SECD program that has been shown to be highly influential when it comes to improvements in behavior, grades, and attendance (Bavarian et al., 2013; Flay et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2016; Smokowski et al., 2016). Though studies using the PA program have different research questions, the outcomes of each of these studies revealed that the PA program positively impacts students’ academic motivation and performance, attendance, character (grit and self-esteem), and social skills (Bavarian et al., 2013; Flay et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2016; Smokowski et al., 2016). Additionally, research utilizing the PA program has revealed that students receiving higher dosages—defined as a longer duration and more frequent use of the PA program—saw the greatest improvements in academic and behavior outcomes (Smokowski et al., 2016). However, as little as one year of the PA
program has been shown to support the improvement of students’ attendance, motivation, academic, and behavior outcomes (Smokowski et al., 2016).

Other character education programs mentioned in the literature, such as SEL, Character Counts!, and EAFK, displayed similar results in participants ranging from kindergarteners to college students (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014; Durlak et al., 2011; Parker, 2016; Snyder et al., 2012; Stewart-Burrison, 2014). Each of the studies involving these programs found similar improvements to those observed with the PA program in one of more of the following aspects: prosocial behavior, academic achievement and motivation, attendance, social-emotional skills, and overall school quality (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014; Durlak et al., 2011; Parker, 2016; Snyder et al., 2012; Stewart-Burrison, 2014).

In compiling and analyzing the research surrounding character education, the outcomes of success were consistent across most studies. The outcomes of success consisted of improved behaviors, attitudes, grades, test scores, GPA, and overall school quality/climate (Bavarian et al., 2013; Bedard, 2016; Flay et al., 2012; Goss & Holt, 2014; Holtzapple et al., 2011; Lessons in Character, 2006; Parker, 2016; Payne, 2016; Pike, 2009; Snyder et al., 2012; Snyder et al., 2013; Stewart-Burrison, 2014; Top, 2015). Character education studies that found improvements in behaviors, attitudes, and prosocial behavior generally showed that students improved their motivation towards learning, abilities to connect with peers and teachers in a positive manner (prosocial behavior), and their self-control (Bavarian et al., 2013; Flay et al., 2012; Holtzapple et al., 2011; Stewart-Burrison, 2014; Top, 2015). Studies involving the effect of character education on grades, test scores, and GPA have mostly shown significant increases in overall grades and students’ academic motivation (Bedard, 2016; Goss & Holt, 2014; Lessons in Character, 2006; Parker, 2016; Pike, 2009; Snyder et al., 2013; Top, 2015). Furthermore, studies
involving the impact of character education on academic performance revealed that character education programs integrated into school values further supported students in improving their academic performance (Pike, 2009). The last outcome of success highlighted in the analysis of this research is improved school climate. Improved school climate has been noted to support students’ improvement in both behavior and academics (Payne, 2016; Pike, 2009; Snyder et al., 2012).

**Critique of Previous Research**

The purpose of this literature review was to analyze and further understand the most up to date and influential research on the impact of character education on student success. Through looking at previous studies, it was found that character education programs support students in developing traits outlined for 21st century success such as, but not limited to, grit, perseverance, and self-control. However, there are some limitations to the previous research analyzed for the purpose of this literature review, which yield pathways for further research.

The character education studies analyzed for the purpose of this literature review used all three types of research methodology: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Though all three types of research methodology were utilized in the character education research discussed in this literature review, each methodology does come with its limitations. The use of quantitative methodology in character education research provides the researcher with the ability to begin to generalize findings to other populations, but it does not include the opinions, ideas, and perspectives of the participants and others involved. Qualitative methodology in character education research utilizes interviews and observations but can be difficult to generalize to other research studies and situations. Mixed methods research, combining the use of both quantitative and qualitative aspects, has its limitations as well. The limitations of mixed methods research
include the variation of scales, surveys, and interview questions and the research has diminished ability to be replicated and generalized.

The results and overall findings of the literature surrounding character education and its impact show that there is an apparent difference between the 21st century skills needed for success and the traits that support those skills. In analyzing the character traits outlined in this research, it should be noted that students, in their futures, will be required to show more than just proficiency in academics to be successful in the 21st century. Students will need character traits like grit, perseverance, and self traits (Baehr, 2017). It is the researcher’s argument, however, that dispositions, such as communication, collaboration, problem solving, and commitment to self and others, rather than traits, could also support students in reaching 21st century success. Moreover, there are very few studies that have involved the integration of student, teacher, and administrator viewpoints on the integration of these character education (CE) programs and how they could support students in preparing for the 21st century world.

**Summary of the Literature Review**

The main findings of this literature review center on the idea that character education does influence the development of academic, behavioral, and social attributes. The current research theorizes that character education could support the development of 21st century life-skills needed for future success. However, to date, there exists no apparent research on how character education influences the development of dispositions including communication, collaboration, problem solving, and commitment to self and others. Additionally, there have been very few research studies conducted involving teacher and administrator perspectives on how character education influences student acquisition of particular traits or skills.
Based on this review of the literature surrounding the concepts of character education and various 21st century attributes, there is adequate reason to believe that a study examining the effects of character education on particular 21st century dispositions like communication, collaboration, problem solving, and commitment to self and others would yield significant findings. The literature review, intended to further understand how character education impacts student success in advancing these attributes, has provided strong support for pursuing research to answer the question of how character education programs are perceived and can actually help students develop these particular 21st century dispositions.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Academic commitment is a disposition in which those involved exhibit perseverance, grit, and resilience when facing academic challenges (Human-Vogel, 2013). Academic commitment practices include goal-setting, using failure to improve, reflection, and acceptance of feedback. The ultimate goal of this research was to holistically understand how teachers facilitate academic commitment in students through their lived experiences. Thus, a qualitative research design was the most suitable methodology for this type of research. The utilization of a qualitative research methodology—specifically, phenomenological research—was implemented for the purpose of this study. This chapter outlines in detail the methodologies that have been employed for this research study, including the rationale and purpose of the phenomenological research design, the research population, the sampling methods used, and how data was collected and analyzed. This chapter also discusses the limitations of the research, including validity and ethical issues.

Research Questions

In the literature review, the current demand and requirements for the embodiment of certain character traits on 21st century life success were discussed. In understanding the lack of research and information on how teachers influence students’ development of character traits and 21st century life skills, this particular study sought to understand how educators support and facilitate commitment to academics in students. For the purpose of this study, the following research questions framed the investigation and guided this study:

How do teachers define and view academic commitment?

How does a teacher’s definition and view shape the way that he or she facilitates academic commitment in students?
Purpose and Design of Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze how teachers facilitate academic commitment in students. It focused on one school district’s elementary educators as well as its students, ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade. The school district administrators in this study recently initiated a district-wide set of dispositions, one of which was academic commitment. Academic commitment was highlighted and revealed as a shared value across the district’s community members (students, teachers, parents, and administrators) after implementing and analyzing a community-wide survey.

Academic commitment, for the purpose of this study, was defined as persistence in overcoming challenges, capitalizing on personal mistakes and failures, setting personal academic goals and monitoring progress, and seeking and accepting feedback. Because the district administration values the disposition of academic commitment, understanding how teachers facilitate academic commitment in students, especially at the elementary school level, is valuable in supporting students in 21st century life success. The literature review focused on character traits and 21st century life success. Throughout this process, a lack of research investigating how educators facilitate academic commitment was noted. Because the purpose of this study was to focus on describing teachers’ experiences with the phenomenon of academic commitment, a phenomenological research design was employed to analyze the lived experiences of teachers and the impact that they have on students’ academic commitment (Creswell, 1998).

In studies focused on character traits, 21st century life skills, and student behavioral and academic success, quantitative research designs are utilized quite frequently when referencing and analyzing student academic and behavioral data (Duckworth et al., 2007; Martinez, 2015;
Seider, Gilbert, Novick, & Gomez, 2013; Snyder et al., 2012; Stewart-Burrisson, 2014; Washington, 2016). Although a large portion of character education studies are designed quantitatively, qualitative methodology can be used to analyze a set group of participants and understand how specific character education programs support academic and behavioral growth in the participants (Goss & Holt, 2014; Shapiro, Accomazzo, Claassen, & Robitaille, 2016). Within the qualitative character education studies, a case study research design was most commonly employed due to the need for the collection of in-depth data for a particular case, a participant group consisting of students (Creswell, 1998; Yin, 2016). Because the objective of this study was to understand how teachers assist students in developing academic commitment through the investigation of teacher practices and experiences, the most suitable research methodology was a phenomenological study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological research, a branch of qualitative research, is a study of a lived experience or phenomenon, as defined by Creswell (1998). Phenomenology dates back centuries, but it gained popularity in the early 20th century with the German mathematician Husserl (1859–1938). To Husserl, phenomenological research consisted of studying conscious experiences from a first person point of view (Woodruff-Smith, 2016). Husserl found value in examining a phenomenon free of judgment and biases, which he referenced as epoché, meaning the suspension of judgement (Creswell, 1998; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Gearing, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). Husserl’s view of phenomenology is considered a transcendental type of phenomenological research, where studies seek to describe situations utilizing epoché and suspending personal opinions rather than interpreting them (Kafle, 2011; Moustakas, 1994).

Heidegger, a follower of and assistant to Husserl, furthered Husserl’s theory on phenomenology from analyzing phenomenological situations with epoché to focusing on the
many interpretations of the underlying relationship between situation and participant (Woodruff-Smith, 2016). Heidegger believed that human beings experience the world and thus make judgments based on their way of living. Therefore, humans are unable to separate their judgments and point of view from a given situation (Woodruff-Smith, 2016). Therefore, Heidegger proposed that phenomenological research should aim to analyze the phenomenon and the meaning it holds considering participants relationships with it in order to analyze the participants’ lived experience in the phenomenon (Woodruff-Smith, 2016). This type of phenomenological research is called hermeneutical, and has the purpose of interpreting and finding many different viewpoints of a subjective experience (Kafle, 2011).

Since the 1980s, phenomenological research has been a notable methodology in education research involving teacher practices and student learning (Åkerlind, 2012; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Contemporary education researchers aiming to understand how to support teachers and students are utilizing phenomenological research to analyze the ways that participants experience a given situation (Åkerlind, 2012). The ability in phenomenological research to view and investigate the varying experiences that participants have with a given phenomenon is highly significant in education research today (Åkerlind, 2012).

**Research Population and Sampling Method**

The school district of focus is located in the Northeastern United States. This school district is highly accredited, and according to Niche School Ratings 2018 was rated in the top 100 out of approximately 650 schools throughout the state (Niche, 2017). The school district has three K–5 elementary schools that lead to one middle school and one high school. The entire school district is composed of approximately 2,500 students from grades K–12. The majority of
the school’s population is Caucasian (approximately 85%), and the other 15% of the school’s population is an ethnicity other than Caucasian (Niche, 2017).

In 2015, the district leadership, with the intention of refocusing and revamping their philosophy towards 21st century demands and the facilitation of student success in the 21st century, launched a set of shared dispositions. The dispositions were called the Shared Value Outcomes (SVOs) because they came from the results of a survey of the school community asking the question, “what do you value most in a child’s education?” From the surveys, a list of common themes emerged and a list of dispositions came into fruition. The dispositions were written and defined as ways of students being and behaving as communicators, collaborators, thinkers, problem-solvers, innovators, and committed individuals to themselves and others. This study focused on the disposition of committed individuals, previously called and defined as academic commitment. The academic commitment standards outlined by the SVOs require a particular emphasis on goal-setting, reflection, and the pursuance and acceptance of feedback. Optimal participants for this study had designed and facilitated specific lessons, projects, and teachings with the aim of developing academic commitment of this nature.

In this study, criterion sampling was used to select participants from a pool of elementary school teachers. Criterion sampling is defined as a sampling strategy that selects participants based on the possession of certain criteria (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Criterion sampling, the primary sampling strategy for phenomenological research, is utilized in phenomenological research because each participant must have experience with the phenomenon of focus (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Other sampling methods, such as random-purposeful sampling, were rejected due to the necessity of the participants having experienced the phenomenon of academic commitment, highlighting teacher facilitation of lessons, projects, and protocols focused directly
on the district’s definition of academic commitment. This study’s research population requires a participating set of educators who have experience with the phenomenon of focus, with a particular emphasis on teaching strategies and classroom procedures surrounding academic commitment.

Participants were selected from surveys of three elementary school principals, and also based on teacher involvement and participation in facilitating and valuing the school district’s outlined SVOs, particularly academic commitment. The school district offers various professional development opportunities and collegial circles centered on these dispositions. Teachers heavily involved in and committed to this work were optimal for this research. In addition, the elementary principals had a strong understanding of which teachers had experienced the most involvement with the dispositions, particularly academic commitment. This included teachers who had developed and organized classroom lessons, procedures, and protocols around facilitating academic commitment more so than other educators would do regularly. The rationale behind choosing the criterion for sampling was to ensure that each of the selected participants was involved in developing instruction with the intention of furthering academic commitment in students.

The three elementary schools host approximately 60 general education classroom teachers, which served as the pool of participants for selection. For logistical reasons, and due to time constraints, only six elementary school teachers were participants of this study. As stated by Guetterman (2015), in phenomenological research, the participant sample size should range from eight to 31 participants. Creswell (1998) advised that phenomenological studies utilize between three and ten participants, and based on the number of elementary schools and the principal recommendations, a sample of six teachers was deemed as sufficient. The six teachers
are all elementary school educators who taught all content areas and were with their students for the entire school day, excluding a prep period and lunchtime. These participants had more than the usual experience with facilitating academic commitment, as they had attended numerous professional learning opportunities on the SVOs and implemented specific classroom lessons, procedures, and projects surrounding academic commitment.

**Instrumentation**

For qualitative research design, the researcher is the most important instrument for collecting and processing data (Creswell, 2018). The researcher in qualitative methodology must engage with and explore the inquiry of focus, seeking to obtain a holistic view of the inquiry (Creswell, 1998). Although the researcher is the main instrument in this research study, the following will briefly discuss the other instruments implemented to integrally employ phenomenological research.

In phenomenological research, the researcher will ultimately have prior experience with and personal beliefs about the phenomenon in focus. Thus, it is necessary that the researcher fully acknowledging and reflectively analyze how these experiences and personal beliefs may affect the results of the study. This process, in which the researcher is cognizant and vigilant about reporting their involvement in the results of the study, is called reflexivity (Ahern, 1999). As a researcher fully commits to engaging in reflexivity, the findings and analysis of the collected data will bracketing, in which the researcher brackets their personal experiences and beliefs out of the research findings so that the data reveals the true experiences of the participants (Ahern, 1999). The processes of reflexivity and bracketing were implemented throughout this research study. As the primary investigator of this study, the researcher was committed to disclosing personal beliefs and experiences with the phenomenon of academic commitment, as
well as maintaining a reflexive journal to record and acknowledge all of her personal thoughts throughout this process (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013).

To select participants, two instruments were utilized. First, the elementary school principals, through a thorough discussion, identified a selection of six teachers who had the most experience with the outlined phenomenon. The discussions began with a description of the research questions and the outlined procedures for completing this research. After this description was given, the principals identified teachers who they believed had noteworthy experience with the phenomenon of facilitation academic commitment. In addition to the discussions, attendance records from collegial circles and professional development events surrounding the SVOs also informed the selection of educators best suited for this study. Following this, teachers selected were asked for their voluntary participation. The teachers who agreed became the participants of this study.

To collect data, this study utilized interviews. The interview process was structured as informal interviews that were designed employing a conversational tone and open-ended questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview also utilized a three-cycle format, asking questions to more fully understand the participant’s experience with the phenomenon, their actions towards facilitating academic commitment, and their values and knowledge about academic commitment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Later sections will describe, in detail, the process for data collection, as well as the methods to be used.

To analyze the data collected through the study, the qualitative data analysis spiral was applied (Colaizzi’s method), along with horizontalization and the use of the ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software. In later sections, the tools and instruments used to collect and analyze data will be further described and discussed.
Data Collection

Data in phenomenological research is the lived experiences of the participants (van Manen, 1990). Thus, the data collection processes must include collection tools that capture the actual lived experiences of the participants (van Manen, 1990). To capture the lived experiences of the participants, the data collection process for this research study consisted of interviews, utilizing a three-cycle interview process. Interviews are the main source of data collection in phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation was ensured through the employment of criterion sampling in discussions with the administrators, as well as through collecting data through the three-cycle interview process. Triangulation is defined as a technique that uses multiple varying forms of data to obtain valid findings verses collecting a single source of data for interpretation (Creswell, 1998). In the following, the rationale for the use of interviews will be discussed, as well as the specific way that the interviews were implemented.

Interviews

According to Creswell (1998), phenomenological studies primarily involve the utilization of in-depth interviews. Due to the need for participants to experience the phenomenon in phenomenological research studies, interviews are the most direct data collection tool for collecting personal accounts of experiences (van Manen, 1990). Interviews support researchers in synthesizing experiential information to depict a clearer picture of lived experience (van Manen, 1990). In addition to depicting a clearer picture of the phenomenon, interviews also support researchers in obtaining experiences of participants that are impossible to observe (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). One-to-one interviews allow for a personal account of a participant’s interaction and involvement with a given phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). In the case of this study, teachers were able to share their interactions and experiences with academic
commitment in one-to-one interviews. The interviews were conducted through an informal interview format and included open-ended questions and a conversational tone (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). All interviews, to the knowledge of the participants, were audio-recorded for accuracy and further transcription (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

As the researcher and interviewer in phenomenological research, it is necessary to engage in reflexivity and bracketing throughout the interview process. The open-ended nature of the first two interviews allowed for engagement in reflexivity and bracketing, as the participants guided the interviews (Chan et al., 2013). Chan et al. (2013) noted that the open-ended nature of interviews in the phenomenological study is essential for reflexivity and bracketing as the participant, not the researcher, is the source of information. After each of the first two interviews, the researcher wrote in a reflexive journal, noting any opinions, beliefs, or personal issues that the researcher came across during the interviews. The researcher also noted any areas of discomfort or ways that the researcher showed or expressed emotions in a way that could have potentially influenced the participants’ responses. In addition, the researcher reflected on any lack of neutrality the researcher showed throughout the interviews. For example, the researcher considered words or phrases, leading remarks or phrases, or any facial expressions she may have shown that could have influenced the participants’ responses (Ahern, 1999). This allowed the researcher to analyze and disclose any potential biases throughout the process to capture the complete experience of each of the participants.

The interview protocol that was applied in this study, as suggested by Creswell (1998), was a recording sheet with room for the date, time, location, and name of the interviewee, and ample space for the interview questions. Creswell also suggested memorizing the open-ended interview questions, asking succinct questions, and writing closing comments to thank the
interviewee for their participation. Each of these suggestions was strongly taken into consideration as the interviews were planned and implemented.

As expressed by Seidman (2006), utilizing a three-cycle interview process presents the researcher with an opportunity to gain a clearer understanding of the context in which participants interact with the phenomenon of focus. Therefore, interviews were conducted utilizing a three-cycle interview process. The first cycle of interviews included minimal researcher questioning and commenting, as the ultimate purpose was to have the participant share as much about their experience with the situation as possible (Seidman, 2006). A sample probing statement for the first interview is, “tell me about your experience with facilitating academic commitment.” The first interview was designed to gain access into the participant’s world and to understand their experiences with the facilitation of academic commitment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The initial probing questions were followed by a few brief questions that allowed the participant to elaborate on their accounts (Seidman, 2006).

The second cycle of interviews involved the personal lives of the participants and their background experiences with the topic and situation (Seidman, 2006). For the purpose of this study, in the second cycle interview participants were asked to share their experiences as academically committed people and to elaborate on how they believed that to have influenced their teaching (Seidman, 2006). The third and final interview had the participants reflect on and review the overall findings from their personal contributions to this study and served as a member check. The purpose of this final interview was to allow the participants to contribute their opinions on how strongly the interpretations represented their contributions and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
Identification of Attributes

In analyzing the lived experiences of educators’ facilitations of academic commitment, various attributes were reviewed and interpreted. Common attributes in character education research are perseverance, grit, resilience, and self traits. For this research study, the attributes studied were connected directly to academic commitment and included attitudes, traits, vernacular/repetition of phrases, communication, and training/experiences. Attitudes, as attributes, were defined as beliefs and feelings towards academic commitment. Traits were considered to be the ways of exhibiting strong academic commitment. Vernacular/repetition of phrases was understood as the particular words and sentences that participants used to instruct students, specifically the phrases that were repeated frequently. Communication was defined as the way that the participants delivered information and support to students. Finally, training/experiences were defined as the experiences that the participants had and the situations in which they had been involved that supported their facilitation of academic commitment.

Data Analysis Procedure

Qualitative researchers collect data in the moment through their experiences with participants (Creswell, 1998). Particularly for phenomenological research, the researcher is experiencing the participants, as they are involved in the phenomenon of focus. Thus, researchers are truly collecting information through experience and in the moment. As qualitative researchers collect data through their experiences, much of the experience relies on the three I’s of insight, intuition, and impression (Dey, 1995, p. 78). Thus, Creswell (1998) recommended the use of the data analysis spiral to assist the researcher in evaluating data in analytic circles as opposed to analyzing with a fixed linear approach.
The data analysis spiral begins with the collection of data followed by data management, reading, and note taking. It continues on to interpreting and classifying data, and finally to representing and visualizing the findings (Creswell, 1998). In addition to the data analysis spiral, Colaizzi’s method was also utilized in analyzing this data. Colaizzi’s method is a seven step approach to forming clusters of meaning and themes while ensuring that the researcher brackets themselves out of the findings as much as they possibly can (Morrow, Rodriguez, & King, 2015). Colaizzi’s method is a highly regarded data analysis tool in phenomenological research as it thoroughly supports the researcher in searching for clusters of meaning and engaging in reflexivity and bracketing (Morrow, Rodriguez, & King, 2015). The seven steps of Colaizzi’s method require the researcher to initially familiarize themselves with all of the data by reviewing the interview transcriptions several times. The researcher then searches the collected data for codes and themes that are common across all interviews (Morrow et al., 2015). Throughout this entire process, researchers must reflexively bracket themselves out of the research and develop a description of the phenomenon incorporating all the common themes, and finally, have the participants analyze the findings to ensure that they accurately depict the phenomenon in focus (Morrow et al., 2015).

To fully employ this spiral process of data analysis and Colaizzi’s method, ATLAS.ti was utilized for data management, interpretation, and classification. Furthermore, the process of horizontalization was employed to fully reveal the researcher’s role in the phenomenon as well as to completely depict the experiences of the participants’ interactions with the phenomenon.

ATLAS.ti. Creswell (1998) strongly advised the use of computer software to support researchers in data management, interpretation, and classification. According to Yin (2016), one of the most widely used computer software programs for the analysis of qualitative data is
ATLAS.ti. For the purpose of this study, ATLAS.ti was the computer program employed for data management, interpretation, and classification. ATLAS.ti is a computer software program that organizes and analyzes large quantities of collected qualitative data and supports researchers in coding the collected textual, visual, audio, and video data (Hwang, 2008). The ATLAS.ti computer software supports researchers in the process of finding of clusters of meaning in the collected data by sifting through transcriptions to find commonalities and reoccurring words and phrases. ATLAS.ti is regarded as a valuable tool in the analysis of qualitative data (Scales, 2013).

**Horizontalization.** Horizontalization is a qualitative analysis process in which researchers regard each piece of collected data as equally valuable (Creswell, 1998; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process supports the researcher in organizing statements into categories and developing clusters of meaning (Creswell, 1998; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher’s goal for this process was to sift through repetitive information and seek significance in the data collected, which is the essence of horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). During this process, the researcher also referred back to the reflexive journal during the process of filtering and sifting through information to corroborate any potential biases (Chan et al., 2013). Following this, the researcher constructed a description of how the phenomenon was experienced, known as the structural experience (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, a comprehensive account of the experience was detailed, including the accounts of each individual participant. This helps the researcher obtain the *essence of the experience*, thus understanding what the participant has experienced (Creswell, 1998). For the purpose of this study, horizontalization provided backing when collecting data and also supported the inclusion of the researcher’s personal experiences into the analysis of data.
Limitations of the Research Design

As previously discussed, a phenomenological design was the best-suited research methodology for this study in order to analyze how teachers facilitate academic commitment amongst elementary school students. Although this research design was best suited for this particular study, there are limitations that exist when employing phenomenological research designs. The limitations of this study generally involved the summarization and generalization of findings across participants, epoché when involved in the phenomenon, and that the participants knew the researcher collecting data (Creswell, 1998).

The first limitation of phenomenological research that was relevant in this study was the limited ability to summarize and generalize findings across the teachers in this study. Due to the nature of phenomenological research of experiencing the way in which participants interact with a given phenomenon, generalizations regarding participants’ experiences with the phenomenon may vary greatly (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research has the purpose of uncovering principles and values involved with the research topic—character education and academic commitment—as opposed to analyzing general tendencies.

Another limitation potentially affecting this study involved the reliability of epoché when the researcher also experiences, and is involved in, the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). For this study, the researcher personally experienced the phenomenon of educators facilitating academic commitment as an elementary educator in the school district of focus.

Additionally, the participants’ awareness of the researcher’s role in phenomenological research and in this research study was a limitation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the researcher observed and interviewed the elementary teachers participating in this study, their role was
identified. This could have potentially altered the way that the participants responded to the interview questions that the researcher was asking (Creswell, 1998).

**Validation**

In phenomenological research, the validity of the study refers to the degree to which the study is rooted in the components of a phenomenological study and that the findings are sustained through phenomenological research processes (Polkinghorne, 1989). This includes phenomenology-specific components such as the accuracy of interview transcripts, the researcher’s influence on the descriptions of the experiences, the discussion and acknowledgement of alternate conclusions from the findings, and whether the findings are situation-specific or generalizable (Polkinghorne, 1989). Similarly, to examine the level of a phenomenological study’s validity, van Manen (2014) discussed crucial components in the analysis of a valid phenomenon, the avoidance of overly perception-based analyses, and the roots of phenomenological research and literature.

To synthesize and assess the validity of phenomenology, Creswell and Poth (2018) outlined a set of five standards for assessing the quality of a phenomenology study. These standards consist of the inclusion of a clear phenomenon, philosophical roots in phenomenology, a data analysis procedures referenced from phenomenologists, communication of the essence of the phenomenon as described by the participants, and researcher reflexivity seamlessly woven throughout the report (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

With these standards and components in mind, the researcher engaged in validation techniques and strategies including engagement in bracketing and reflexivity, triangulation, rich and thick description, and negative case analysis, and sought participant feedback (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). Each of these techniques and strategies are frequently implemented
in qualitative research as well as phenomenological research and have been noted by Creswell and Poth (2018) as widely accepted strategies for the validation of qualitative research. Validation is a comprehensive and essential aspect of the methodology in a phenomenological research study because there is a need to completely portray the lived experience of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Due to the comprehensive nature of validation, for the purpose of discussion, the validation techniques and strategies that were implemented for this study were organized chronologically in the research process.

The first validation strategy of engagement in reflexivity was executed throughout the entire research process. As explained by Creswell and Poth (2018), engagement in reflexivity requires researchers, from the start of the study and throughout the report, to divulge biases towards and experiences had with the outlined phenomenon. The noting and acknowledgement of potential biases and connections to the phenomenon of focus provides clarity for the reader or reviewer, as they will better understand the impacts the biases and connections have on the findings (Larkin & Thompson, 2012).

This validation strategy also involved the process of bracketing, where the researcher brackets themselves out of the collected data through deep and thorough descriptions of their personal experiences with the given phenomenon (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). This process sets aside the researcher’s personal experiences from the beginning and allows the participants’ experiences to be at the forefront of the research (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). In engaging in bracketing, the researcher in this study ensured that their thoughts and personal beliefs were minimized, but recognized by the participants throughout the entire research process.

As a teacher in the school district of focus, the researcher held the same level position as the participants. In holding the same level position as the participants, the researcher was
subjected to the same evaluative ratings and observations thus held no oversight, power
differential, or administrative influence over the participant group. Being a co-worker with the
participants, the researcher did know each of them as acquaintances, but had not witnessed their
teaching or engaged in conversations with the participants about their interactions and
experiences with academic commitment. Additionally, the researcher’s personal experience with
the facilitation of the disposition of academic commitment is disclosed and described in the
discussion section of this research report.

As previously discussed in the data collection section, triangulation also supported the
validation of this research. Triangulation occurred throughout the process of this research;
however, it is most prominent in the data collection and analysis stages. Triangulation supported
the revelation of common themes throughout collected data by analyzing and connecting
information from multiple sources of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the use of interviews supports triangulation in
phenomenological research studies. For this study, information from the interviews was
synthesized to verify common themes and then used this to develop an interpretation of the
phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Because the concept of generalizability or transferability is significant to qualitative
research, rich and thick descriptions of participant responses, settings, and interview transcripts
increase the validity of a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rich and thick descriptions include
specific and noteworthy details about the participants’ experiences with the phenomenon as
pertaining to the data collected during the interview process (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
Furthermore, rich and thick descriptions were made after analyzing interviews to further uncover
any connections between the first and second interviews and between the various participants
and their interviews. The rich and thick description took place throughout the data collection and analysis stages of this research study.

As the collected data is analyzed and themes begin to emerge, not all the findings will connect to the emerged themes. These findings are called outliers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The validation technique of finding outliers is referred to as *discovering negative case analysis* (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In reporting these outliers, the provided findings will stay realistic; not all research findings paint a picturesque depiction of the studied situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the researcher reported all findings realistically, whether the findings validated the expected findings or not. This information was included in the discussion of findings and results.

Including outliers, or *points of intrigue*, reveals to readers and reviewers that the researcher is alert to them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Often, the *points of intrigue*, become central in the discussion of the study, aiding the researcher in making recommendations for further research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When outliers emerged in this particular study, the researcher noted the outliers and followed through with discussing these in the concluding thoughts of the report.

After the data was collected and interpreted, the researcher used member checking or sought feedback from the participants in the third interview, which predominantly focused on the researcher’s findings and interpretations of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), seeking participant feedback is regarded as a crucial strategy in building credibility and validity in a study. This process allows the researcher to ensure the credibility and accuracy of the collected and interpreted information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, the member check or participant feedback ensured that the reflexivity and
bracketing efforts the researcher had taken throughout the entire process were accurate and honest. In this study, the researcher used the final interview as an opportunity to seek participant feedback.

Once the findings and interpretations had been composed, the final interview was scheduled and organized to provide feedback on the accuracy of the findings and interpretations, as well as on any missing information. The feedback from the final interview was taken into consideration and the findings, interpretations, and conclusions were adjusted accordingly to ensure the utmost accuracy of the account.

**Expected Findings**

As this research study concluded, it was expected that the findings would support a better understanding of how teachers promote academic commitment in elementary school students. This better understanding would include the revelation of particular teaching strategies, the creation of a bank of vocabulary associated with furthering academic commitment, and activities, lessons, practices, or projects that engaged students in academically committed situations. Above all, it was expected reveal the wisdom behind the importance of academic commitment. Because current literature on character traits and 21st century life skills and success lack studies centered on teacher perspectives and practices, this study would add to the academic research on how educators can better facilitate academic commitment in their students.

**Ethical Issues**

As qualitative researchers compose a study, a comprehensive approach is necessary to address and manage any ethical issues that may arise throughout the process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As Creswell and Poth (2018) divulged, ethical issues emerge during various stages of the research process and must be addressed sensitively concerning all the participants involved in the
study. Specific practices were implemented to minimize the potential of ethical issues within this research study. Suggested practices for qualitative research consist of informed consent, the maintenance of participant privacy and confidentiality, divulging potential research biases, and reporting data fully and accurately, all of which were utilized in this research study (Shaw, 2003).

As Creswell and Poth (2018) noted, sensitivity to participants in a research study is imperative to minimizing ethical issues. Suggested ethical practices to support the minimization of ethical issues include informing participants of the general purpose of the study, assurance of voluntary participation, and gaining formal consent via informed consent forms (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Initially, the participant pool was sent an email detailing the general purpose of this study. To minimize ethical issues involving participant consent, selected participants were initially invited to join this research study via email, noting that the process was voluntary. After agreeing to participate, participants were asked to sign an informed consent agreement describing the expectations for their involvement in the study. An informed consent letter developed by Creswell and Poth (2018) was the model for the informed consent letter utilized in this research. Throughout this participant agreement process, it was reiterated that participation was voluntary and that participants could leave the study at any point in the process without penalty (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, real names and identities were omitted, participants were able to choose the interview locations and times, and all collected documents were stored securely in a locked filing cabinet or on an encrypted and secured external hard-drive (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The ability to choose the interview locations and observation times provided the participants with the necessary sensitivity to
address potential ethical issues, while also balancing the “power” between the researcher and the participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 57). Additionally, after the study was concluded, participants were asked to review the findings and interpretations of the study and provide feedback on accuracy in their final interview. This allowed for any potential issues in findings or interpretations to be resolved before the study was published (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Researcher bias is a potential ethical issue that arises in all types of research (Shaw, 2003). To minimize the ethical issues that could arise from researcher bias, the researcher engaged in reflexivity and bracketing throughout the entire process. Along with the engagement of reflexivity, the reported information was honest and illuminated all findings of the study, desired or not (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As an educator in the school district of focus, the researcher needed to divulge and share connections with the findings to reveal potential biases for the reader (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided insight as to why the phenomenological research methodology was selected to examine how teachers facilitate academic commitment in elementary school students. Through the review of literature surrounding phenomenological philosophy, the most suitable, foundational, and widely accepted methodologies were employed to ensure a qualitatively and phenomenologically sound research study. To investigate how teachers facilitate academic commitment, six elementary school teachers from three elementary schools in single school district in the Northeastern United States were selected through criterion sampling and voluntarily recruited for participation. Following the selection of participants, three interviews were scheduled to better understand how teachers interact with academic commitment and how that influences their teaching.
To analyze and interpret the data, three strategies were used: the data analysis spiral (Colaizzi’s method), ATLAS.ti computer software, and horizontalization. Many widely accepted qualitative practices were implemented to enhance the validity of the study, such as engagement in reflexivity, triangulation, rich and thick description, negative case analysis, and participant feedback in the form of a member check in the third interview. Each of these validity practices connected with the ethical research practices executed in this study and supported the voluntary participation of teachers, the assurance of teacher and school district privacy and confidentiality, the full disclosure of all outcomes, and the inclusion of researcher bias.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

As schools continue to prepare their students for 21st century success, facilitating students in developing and possessing dispositions like academic commitment are necessary. However, little is known about how teachers view these particular dispositions and how teachers’ views influence the ways that they facilitate these dispositions in their classrooms. There is value in understanding how teachers define and view dispositions such as academic commitment, especially regarding students’ future success in the 21st century. Developing an understanding of how teachers view and define academic commitment, as well as the particulars on how they facilitate academic commitment, empowers schools and other teachers to better support students in developing strong academic commitment for future success.

The aim of this research was to gain insight into the lived experiences of a small participant set of elementary teachers who notably view and facilitate academic commitment in distinct yet different ways. To comprehensively understand the phenomenon of academic commitment, the two research questions that framed the entirety of this study are:

How do teachers define and view academic commitment?

How does a teacher’s definition and view shape the way that he or she facilitates academic commitment?

Six elementary school teachers in a Northeastern United States school district participated in a three-cycle interview process in which they were asked to disclose their present and developed views and beliefs about academic commitment and how they embark upon supporting and facilitating academic commitment in their students and classrooms. As this is a phenomenological research study, the investigation was designed to elucidate teachers’ personal
experiences as academically committed individuals and understand how their views on academic commitment shape their facilitation of academic commitment in their classrooms.

In this chapter, the researcher will discuss the data analysis process and illuminate the results and findings of this research study. Initially, this chapter details the process of recruiting and selecting participants for this research, followed by a report of the demographic information of the selected participants. Furthermore, this chapter will outline the sound phenomenological methodology and data analysis tools employed during this research study. It will present in detail the findings of this research in terms of profiling the participants and sharing their personal experiences with academic commitment as well as divulging common themes that emerged throughout the analysis of the collected data.

**Description of Sample**

Through the criterion sampling process of discussions and emails with four of the elementary administrators in the school district, six elementary teachers were interviewed and will be highlighted throughout this section. These teachers were interviewed about their personal experiences with academic commitment and facilitating academic commitment. This section will explore the process implemented to recruit participants, the response rates of the participants, and the particular demographics of the participants.

**Sampling procedure.** To organize a recruitment pool of participants, four elementary administrators were surveyed and asked to name four to five elementary teachers that they felt notably fostered and facilitated academic commitment in their students and classrooms, while strongly considering teachers who had attended various professional learning opportunities geared towards academic commitment. It was noted in the email to the administrators that the teachers they suggested for this research would know that the administrators had recommended
them. However, if the teacher chose to participate, the administrators would not know if they chose to participate, for confidentiality and deductive disclosure purposes. This process was facilitated via email and all of the administrators responded in a timely manner. Administrators separately emailed their suggestions for well-suited potential participants, and 18 teachers in total were recommended for this research. The recommended teachers were not ranked in any way and were listed as strong candidates matching the specific criteria suited for this research. Of the 18 recommended teachers, 9 of the teachers worked in School A, 5 of the teachers worked in School B, and 4 of the teachers worked in School C.

Based on the four administrators’ suggestions, 18 elementary school teachers—including classroom and special area teachers—were contacted via email to participate in this study (see Appendix D). These 18 teachers served as the recruitment pool for this research. All 18 recommended teachers were initially contacted via email to discuss the requirements of this research and to inquire about their interest in participating. The email sent to the potential participants detailed the requirements of participating in the study as well as noting that the teachers were selected through the recommendation of an administrator. However, it was noted that the administrators would not know if the teachers chose to participate for confidentiality and deductive disclosure purposes, and for the integrity of this research. Out of the 18 teachers, potential participants who were emailed and asked to participate, nine teachers responded that they would be interested in participating in this study. The nine teachers who did not respond to the initial email were contacted a second time using the initial email in case there were technological errors in sending the first time. Only nine of the 18 teachers were interested in the research.
After responding to the initial email, a second email was sent to the nine interested teachers providing them with the consent form for participation and asking to schedule the first two interviews. In response to the second email sent, seven of the nine teachers returned the consent form. From the seven teachers who returned the consent forms, six teachers scheduled and participated in the interview process previously outlined in Chapter 3. The seventh teacher, consented to participate in the study, but after many attempts to try to schedule interviews, could not participate due to scheduling conflicts.

**Participant demographics.** Before the initial interview began, each participant was asked a short series of demographic questions consisting of information regarding the participant’s ethnicity, highest level of education attained, additional credit hours, grade level range, and number of years teaching. The results of these demographic questions showed that the participants of this study had a wide range of teaching experience and were highly qualified teachers, all with at least master’s degrees and additional credit hours held.

The participants’ years of teaching experience ranged from seven years to 26 years. The names of the participants were changed and pseudonyms were used to maintain the confidentiality of these teachers. The participants were given the opportunity to choose their pseudonyms. Two participants elected to choose their pseudonyms and the other four gave me permission to choose pseudonyms for them. The six participants in this research came from the three elementary schools in the district of focus: four participants from School A, one participant from School B, and one participant from School C. Though an equal number of participants from each elementary school in the district would have been ideal, based on the pool of potential participants from the criterion sampling, the number of teachers from each school was consistent with the pool of potential participants. All of the participants were Caucasian females.
Any specific information regarding subject area or grade level was not included in the demographics table due to the small recruitment pool and participant population. The specific grade level or subject that each participant taught was not included as it could increase the potential of deductive disclosure. However, a range of grades was included to give more perspective to the participants’ views and experiences. Half of the participants had experience teaching grades kindergarten through fifth (one with kindergarten through second) and the other half of the participants had experience teaching grades third through fifth. Table 2 outlines the demographics of the participants in this research. The participants of this study are listed in the table in order of response dates and order of interviews. Each of the interview dates, times, and locations were chosen by the participants to allow them to feel more comfortable with the process.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Jamie</th>
<th>Rachel</th>
<th>Jane</th>
<th>Sarah</th>
<th>Hannah</th>
<th>Billie-Jean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>School A</td>
<td>School B</td>
<td>School C</td>
<td>School A</td>
<td>School A</td>
<td>School A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Degree</td>
<td>Master’s &amp; Administration Degree</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Credit Hours</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level Range</td>
<td>K–5</td>
<td>K–2</td>
<td>3–5</td>
<td>K–5</td>
<td>3–5</td>
<td>3–5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Years Teaching</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Methodology and Analysis

In phenomenological research, the essence of the research process is to gain access into the participants’ views and perspectives—the data in phenomenological studies—with the researcher as the primary instrument in collecting this data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 1990). To collect data, or the lived experiences of the participants, the most prominent form of data collection tool utilized in phenomenological studies is interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As previously described, a three-cycle interview format was employed to gain a complete view of each participant’s experience with the phenomenon of academic commitment, their values and opinions about academic commitment, and how these affect the way they facilitate academic commitment in students (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To analyze the data collected from the interviews, phenomenological data analysis tools such as a data analysis spiral (particularly, Colazzi’s method), ATLAS.ti computer analysis software, and horizontalization were used. This section will reinforce the underpinnings of sound phenomenological data collection and analysis practices while also portraying the particulars of the data that was collected and analyzed, further discussing how substantial themes began to emerge.

Researcher note of reflexivity. As the researcher is the most distinguished instrument in the phenomenological data collection and analysis process, it is important to note that the researcher is human and has personal judgments and perspectives on any given phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, it is necessary that the researcher, in a given phenomenological study, openly and transparently discloses their experiences and beliefs about the phenomenon of focus (Chan et al., 2013). This open and transparent disclosure of researcher experiences and beliefs is termed reflexivity (Ahern, 1999).
Thus, the data analysis process began before the interviews, as the researcher had to personally grapple with her own understanding of academic commitment, how she experienced academic commitment in her life, and in turn how that affects the way she facilitates academic commitment in her students. As discussed in previous chapters, the researcher is a teacher in the school district of focus and holds the same level of position as the participants being interviewed. Prior to conducting any interview, the researcher began to keep a detailed reflexive journal noting her personal opinions, beliefs, and ideas about academic commitment and also her thoughts and potential biases during the interviews themselves. This journaling continued throughout the entire process.

In phenomenological research, it is essential that the researcher addresses and honestly understands their personal position and experience with the phenomenon in focus (Ahern, 1999). The process of keeping a reflexive journal and the acknowledgement of the researcher’s lived experiences with academic commitment, in conjunction with other phenomenological standards for ensuring validity to be discussed in later sections, supported the bracketing of personal experiences out of the collected data during the analysis phase of this research (Ahern, 1999). Essential and relevant information from the reflexive journal will be woven into the section of this chapter detailing specific data, and the results of this study and notations of bracketing will be addressed as well.

**Interview procedure.** The interview procedure employed for the purpose of this research was a three-cycle in-depth interview process asking a succession of strategically organized and planned open-ended interview questions about the participants’ facilitation of academic commitment, their views on academic commitment, and how academic commitment plays a role in their personal lives (Creswell, 1998). These interviews and questions were
strategically planned to support the participants in a deep and detailed sharing of their personal experiences with academic commitment both as individuals and as teachers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For reflexivity and bracketing purposes, notes were taken after the interviews and transcriptions of the interviews on personal impressions, thoughts, and possible biases presented during the interviews. These reflexive notes will be included throughout this chapter and will be noted clearly.

Interviews, as reported by van Manen (1990), are the most direct and commonly utilized, tool in collecting data for phenomenological studies due to the necessity of collecting personal accounts of experiences and certain phenomenon. The use of interviews as a data collection tool also supports researchers in gaining access into participants’ former experiences, which are impossible to observe (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, this research study utilizes interviews as the primary source of data collection.

The day prior to the scheduled interviews, the participants were emailed or called to remind them of their scheduled interview time and location for the following day. Four of the six participants preferred phone calls to email for the reminder, and the other two participants chose to be contacted via email. Only one interview had to be rescheduled due to a morning conflict. The primary research conducted all the other interviews that took place on time in the chosen locations.

The first two interviews for each participant were scheduled at points from mid-October to the end of December 2018. All of the participants returned a signed copy of the consent form (see Appendix C) prior to being interviewed. Four of the six teachers elected to be interviewed in their classrooms or offices and the other two teachers elected to be interviewed in the researcher’s classroom. In total, 12 interviews—six participants and two interviews for each
participant—asked in-depth questions regarding views and personal experiences with the disposition of academic commitment. Of the 12 total interviews, six interviews were held after school, three interviews were held during a common lunch break, and three interviews were held before school. Each interview ranged from roughly 25 minutes to an hour in total; between one to two hours were spent with each participant.

Prior to initiating the first interview, participants were told that their participation was voluntary and informed that they could answer as many questions as they would like or elect to not answer particular questions. Participants were also informed that these interviews were to be audio-recorded for accuracy and further transcription. The first round of interviews began with the question, “how do you personally define academic commitment?” and were followed by questions and prompts that extended the discussions around what traits individuals with strong academic commitment possess, the interviewees’ values and beliefs about academic commitment, and how the interviewees’ facilitate academic commitment in their classrooms.

Because this was the initial interview and the participants and researcher were just becoming acquainted with the process, the questions were more structured, and the researcher followed a procedural approach to ensure that the questions were being answered in detail. Becoming acquainted with the process and building trust involved some light conversation and sharing feelings about being interviewed, all which took place before the participants answered questions and discussed their personal experiences. Although this interview was structured informally, its purpose was to truly gain insight into the participant’s views and beliefs on academic commitment in their teaching experiences. Thus, the questions were gently restated to support the participants in fully answering and elaborating on or clarifying their responses, as many participants were nervous about making a good impression. Some restated and clarifying
questions were, “could you tell me more about . . .?” “you had mentioned . . ., what does that look like in your classroom?,” and “building off of your thoughts about . . ., how do you share this with your students?” These prompts were not noted in the outlined interview questions (see Appendix F), but they followed and built directly off the outlined questions and the participants’ responses.

The second round of interviews began with the question, “what are you beliefs/opinions about academic commitment both in school and as an adult?” and followed with other questions that probed the participants to share their personal journeys and experiences with academic commitment and how those might shape their experiences as a teacher facilitating academic commitment. This second interview, as the participants and researcher were more familiar with one another and the process, was more open-ended and the questioning followed the direction each participant set. To further the discussion and assure that the participants were addressing the research questions, some general prompting and other questions were asked, such as, “could you describe any particular instances that tested your academic commitment?” and “would you elaborate on how (a given individual) supported your personal academic commitment?” Questions that furthered the discussion were not noted in the list of initial interview questions (see Appendix F) as they particularly pertained to specific interviews.

Over the first two interviews, the participants were open and excited to discuss and share their experiences regarding academic commitment. Two of the participants ended their interviews stating that they were excited and interested to hear more about this topic, as they felt it was not focused on nearly enough in the curriculum. In particular, Billie-Jean noted, “Nothing I would like to add, but I must say I can’t wait to read your findings so we can continue this discussion because it’s [academic commitment] a dying trait.” As a whole, the participant set
was enthusiastic, honest, thoughtful, reflective, and quite open to sharing their personal experiences regarding academic commitment as individuals and as teachers.

The third round of interviews was designed to serve as a member check where participants reviewed their personal contributions to the study to ensure that the information collected was accurate and honest. A third email was sent to schedule the dates, times, and locations for this interview. As in the two previous interviews, the participants were able to choose the dates, times, and locations of the third interview. All of the third interviews took place in February 2019. Each of these interviews required about 30 additional minutes of the participants’ time. One day prior to the third interview, participants were contacted via phone or email to remind them of their interview. In addition, each participant was emailed a copy of her participant profile and the interpretations of her contributions to review prior to the third interview.

**Data analysis process.** As sound phenomenological studies involve collecting information through interviewing participants on their experiences with the phenomenon of focus, much of the data collection process relies on the researcher’s discretion (Dey, 1995). Due to this, procedures such as the data analysis spiral, Colaizzi’s method, and horizontalization are highly recommended in evaluating and analyzing collected data for qualitative and phenomenological research studies (Creswell, 1998; Morrow et al., 2015). This research study employed the use of a data analysis spiral, with a particular emphasis on Colaizzi’s method, and horizontalization. In addition to the data analysis spiral, Colaizzi’s method, and horizontalization, this research study relied on the use of the ATLAS.ti qualitative computer software to support the management, interpretation, and classification of data (Creswell, 1998).
The data analysis spiral and Colaizzi’s method involve a cyclical analysis of the collected data through reviewing the interview transcripts multiple times and searching the transcripts for codes and themes that are apparent and recurring throughout all the interviews, all while reflexively bracketing the researcher’s opinions out of the collected data and ultimately developing an accurate and complete description of the phenomenon (Morrow et al., 2015).

ATLAS.ti data analysis software for qualitative research is designed to support researchers in managing, interpreting, and classifying collected data in qualitative research studies. ATLAS.ti software is highly regarded and aids qualitative researchers in organizing particular codes, finding co-occurrences between and within collected data, and providing various visual representations of the formulated codes using tables, lists, and webs (Hwang, 2008; Scales, 2013). For the purpose of this research, ATLAS.ti supported the coding of the transcribed interviews, finding co-occurrences between the first two interviews and across all interviews, and thus, the emergence of themes throughout the collected data.

In bridging the data analysis spiral, Colaizzi’s method, and the use of the ATLAS.ti software, the process of horizontalization threads the entire data analysis process together in emphasizing the importance of each piece of collected data (Moustakas, 1994). As the researcher reviewed the transcribed interviews, coding each in the ATLAS.ti software, they were able to find clusters of meaning and generate categories that supported the emergence of themes. To find the clusters of meaning in the collected data, the ATLAS.ti software—particularly the co-occurrence functionality—enabled the ability to evaluate repeating codes and analyze significant themes that occurred throughout all the interviews (Moustakas, 1994). During the horizontalization analysis process, each line and statement is necessary to the essence of the participant’s perspective of the phenomenon, and in this study, horizontalization supported the
development of commonalities between experiences, allowing themes to emerge (Creswell, 1998).

Analyzing the collected data from the interviews began during the interview process. Throughout the interview process, connections between the researcher and the participants developed. Noteworthy attitudes and mindsets regarding academic commitment became more apparent and were noted in the reflexive journal. Themes on the development of particular attitudes and mindsets quickly began to emerge and connections between first and second interviews and between participants became apparent. Themes were developed based on traits and profound experiences that the participants had with academic commitment, both personally and as educators. For example, in the interview exchange with Jamie, who was extremely optimistic and positive, it was noted that her parents always encouraged her to “find her happiness,” and seek purpose in what made her happy. According to Jamie, that definitely influenced her in trying to do the same in her teaching. She noted that she wanted her students to feel positive about their experiences in her classroom. She has them set purposeful goals and ensures that the students understand exactly what they should be doing and why it is important.

Additionally, Hannah, having strong convictions in her beliefs about commitment, explained in the initial interview how she understood that developing positive relationships with her students through recognition and being honest with her students was necessary in “making or breaking their commitment.” In the second interview, Hannah had a profound moment where she recognized the impact her parents and her high school track coach had on her view of academic commitment. She expressed that in her classroom and in her teaching, she tried to develop this notion of a “no excuses mentality—if you want it bad enough you have to make sacrifices,” which came directly from values her parents and her high school track coach instilled.
in her. These two anecdotal moments were noteworthy in developing emergent themes, and other themes were similarly examined throughout this interview process.

As each interview was conducted, the interviews were transcribed to express the essence of the phenomenon of academic commitment. The primary researcher transcribed each interview to allow for more processing time with the collected data and to immerse themselves with the participants’ experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Before transcription, each interview was listened to multiple times to gain the essence of the interview and to note, in the reflexive journal, any potential biases for bracketing purposes later on (Morrow et al., 2015). The transcriptions were documented in the ATLAS.ti software in a password protected and encrypted file for securing the data. Each transcription was labeled with the participant’s pseudonym for further confidentiality.

To initiate the process of the data analysis spiral/Colaizzi’s method before coding each interview, the interviews were read over at least three times to support coding and developing of emerging themes (Morrow et al., 2015). During the third read of the transcribed interviews, relevant and prominent comments were coded as they became apparent. This process occurred line by line, employing the phenomenological data analysis process of horizontalization and noting how each piece of collected data has equal importance in developing a complete picture of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each code was entered into the ATLAS.ti software to monitor the frequency of particular codes as they were noted and repeated throughout the coding of all the interviews. A table of these frequently occurring codes was organized to develop themes (see Appendix G). Divulging and discovering common codes across the interviews was essential in following Colaizzi’s method for data analysis (Morrow et al., 2015). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that computer analysis software cannot code the collected data
automatically. The coding process is ultimately left to the researcher. However, the ATLAS.ti software does support researchers in organizing the codes and viewing co-occurrences of codes to support the emergence of themes.

As the first three interviews were coded, using the open code functionality provided by the ATLAS.ti software, common themes began to emerge that were noticeable across interviews as well. These recurring comments and exchanges were coded using the list coding functionality that ATLAS.ti offers to support the emergence of common codes and themes throughout the data analysis process. As the other interviews were coded, the list coding functionality was used to code comments and vernacular that were threaded, repeatedly, throughout the varying interviews. It should be noted that original codes were also entered, using the open code functionality, in the coding process of the other interviews as new codes emerged.

From the coding of each interview, a framework for each of the participants was developed to depict a clear representation of each participant and their personal affiliation and connection with academic commitment. Developing a clear representation of each individual’s experiences with the phenomenon is crucial to the data analysis spiral, Colaizzi’s method, and the horizontalization process (Moustakas, 1994; Morrow et al., 2015). To depict a clearer picture of each of the views, the ATLAS.ti software was used to find recurring codes within each participant’s two interview transcripts and to determine the frequency of the codes within the two interviews. Codes that occurred more frequently were noted in the framework as important to understanding the participants’ lived experiences of academic commitment (see Appendix G). The participant framework developed into a participant profile, for each participant, which will be discussed further in the Presentation of Data and Results section of this chapter. In developing the participant frameworks, called profiles (see Appendix H), the reflexive journal
was referenced to sift through potential biases and will be explained later on. These frameworks will be highlighted in later sections (see Appendix H).

After the coding process was completed for all the interviews, a complete list of 120 codes was organized into the ATLAS.ti software utilizing the code manager functionality. After reviewing the codes and transcripts multiple times, categories for recurring themes became apparent. From there, using the code manager functionality, code groups or categories were created to organize the codes to further find emerging themes. These categories, later termed clusters of meaning, supported the findings of the themes that emerged from all the transcriptions. From there, the codes were color-coded to help find themes in the data. Finally, the transcripts were reviewed once more, serving as a final check, to ensure that the derived themes were consistent across all the transcriptions and that no themes or commonalities had been omitted in the process.

To limit researcher bias, aside from reviewing and referencing the reflexive journal, commonly occurring codes within the themes were noted across all interviews. The frequency of commonly recurring codes (see Appendix G) supported the understanding of the themes across all of the participants’ experiences. The themes were organized into five total categories and guided the presentation of the results, but are also interconnected in their pertinence to understanding the lived experiences of academic commitment and to answering the two research questions of this study. The frequency of commonly recurring codes reinforced the collective values of the participant set in terms of defining academic commitment and personal experiences influencing the facilitation of academic commitment.

**Ensuring validity.** To ensure the validity and sound phenomenological methodology of this study, five specific validation techniques were employed throughout the data collection and
analysis phases of this research. These techniques and strategies include engagement in triangulation, reflexivity and bracketing, rich and thick description, negative case analysis, and a member check or participant feedback. Each of these validation techniques are noted by Creswell and Poth (2018) as commonly used and widely accepted techniques in phenomenological data collection and analysis. The validation techniques will be discussed chronologically as they occurred throughout the data analysis phase of this research.

First, before collecting any data, triangulation of the criterion sampling, with elementary administrators suggesting ideal and qualified potential participants for this study, coupled with the three-cycle interview process, was strategically devised to reinforce the credibility of the participants and their experiences with the facilitation of academic commitment. It was ensured that the district administrators, who had conducted observations and had various discussions with the participants over their years teaching in the district, selected participants who were experiencing this phenomenon and supported the triangulation process. Additionally, conducting multiple interviews fortified the triangulation of data across interviews and corroborated that the participants the administrator recommended were credible and ideal candidates for this research study.

The second validity technique, used throughout the entirety of the data collection and analysis phases, was reflexivity. Reflexivity is the process of discussing the researcher’s personal experiences with the phenomenon in focus and acknowledging these biases throughout the research report (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). As previously mentioned, a reflexive journal was maintained and utilized to disclose judgments, personal experiences, and potential biases that occurred throughout the data collection and analysis stages. The maintenance of a reflexive journal supported the understanding that researchers have their own personal opinions about their
phenomena of focus, but the purpose of phenomenological studies is to better understand how participants experience a phenomenon, not how the researcher experiences it. Thus, a reflexive journal and the disclosure of biases increases the trustworthiness and reliability of the interpreted data (Moustakas, 1994). Evidence of the reflexive journal and reflexivity will become more apparent in the upcoming sections, specifically the Summary of Findings section and the Presentation of Data and Results section.

Coupled with reflexivity is the process of bracketing, where researchers essentially *bracket* their divulged opinions, beliefs, and judgments of the phenomenon and of the collected data out of the results to ensure that the participants’ experiences are being accurately represented (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). Bracketing occurred while analyzing the transcripts and developing codes, as the researcher’s personal judgments and connections to the participants’ responses needed to be noted to ensure accuracy. Participants were directly quoted to ensure that their views and experiences were accurately represented and to minimize potential researcher bias (Stiles, 1993). In addition to the evidence of the reflexive journal and reflexivity, evidence of bracketing will be noted in the upcoming Summary of Findings and Presentation of Data and Results sections.

When developing the participant frameworks and profiles, rich and thick description was used to fully describe the interview settings and noteworthy details about the interviews that were not apparent through transcription. Details unable to be captured through transcription included the participants’ attitudes and demeanors during the interviews, the interview settings, and the researcher’s perceptions of the interviews. Furthermore, rich and thick description was utilized to uncover connections between the first and second interviews and across all the interviews as a whole, supporting the emergence of themes.
As a fourth validation strategy, discovering negative case analysis was employed to disclose outliers in the coding and items that did not directly connect with the emerging themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the Presentation of Data and Results section of this chapter, the outliers will be briefly discussed and interpreted. Outliers are defined, for the purposes of this research, as codes that occurred less than two times across all the interviews, and were organized into a table for further interpretation (see Appendix G).

As a final form of validation, seeking participant feedback in the form of a member check ensured that the results and findings of this research were accurate from the participants’ perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each participant was emailed, after the data was interpreted, to schedule a third interview that would serve as the member check, where participants were asked to review the findings (only of their personal contributions to the study, for confidentiality purposes) and ask any questions or provide feedback on the interpretations. Participants were asked to carefully review their profiles and the interpretations of their contributions for any inaccuracies or corrections that needed to be made. Only minor adjustments were made, including simple wording and phrasing of the contributions, and the participants were overall satisfied with the interpretations of their contributions.

**Summary of Findings**

The comprehensive process of data analysis revealed themes and repeating concepts through the participants’ experiences as they were coded and reviewed. Throughout this process, recurring codes unfolded and developed into clusters of meaning that epitomized the essence of the participants’ collective experiences with academic commitment. Within the context of this research, each participant shared their personal views of academic commitment, the ways they
facilitated academic commitment in their classrooms, and how their views and facilitations of academic commitment evolved.

The commonalities within the participants’ experiences represent the clusters of meaning and themes generated from the analysis of the interviews. The clusters of meaning were derived from recurring codes and directly related to the previously identified attributes associated with academic commitment and the two research questions grounding this investigation. This section will give an overview of the specific findings of the analysis techniques outlined in the previous section while further elaborating on how the identified attributes were represented in participants’ experiences and how the participants’ experiences elucidated the foundational research questions.

**Recurring codes and patterns.** As the comprehensive data analysis process materialized, recurring codes and patterns between interviews and across all the interviews emerged. Using the ATLAS.ti software, common codes and patterns were revealed through frequency tables. These frequency tables supported the holistic understanding of each individual participant’s experience as well as the overall essence of the participant’s experiences. The recurring codes, which will be discussed in this section, supported an understanding of the attributes and clusters of meaning that transpired throughout the data analysis. This section will briefly disclose recurring codes and patterns within the interpreted data, and later sections will further explore the recurring codes and patterns as they pertain to individual participants and to collective experience of the participants.

In interpreting the collected data, the most frequently occurring codes connected most directly with how the teachers viewed academic commitment as a disposition and the facilitation techniques that the teachers used. These recurring codes revealed patterns within the collected
data that in turn illuminated clusters of meaning and themes, which will be discussed in a later section. The most frequently occurring codes referenced and shared were codes that had a frequency of more than 6 occurrences across all 12 interviews. The most frequently recurring codes within the data (see Appendix G), are categorized across clusters of meaning.

Overall, the most frequently occurring codes revealed traits such as dedication, persistence, and self-awareness. Recurring codes categorized under the teaching strategies, tools, and modes of facilitation cluster of meaning, included goal-setting procedures and processes, reflection, differentiation and personalization of learning, and providing students with choices and productive struggle in their learning. Other recurring codes for strategies and modes of facilitation associated with relationships and community consisted of teachers being models of strong academic commitment (role models) and building positive relationships with students and in a classroom community, teachers honoring progress and quality work (recognition), and teachers giving students honest feedback while having transparent expectations. Recurring codes associated with the development of academic commitment were noted as the development of personal relationships, significant or transforming experiences, and the idea that having a purpose is motivating.

Recurring codes expressed commonalities across all 12 interpreted interviews while supporting the development of the clusters of meaning and gaining further insight into how teachers personally facilitate academic commitment based on their experiences. In the following sections, direct quotes will elaborate on the significance of the recurring codes to detail connections between the participants’ personal academic commitment journeys regarding their beliefs and facilitations of academic commitment.
**Interpreted attributes for academic commitment.** As previously discussed in Chapter 3, five particular attributes framed the interpretation of the collected data and provided the lens for analyzing the data. The five particular attributes were outlined as attitudes, or beliefs towards academic commitment; traits—ways of exhibiting strong academic commitment; vernacular/repetition of phrases, meaning terms and phrases that are used to facilitate academic commitment; communication, or the way participants share their beliefs with their students; and training/experiences—particular experiences that supported beliefs and the facilitation of academic commitment.

In conducting, transcribing, and analyzing each of the interviews, the sentiment and feeling towards academic commitment was overwhelmingly positive. The attitudes that participants generally expressed towards academic commitment were that this disposition was essential in the success of students and teachers alike, and there was a confidence in facilitating this disposition in students. All the participants reported in various ways that academic commitment was necessary for success both now and in the future. Table 3 shares direct quotes expressing the participants’ individual attitudes towards the disposition of academic commitment.
Table 3

*Attitudes Towards Academic Commitment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>“I think commitment to self, especially as an educator, is crucial because the way you . . . I think the kids can definitely pick up on it and I’ve noticed it over the years. So I think that showing them that you are committed to developing in your profession, trying new things, admitting when you’re wrong or when something doesn't work when you tried, I think it just shows the kids that you’re human, that you do make mistakes, but that you're committed to trying and committed to getting better.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>“I’m a big believer in academic commitment, I believe it drives success and I think success looks different for everyone and I think being committed also looks different for everyone too, but I think the ultimate reason why being committed is important is the process of setting your goals and deciding how you're going to get there. Just really persistent. I always talk to kids about persistence.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>“You have to have commitment to self, it’s absolutely essential . . . You have to have it. And it could drive you crazy and other people around you crazy, but it’s the only way to get better. It's the only way to explore. It’s the only way to learn and grow.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>“Kids have to be committed to themselves.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>“It’s [academic commitment] necessary, there must be some level of commitment, no matter how smart you are, to be successful, that transfers to life as an adult. You know . . . just how like if you’re younger and in school and you’re not committing to something it makes it much harder later on in life to make that connection and commit to something. Even if you’re not so passionate about school I think it sets the groundwork for things later on in life because you will be forced to do things you don’t want to but you have to.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billie-Jean</td>
<td>“And it wasn’t until I was an adult that I took charge of my own learning, so I do try to instill that in kids, not so much what are we doing, but why are we learning this and how can we apply this.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These quotes collectively express the positive attitudes that the participants expressed towards the disposition of academic commitment. Within the attitudes towards academic commitment, commonalities between participants’ accounts were that academic commitment is necessary, that it drives success, that it prepares students for future success, and that teachers must be role models in order to support students in developing commitment.
In understanding participants’ attitudes towards academic commitment, understanding which traits the participants viewed as necessary for development of strong academic commitment was also central to gaining insight into the essence of academic commitment. Traits identified by the participants varied, but were interconnected. Participants highlighted traits such as optimism, grit, motivation, open-mindedness, openness to criticism, persistence, passion, and curiosity. These traits are directly aligned with traits outlined throughout the literature review in Chapter 2 as traits for 21st century success. Cohesively, the participants’ valued traits were centered on a motivation, desire, and passion to keep moving forward and trying various approaches. Recurring codes in the transcriptions for the traits attribute revealed that the participants most frequently discussed the codes of dedication/focus, persistence, motivation, and optimism through struggle in relation to traits of academic commitment. These most frequently recurring codes are evident in the quotes organized in Table 4.
Table 4

Traits for Strong Academic Commitment: Participant Perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>“Cooperation, teamwork, commitment . . . They are leaders, role models, willing to help whenever they can and just overall positive and happy, pushing themselves and pushing others but not in a negative way, and being able to take criticism. I think that is a big thing and you could see who can handle it and who can't. The kids notice and recognize that also as they get older.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>“You know, I actually grapple with this a lot, but I think about this probably more than you would ever imagine, which is very weird that you're asking me because I watched this maybe a TED talk or something on grit, I want to believe that every kid has every bit of potential as everybody else and I . . . I just believe that grit is a thing and I believe that watching some kids who just have this deeply motivated self and I just wonder where that comes from and I see it in adults . . . I don't know . . . I think it has a lot to do with your open-mindedness to wanting to learn . . . when kids and adults have to feel the bigger meaning behind it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>“So academic commitment is the goals you set, and how you then proceed to follow through, and are you able to follow through, and how you react if you can't, or what is your bar set to.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>“They really try everything. They listen, they try, they turn and talk, they're talking about what you're talking about, it's just that they pay attention; it's a whole different ballgame when kids are just focused on you for at least a little bit of the day . . . they are willing to try what you did.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>“Passion for anything, not just for school, a passion for an instrument, like anything done passionately they are invested in and I think helps their commitment to school. Thinking about kids who are passionate about things outside of school, they have that understanding inside of them that they could transfer to something else. That would be my big word, passion. They are kids who are persistent, kids who are truthfully, positive, kids who can get knocked down again, and again, and keep positive, it makes all the difference.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billie-Jean</td>
<td>“I think it's heart. They have heart as well and curiosity. I think it's both. They have to be driven, they have to have some kind of passion inside . . . that desire to make something out of nothing, but they've got to have that yearning.”</td>
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</table>

As understanding participants’ attitudes towards academic commitment and the traits of strong academic commitment were aims of this study, identifying and tracking particular phrases and vernacular that the participants used to facilitate academic commitment in students was also a critical component of this study. The repetition of particular phrases and vernacular became apparent in transcribing and reviewing the interviews multiple times throughout the data analysis.
process. In the participants’ general views, how educators speak to students was one of the most crucial ways of supporting and facilitating academic commitment.

Table 5

Repetition of Particular Phrases and Vernacular in Regard to Academic Commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>“We do a ton of goal-setting, we do a ton of collaboration, and communication, teamwork . . . And we just want them to feel good about themselves and feel positive and we explain exactly what we're doing exactly what we're looking for, the goal of every lesson. Then when they leave, we explain whether they got there or not. We hold them to high standards and I think we push them but not to the point that it's too far. I think they all have a positive experience when they leave here so that's pretty much our biggest concern.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>“I think that it’s important for me to get kids motivated, to have kids set goals that are good for them, and they're figuring out how to get achieve that. And I know and I do think that's in my constant language and any sort of fixed mindset language that I hear, and I will be like, let’s change our phrases to growth mindset. I always connect it back to a growth mindset. I feel like I go against the grain, but so I’ve taught so many kids that I hope that I’ve moved and changed their mindset in some way.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>“Well I want them to be into the [subject area] and love the [subject area] and I want them to be committed . . . I ask them, ‘do you want to be here? Do you want to learn?’ Sometimes I forget that they are 8–10 and treat them like they’re 18–20. I hold them to high standards.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>“We've been doing a lot of growth mindset work the last few weeks. So taking those negative comments like ‘I can't do it’ or even the ones who are like ‘I'm done! I'm finished!’ and we just did a whole big lesson on changing those into growth mindset statements like ‘oh, I can look at it again,’ or ‘I can't do it yet.” All those things. We've been talking a lot about growth mindset versus fixed mindset.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>“Routine and repetition, over and over again, getting the kids into a routine, getting the kids to really understand things that support them, the resources they can use, it's not so much what I can or can’t do it's the resources I have to commit to a task or commit to this opportunity. Getting them to really use to these routines and resources that are there for them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billie-Jean</td>
<td>“Definitely personal sharing and personal connections, celebrating them where they are, celebrating what they bring to the party, so to speak, like their personal uniqueness and then also pushing them a little bit, questioning them, yes, helping them wonder more or digging more deeply, but overall connecting with them.”</td>
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As evident in the quoted phrases above, the repetition of phrases and vernacular consistently emphasized a positive tone and optimistic outlook to support students in developing
academic commitment through language. In closely analyzing the quotes and other vernacular used, commonalities amongst all the interviews included developing personal relationships and connections with students, responsibility in motivating students, supporting students in positive self-talk and reframing language, holding students to high standards and expectations, and having transparent and well-defined expectations of the students.

The repetition of phrases and vernacular attribute builds on how teachers communicate their expectations and beliefs regarding academic commitment. The most frequently recurring codes connected to the communication attribute were positive relationships with students, mindset and growth, and teachers as models of commitment. As apparent in the quotes in Table 6, the participants overall used communication as a means to express the importance of certain traits, share the importance of positive talk and thoughts (growth mindset), positively reinforce outlined behaviors, develop positive relationships, and model, as a form of communication, the outlined and highlighted behaviors for students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>“Yeah, we focus on the SVOs [Shared Value Outcomes-academic commitment] a lot with just encouraging them to reflect on that and we pick one to focus on per class. We also have a [recognition and rewards system] which they earn a certificate that they seem to love and take home. It just shows they’re committed to themselves, and committed to others, and committed to learning and doing their best work.”</td>
</tr>
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</table>
| Rachel      | “I want them to think a lot about the process. I think a lot of times it's easy to just set goals, even for me as an adult, but thinking more and reflecting more about how to get there is what matters to me most when it comes to academic commitment.”  
“I want kids to be able to construct a lot of this meaning themselves, so that's what I think . . . I think of it as growth with kids so going from here to here . . . I think kids are innately, not always, but I feel like kids are generally worried about “I can do this or I can't do this” but I think of it as where you are and where you're going and how you're going to get there.” |
| Jane        | “There's a lot of verbal support . . . I am constantly writing the parents about . . . about their commitment or if they are struggling. I suggest a high school student help them or they come in and see me for extra help . . . I try to get the parents on board, and a lot of times, I bring the parents and the child in because if I don't have the parents on board, I often lose them. I build that connection so the parents are now accountable for this too, so we're accountable together and that collaboration is really nice.” |
| Sarah       | “Just modeling and re-modeling. Each having their own recording sheet so they each know which strategies they should be working on every time they're reading; everything is color-coded to organize them . . . and it's definitely difficult, there so many things they have to keep track of, like their book baggie, their strategy-to-habit sheet. A lot of reminding.” |
| Hannah      | “Highlighting to traits to the kids, calling them out, I am aware of all the time and effort you put into things and telling them about all the time and effort you put into things and how sometimes they totally flop. Sometimes I say, ‘I put so much time and effort into planning this and I don’t know how it’s going to go.’ You know, I think when they hear people say that, especially people who are supposed to be in charge of them, they are more willing to develop those characteristics within themselves, they want to imitate us.” |
| Billie-Jean | “I just had the ‘fair and equal’ conversation with them yesterday because kids want everything to be the same, but that’s always in the forefront of my mind with kids, but I always try to connect with them on a personal level way before academic because if that’s not there, there is no sense.”  
“I use an analogy with my kids, every time you do something you plant a seed and that makes your garden, you can plant a seed and your garden can be gorgeous or it could be a real cactus and drive people away interpersonally and that impacts anything you make or produce.” |
The concept of communicating expectations of academic commitment with parents was discussed, singularly, in Jane’s interview, as she noted that the collaboration between teacher and parents supported students in becoming more committed academically. However, this communication with parents, about academic commitment, is related to the recurring idea that adults, teachers, or parents, should be models of academic commitment for children. Understanding how personal experiences and training have supported the participants in developing their own views of academic commitment as well as influenced the way they facilitate academic commitment is fundamental in understanding the essence of this disposition. Although the quotes in Table 7 resemble varying perspectives and life experiences, commonalities amongst the participants’ experiences include adults as models of commitment, interest, and passion in chosen activities, and that transformative experiences support or test personal or academic commitment. In interpreting and analyzing the quoted items, it is evident that the participants are passionate about academic commitment and could reference specific events, experiences, or individuals who truly defined their current commitment and even how these events influence how they facilitate academic commitment as educators. Table 7 reveals quotes from the participant interviews in connection with training and experiences involving academic commitment.
Table 7

*Training and Experiences involving Academic Commitment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>“I think it started when I was younger. My parents always encouraged me to try everything and that I don’t have to stick with one thing . . . They also instilled the importance of education at a very young age and being one of [number] kids they always told us that we had to get an education. That it [education] is something that couldn’t be taken away from us. They always encouraged me to find my happiness and I think that’s what I really focused on, was trying to find and figure out what I want to do that I can go to work every day make everything like . . . so positive and being able to see that reflect on my students was really important for me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>“I wanted to be a nurse and that didn’t pan out so my mom had suggested that I try teaching because I have all these teaching qualities in my heart and I decided to go into education. I think my brain is wired to know what to do to help people and help move the world in the direction it needs to be and it’s scary for me because I can be such an idealist . . . I just believe something and I just can’t stop doing things until I’m there and that’s hard because my goals are always moving and getting bigger and bigger. I am grateful for being there and I am never satisfied.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>“I practiced . . . I just practiced all the time so I had that . . . I already have that make-up, whether I knew it at the time that I would have that perseverance and I would have that obsessiveness to practice and that strive for excellence I didn’t know . . . you don’t think about that when you’re a teenager. And in some ways me going to [subject] school was perfect because you have to practice all the time and in the middle of college I picked up [sport] which I’d always played sporty stuff but I didn’t know that game and so very soon after college I went and went to the city at six in the morning with all the commuters and went to the [location], played [sport] like crazy and took a trainer, took a coach, practiced for hours and hours and hours because I had all that [previous subject] practicing and came home and tutored from 3 to10 pm. And I loved it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>“I fought to get into college . . . I think I’ve always been committed to self; I was always in the library. I was always the student in the library at 3 to 5 pm, you could find me, I was always committed to being in school and doing really well. My mom always made sure we had a schedule and we did our homework. She always prepared us for the next step; you were always physically ready to go. I did a lot of [professional development for teaching] work during college, I would go in and visit, I love their philosophies, and they tried things out and it was rare to hear that things didn’t work, and followed people who believed in their craft and were truthful about the approach. My mom was also a teacher.”</td>
</tr>
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Table 7 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>“Being waitlisted to go to college totally made me realize that I was committed to [sport] but with school I was like ‘it would get done,’ and it was a huge eye-opener, that there were other people doing way more, better, more meaningful things. It was a huge eye-opener, and it was like when I get there, I need to do bigger and better things, definitely motivating.” “My parents were always telling me that I needed to do my best, 110% effort, if you started something you had to see it through and when you were there you had to give 110%. I think that didn’t totally transfer school, but it took time to help me realize that it mattered . . . I was definitely social. My parents were always like you’re in it, you have to figure it out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billie-Jean</td>
<td>“I also think that having a mother go to college right before my eyes as a conscious 10, 12, 15 year old and work so hard to better her life inspired me to then just always push.” “Just thinking about teaching and being committed to yourself and your learning, my fourth grade teacher, Ms. [name of teacher] and she was the first one that made me care, at all, about what I was doing and she really did it through fun, she connected learning to songs on the radio, she gave extra credit, she was very musical. She made learning and doing what you had to do to get better just a natural part of life and she always stuck out in terms of doing what you had to do and just staying on your path. Contrarily, I had a third grade teacher, Ms. [name of teacher] who was a sterile teacher and no one cared about anything in her room and we did the minimum and I think that’s where I learned the opposite, learning from your negative experiences. So those two teachers were very memorable and I carry them with me each day I come to work.”</td>
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**Cluster of meaning.** In understanding and analyzing the recurring codes from the transcripts, the attributes previously discussed serve as a lens for developing clusters of meaning, which emerged throughout the analysis process. In coding and analyzing the transcripts, five major clusters of meaning transpired and will frame the way that the findings are discussed in this section. The clusters of meaning correspond with the two overarching research questions and were organized in accordance with the crafted interview questions. As the five clusters of meaning ensued, the two research questions were at the forefront of the analysis lens. The five clusters of meaning and categories encompassing all of the themes are as follows: traits and definitions for strong academic commitment, strategies/tools/modes for facilitating academic
commitment, development of traits for academic commitment, impacts of strong academic commitment, and further considerations for supporting students in developing academic commitment (teacher-focused). As briefly discussed in the previous section, recurring codes were used to develop the connecting themes. These clusters of meaning and connecting themes were organized into webs supporting the synthesis of the emerging themes. The sections below will detail the clusters of meaning and the emerging themes that originated from the clusters of meaning.

Traits for and definitions of academic commitment. Throughout the interview process and analysis, traits for strong academic commitment and the way the participants’ defined academic commitment emerged as a cluster of meaning in consonance with the first research question designed to illuminate teachers’ definitions of academic commitment. Within this cluster of meaning, themes began to emerge across all interviews with recurring traits and defining terms concerning academic commitment. Initially, traits and defining terms of academic commitment were found in codes such as dedication and focus, persistence, self-awareness, and open-mindedness.

The theme of dedication and focus as a trait for strong academic commitment occurred most frequently when analyzing this cluster of meaning. Each of the participants referenced dedication and focus in various ways, however the sentiment behind the dedication and focus became apparent in the number of times it occurred throughout the interviews. The participants used various terms and phrases to capture the essence of dedication and focus. For instance, Billie-Jean shared that individuals who are academically committed, “go that extra mile.” Hannah discussed the idea that academic commitment is a process in that “without seeing your end goal you can still invest yourself in something and not be deterred easily from finishing out a
task or understanding a new topic.” Similarly, Rachel shared that academically committed individuals are “motivated and truly wanting to learn.”

While the participants believed that determination and commitment were traits necessary for the students to possess to have strong academic commitment, they also shared that teachers needed to possess dedication and focus when facilitating and modeling academic commitment. When planning lessons and activities for her class, Rachel explained, “I am constantly thinking about how I am going to motivate them [the students] and how I need to make this meaningful for them, so they have a focus.”

Each of the traits and defining terms had various other related codes, as the interviews were analyzed, concurrently, through the data analysis spiral and Colaizzi’s method. Two specific codes related to dedication and focus were passion and the desire to improve. In viewing dedication and focus as a theme, the ideas of passion and the desire to improve were related in analyzing participants’ descriptions of academic commitment and the ways that academically committed people behave.

The second theme of persistence was the next most frequently occurring code when interpreting the interview transcripts. The theme of persistence became apparent in reviewing and analyzing the interviews throughout the data analysis process. Particular phrases were shared that truly revealed and connected with the theme of persistence as a trait and defining term for academic commitment. In the first interview with Sarah, she mentioned that students who possess strong academic commitment “really try everything.” Additionally, Jamie shared that academic commitment involves “learning to push yourself and to strive to reach your goals.” Elaborating even further, Rachel expressed that students who possess academic commitment are “not afraid to have something be hard for them, in their struggle, because they know that their
persistence gets them where they need to be,” explicitly using the word “persistence.” Similar to Rachel, Hannah noted that to her, academic commitment looked like, “perseverance, kids who are willing to persevere, kids who are ready to see things through to the end, no matter what challenges come their way.” In developing connections between the clusters of meaning and emerging themes, the codes linked to the theme persistence materialized as in codes like grit, growth mindset, and optimism through struggle. These three codes were related to participants’ responses and comments in regards to persistence when analyzing traits and defining terms of academic commitment and the behaviors exhibited by academically committed individuals.

The third theme that emerged from the cluster of meaning was coded as self-awareness. The theme of self-awareness was coded as the third most frequently mentioned in the traits and defining terms cluster of meaning. Self-awareness, as noted by Jamie in her first interview, is when a student will “figure out what they want to do and what makes them happy and where they can succeed.”

Another code derived through the analysis of the interviews that is related to self-awareness is the concept of independence. According to Rachel, when describing the process of setting goals, she noted that a large part of the goal-setting process involves independence. She elaborates, “using everything that's best for them . . . there’s a lot of paper choices, revision tools, and things I think they might need to be successful and independent and when they have all the materials, they can choose what’s best for them.” Rachel further discussed that “getting there and deciding for yourself, evaluate it, whether you're there or not, understanding your progress, and knowing where you are going” is part of the goal-setting process and developing self-awareness. Similarly, Hannah noted that part of self-awareness was “getting kids to understand things that support them, the resources they can use . . . not so much what I can or can’t do, it's
the resources they have to commit to a task. Getting them to really use these resources builds independence.”

The fourth theme that emerged from interpreting the codes associated with the traits and defining terms of academic commitment cluster of meaning was open-mindedness. Open-mindedness was the fourth most frequently occurring code across the transcribed and interpreted interviews. Sarah said of students who possessed strong academic commitment, “they're willing to try, they do what you’ve taught, and they are trying it when you are not with them.”

Connected to open-mindedness, was the code of making personal connections with learning. This code materialized in Billie-Jean’s first interview, where she explained that the possession of academic commitment is “an independent willingness, it's that desire to seek meaning and make the connections to figure things out . . . where they go that extra mile and apply it or connect it to other things they are learning.”

**Strategies, tools, and modes for facilitating academic commitment.** Each of the outlined and recurring traits above corresponded to the strategies, tools, and modes participants that outlined when facilitating academic commitment in their students. This cluster of meaning transpired from interview questions involving teaching practices and strategies and protocols promoting academic commitment and aligned with the second research question intended to further understand how views and perspectives on academic commitment shape teacher facilitation. Six themes originated from this cluster of meaning throughout the implementation of the data analysis spiral and Colaizzi’s method. The themes that emerged were summarized as the following: goal-setting processes and procedures, teachers as models of commitment, differentiation, reflection, collaboration, and communication.
The most frequently recurring code in the strategies, tools, and modes for facilitating academic commitment cluster of meaning was coded under goal-setting processes and procedures. This code was identified as a theme as each participant regarded the process and procedure of student goal-setting and personal goal-setting as valuable in facilitating academic commitment. Rachel shared how valuable goal-setting was in supporting students in developing academic commitment by stating that she thinks “the most success in supporting students in their commitment comes from goal-setting . . . I feel like it [goal-setting] should come naturally to kids to think of where they want to go and how they want to get better.”

In addition to valuing the practice of goal-setting, participants discussed particular practices involved in the facilitation of academic commitment. For example, Jane discussed a calendar approach to support commitment to practicing academic skills with weekly and monthly feedback from the teacher as students progress, which furthers their academic commitment to various skills. Similarly, Sarah shared that her class uses, “strategy-to-habit sheets in reading, and writing . . . they're [students] looking through their reading work or writing to practice certain strategies so that they can become habits . . . And these strategies and habits become goals for reading and writing.” To summarize the consensus of how the participants used goal-setting across the interviews, Jamie discussed that she believes in:

Setting those individual goals and realizing that everybody is at a different level whether it's academically, physically, emotionally, socially, and I think just supporting the student is the biggest thing. Helping them reach that next level, across all boards. I think that's just part of us (teachers) being committed to their education and committed to their learning and developing.
The next recurring code emerging as a theme was summarized as “teachers as models of commitment.” The code of teachers as models of commitment, transpired from participant emphasis on teacher behavior and personal expectations as the forefront of facilitation of academic commitment. For instance, Hannah shared how she models academic commitment through honesty and transparency by:

Telling them [the students] about all the time and effort you [the teacher] put into things and how sometimes they totally flop. Sometimes I say, “I put so much time and effort into planning this and I don’t know how it’s going to go.” You know, I think when they [the students] hear people say that, especially people who are supposed to be in charge of them, they are more willing to develop those characteristics within themselves. They want to imitate us.

In agreement with Hannah, Jamie similarly shared that she believes:

Exhibiting academic commitment, especially as an educator, is crucial because I think the kids can definitely pick up on it . . . I think that showing them that you are committed to developing in your profession, trying new things, admitting that you're wrong, or when something that doesn't work when you tried, I think it just shows the kids that you’re human and make mistakes but that you're committed to trying and committed to getting better.

Other participants discussed how particular individuals had served as their own models for commitment and still resonated with the participants as they plan and facilitate academic commitment. Billie-Jean noted:

Ms. [name of teacher] was my 4th grade teacher and she was the first one that made me care, at all, about what I was doing and she really did it through fun . . . She made
learning and doing what you had to do to get better just a natural part of life. So she was very memorable and I carry her with me each day I come to work.

To fully access the essence of teachers as *models of commitment*, Hannah summarized her second interview by sharing that she believes:

> We have to model this [academic commitment] for them [students]. [Teachers] would never just abandon a lesson because it’s not going well. [Teachers] say to them “I don’t think this is going well as I thought it would.” It’s like problem solving; [teachers] would just try something new. I think that this is an example of who [teachers] are.

The third most frequently recurring code, which also emerged as a theme, was differentiation. This code was noted at least once across all participant interviews. Throughout the analysis phase, participants noted the different strengths with which students enter classrooms. The teachers used differentiation, in various forms, to facilitate academic commitment. Specifically, in regard to describing what academic commitment looks like in her classroom, Sarah shared that:

> It looks a lot like small groups, it looks a lot like trying to find who's struggling and who's not struggling . . . it’s differentiation and I have been trying to do differentiation with journals, always trying to plan different journaling activities, to support the different levels of learning.

Jane also discussed the process of facilitating academic commitment through differentiation by sharing:

> I really try to see how to move them. Sometimes it’s a whole group lesson, if they are at the same level and interest. If not, I have to balance them a little more, the idea of
struggle verses struggling, or I have to give two different lessons because of the different levels.

Two additional codes associated with the theme of differentiation, were individualized learning and choice. In regard to individualized learning, and the facilitation of academic commitment, Jamie noted that, “there is a level of academic commitment, especially here at this school, but I think that being able to individualize and make sure that everybody has their own personal understanding of their academic commitment is important.” In addition, Billie-Jean shared that she believes academic commitment is seen the most, “when [the students] have a choice in what they are doing and with whom they are working.”

The theme of reflection processes emerged from codes such as trying different ways, using feedback to improve, partner reflection, and protocols for reflection. Rachel described this process as “I think just being reflective is a big part of [facilitating academic commitment] and making sure that you are constantly . . . you know . . . changing how you're trying to get there [reaching your goals].” Aside from goal-setting, Jamie shared how reflection supports changes in behavior as well. In her first interview she noted, “I have them do a reflection sheet on themselves and what they need to improve on.”

Billie-Jean shared how reflection is used in a different way, as a culminating process to honor growth and success. She explained, “We came up with an ‘effort list’ as a class, just so that they're reminded of what good work is. Then having them reflect on if they’re proud of what they've done. They are excited to share at things like that.” Similar to Billie-Jean’s effort list, Rachel discussed how her class develops “I am Committed” checklists. She shared:

We take mentor texts for units and dive through the units to see what makes them special. We study and reflect on it and ask ourselves what we should be able to do throughout the
unit. Then we get together and talk about what our checklist for this unit would look like, and it’s actually called the “I am Committed” checklist. I type the checklist for them but it’s all of their ideas, co-constructed by the students. This helps them reflect on what their goals are and how they're going to get there.

The last two emerging themes of collaboration, and communication were developed in association with one another during the coding process. Collaboration, as a theme, transpired from codes related to positive relationships, peer feedback, and an inclusive classroom community. The theme of communication, materialized from codes such as teacher feedback, honesty/transparency, reminding and routines, and teacher kindness and empathy. In coding the transcripts, the participants referenced collaboration and communication in conjunction as modes of facilitating academic commitment.

As a theme, collaboration was mentioned throughout the interview transcripts as part of the efforts of the participants to develop positive relationships with their students and create a positive learning community in order to facilitate academic commitment. Jamie discussed how the development of positive relationships and collaboration occurred in her room by sharing that, “we talk a lot about complimenting one another. We try and give a complement and that goes a long way . . . it's so interesting to see who will complement one another . . . it's a nice positive thing to see build.” Additionally, Hannah shared the process of sending positive notes to support in developing positive relationships, “I sent home a few cards that said things . . . [they] were positive notes, little moments of recognition, and that long term, connected feedback.” Billie-Jean also discussed how she continues to “just praise [commitment] and celebrate it so that it's . . . more infectious.” Billie-Jean noted how providing positive recognition is contagious to other students and builds a positive classroom community. To summarize the sentiments across the
First and foremost, I value autonomy in a classroom. I feel like that's what's meaningful to kids. I feel like when they feel like they're a big part of a community and they have a lot of roles. Like if they're not there or if they don't do their job, the community will be falling apart. It's a lot of work at the beginning to front load that kind of community, but it always feels worth it this time of year when you sit back and see the problems getting solved. And you see kids stepping up when they need to, when normally they wouldn't have. That's what helps, where they feel like they have a purpose and feel like they need to reach their goals. They feel like they need to be committed. Whenever I felt like I was valued in a community that I was important, that's when I worked my hardest and I think of it that way for them too.

In the revealing quotes shared above, the theme of communication was threaded throughout. To establish a positive community that supports the facilitation of academic commitment, participants expressed the need for communicating expectations, in providing feedback, and in being honest and transparent with their students. As both Hannah and Billie-Jean expressed in their quotes above, they employed particular communication tools, such as verbal praise and recognition, and positive feedback in letters. Additionally, Jane shared how she engages parents and students:

I send out memos to remind them to bring their work home. I mean there's so much up front work. I write the parents every morning. I mean often before 7 a.m., that their kid has [activity] the next day to remind them. I'm very detailed and I'm... you know...
. I get very insistent on me making sure I don't leave it up to the parent to remember that every Wednesday is [activity].

Similarly, Sarah discussed how she provided “a lot of reminding” to her students when it came to setting goals and keeping track of their goals, particularly during reading.

Encompassing the participants’ essence of communication as a tool for facilitating academic commitment Hannah expressed:

But constant communication with [students], and relationships . . . I’m not just here to be your teacher, I’m here to support you as you are learning. Not just to show you how to do something. So I think that putting the time in effort, throughout the year to build the relationships, academically and just within a classroom, community is going to make or break their commitment.

**Development of traits for academic commitment.** The strategies, tools, and modes for facilitating academic commitment highlighted by the participants of this study were utilized and developed deliberately to support the disposition of academic commitment. The reasons that participants provided for selecting particular strategies, tools, and modes of facilitation accrued in the development of traits for academic commitment cluster of meaning. The development of traits for academic commitment cluster of meaning formed as codes revealed the why behind the strategies, tools, and modes for facilitating academic commitment cluster of meaning.

Participants expressed why they employed certain strategies, tools, and modes for facilitating academic commitment in answering interview questions involving their personal experiences with academic commitment, as well as questions about traits they personally possessed that have supported their own academic commitment.
In examining the development of traits for academic commitment cluster of meaning, the two themes that will be explored in this section are that experience influences beliefs and motivation drives purpose. Particular strategies, tools, and modes for facilitating academic commitment, also referenced in the development of traits for academic commitment, include the codes of process of reflection and building a positive learning community. These will not be referenced they were explicitly discussed in the previous section.

The second interviews focused on the participants’ personal experiences with academic commitment throughout their lives. Each participant discussed how their experiences have influenced their beliefs regarding academic commitment. Each of these exchanges revealed and formed the theme of experiences impacting beliefs. As an example, Billie-Jean disclosed:

Commitment to self, when I was in school, I don’t think I was conscious of at all. I was a Catholic school student and I did what was expected of me because I was afraid, but you just did what you had to do. And I will never forget when I went to college for graduate work, and the teacher walked in and put his feet up on the table and said to us, “What do you want to learn?” and I looked around like “What? What am I supposed to learn?” And it wasn’t until I was an adult that I took charge of my own learning so, I do try to instill that in my students, not so much what are we doing, but why are we learning this and how can we apply this.

Sarah shared that because her mother was a teacher, she had the opportunity to engage in “[highly-regarded reading program professional development] work during college, I would go in and visit, I loved their philosophies and it was rare they shared things that didn’t work. [It was good to see] to see people who believed in their craft and were truthful about their approach.”

Furthermore, Hannah divulged that:
Being waitlisted to go to college totally made me realize that I was committed to [sport] but with school I was like, “it would get done,” and it was a huge eye-opener that there were other people doing way more, better more meaningful things. It was a huge eye-opener, and I was like, when I get there, I need to do bigger and better things . . . definitely motivating.

Hannah’s exchange segued to the second theme of the development of traits for academic commitment cluster of meaning, which was coded as motivation drives purpose. Rachel explained that because of difficult situations growing up, “I can be such an idealist. I believe something and I can’t stop doing things until I’m there . . . that’s hard because my goals are always moving and getting bigger. I am grateful for being there and I am never satisfied.” Similarly, Jamie shared that her parents always supported her in “finding her happiness.” In the exchange regarding past and present experiences with academic commitment, Jamie discussed “but once I figured it out . . . what I wanted to do, what avenue I wanted to take . . . I really bought into it and put my entire self into it to just get better and be the best person I could. I still think I try to do that every day.”

**Impacts of possessing strong academic commitment.** The development of traits for academic commitment cluster of meaning illuminates the reasoning behind why the participants valued particular traits and teaching strategies to facilitate academic commitment while the impacts of possessing strong academic commitment cluster of meaning features the importance of developing traits for academic commitment. This cluster of meaning evolved as participants answered interview questions about how they planned lessons for intended outcomes, specifically in facilitating academic commitment, in addition to questions about their personal
views on academic commitment. Three themes to be discussed for this cluster of meaning are confidence, personal accountability, and reframing mindsets.

The second interview inquired about participants’ personal experiences with the phenomenon of academic commitment and how that affected the manners in which they planned for their students. Each of the participants highly regarded “building confidence as either a result or an effect of developing academic commitment. Jamie simply shared that in planning lessons “I want to have each student thrive and excel and feel successful when they enter my classroom.” Rachel also discussed building confidence when talking about planning and facilitating academic commitment:

I do my best to make sure that things are consistent for [the students], and maybe I don't directly tell them that they're important, but it's implied by the way the community is run. The way that they can see the value of the work, see the value of themselves, and they can see how important they are, and I just think I don't have to say too much.

Rachel’s exchange illustrates how building confidence, as a theme, supports personal accountability, the second theme of the impacts of possessing strong academic commitment cluster of meaning. Jane brought up the idea that you have to be accountable in order to grow as an individual: “it’s absolutely essential . . . You have to have it. And it could drive you crazy and other people around you crazy but it’s the only way to get better . . . It’s the only way to learn and grow.” Epitomizing the essence of the personal accountability theme, Billie-Jean explained:

I use an analogy with my kids, every time you do something, every time you make a choice, you plant a seed and that makes your garden, you can plant a seed and your
garden can be gorgeous or it could be a real cactus and drive people away or affect anything you make or produce.

As personal accountability, is a result of possessing academic commitment, the theme of reframing mindsets is yet another impact of academic commitment. The theme of reframing mindsets, evolved from codes like an optimistic outlook, and reactions to struggles/challenges. Sarah divulged that she has noticed a change in her students through “taking those negative comments like ‘I can't do it’ or ‘I'm done . . . I'm finished’ and we’ve been working on changing those into statements like ‘Oh, I can look at it again’ or ‘I can't do it yet’.” Jane also expressed particular emphasis on “how you react if you can't,” in regard to becoming an academically committed person. The “can’t” was reference to an activity or situation that one struggles with.

**Further considerations for developing academic commitment.** Separate from the other clusters of meaning outlined previously, further considerations for teachers supporting students in developing academic commitment emanated from the final question in the second interview, which asked participants to discuss training they had participated in that supported their facilitation of academic commitment. In interpreting and analyzing this particular interview question, three themes arose. The three themes were collaboration amongst teachers, continued learning, and opportunities for further professional development and training.

Across all interviews, participants expressed the value and importance of teachers collaborating with others in various structures and through various opportunities. This was summarized as *collaboration amongst teachers*. When asked about the valuable training she had experienced, Hannah explained, “Defining trainings are collegial circles and meeting other teachers who had different perspectives on teaching . . . Seeing the way other teachers think and getting to know one another shows us what commitment looks like in our schools.” Billie-Jean
mentioned the idea that one individual could support your training in facilitating academic commitment, specifying, “my old principal, by being supportive, positive, fun loving, and always encouraging me to rise and to strive to be my best.”

Concerning general collaboration amongst teachers, Sarah shared “I think it's helpful to have other people to go to help you, because if you're trying to bring kids to the next level you can’t always do it by yourself.” Similarly, Jane divulged, “I talk to my colleagues and we talk a lot about different ways to reach the students and come up with different strategies to get them [the students] to grow.”

In addition to the theme of collaboration amongst teachers, continued learning also arose as a theme within this cluster of meaning. Continued learning, as expressed through the interview exchanges, described participants’ personal journeys of pursuing learning opportunities that were separate from school-district-provided opportunities to support their facilitation of academic commitment. Sarah explicitly discussed her own continued learning stating, “I read at least two teaching books a summer and type lessons using them and think about good strategies from them. I type the lessons up on the computer and my husband thinks I’m crazy.”

Furthermore, Jamie shared that:

[I] was part of [a committee] and we went on a visit to another school . . . it was so exhausting but rewarding. We evaluated their [particular program] and it was . . . I think, almost career changing to see what other schools do and how other people are presenting . . . I just feel like there's so many opportunities, so why stop when you can develop and continue getting better.

The last theme, derived from the further considerations for teachers supporting students in developing academic commitment cluster of meaning, is opportunities for professional
development, describing professional development opportunities that the school district offers for teachers. Throughout the interviews, a few names of individuals who have provided professional development for the school district in focus arose, such as Rose Levin, Jeanette Smith, and Jared Collins. Pseudonyms for the professional development presenters were used to maintain confidentiality. As Sarah shared:

I think that Rose Levin is awesome. She does Socratic Seminar and she was guiding them [students] into interesting thinking without actually telling them. She never confirms or denies and guides them along, it's always about questioning, and helping them prove and talk out their thoughts . . . big turning point in my teaching.

In a separate exchange, Sarah also said, “so I read a book by Jeanette Smith, I read her reading conferences book this summer and took a lot of notes, wrote up different kind of lessons to do with the kids that really helped transform the way I facilitate conferences.” Similarly, Billie-Jean explained, “in terms of professional development here, Jared Collins and Rose Levin set the bar high, but not in a presumptuous way. Jared Collins explored interacting with people and how to get the best from people in a motivating way.”

**Presentation of Data and Results**

As the previous section outlined the reiterative process of divulging themes and clusters of meaning across all interviews, this section will provide deeper insights into the essence of each participant’s views on academic commitment, as well as a more detailed discussion of the collective responses regarding the first and second research questions. This section was designed to best reveal the essence of the phenomenon of academic commitment through the collected data of this research. This section will be organized to first include the researcher’s personal experiences and beliefs on the disposition of academic commitment, including challenges faced
throughout this process. This will be followed by detailed descriptions of each participant profile. The section will end with a holistic discussion of how the research questions were answered.

**Researcher’s note on personal experiences.** To engage completely in the reflexivity and bracketing process, as the primary researcher, it is essential that I disclose my personal beliefs about and experiences with academic commitment (Moustakas, 1994). In addition to maintaining a reflexive journal, I personally answered the outlined interview questions to support me in the process of bracketing throughout the data analysis stages. My responses to the interview questions were recorded prior to conducting the interviews so that I could separate my personal experiences with the phenomenon from the participants’ experiences. This section will outline my personal beliefs about and experiences with academic commitment.

I, personally, view academic commitment as persistence towards academic challenges. This includes the process of goal-setting; the monitoring, acceptance, and implementation of feedback; self-reflection; and using failure to improve. To me, academic commitment looks like a person who struggles through difficulties with a positive outlook, constantly wanting to improve and asking others for support in doing so. These individuals use resources such as feedback and model work to grow and improve.

In my classroom, this looks like students working together using resources that I have provided them or resources they have created to help them through challenges. To do this work, students communicate their ideas with one another to build greater meaning through whole-class discussions, partner work, collaborative problem solving, and giving, receiving, and implementing feedback. I believe that no matter where a student is in the spectrum of learning about a given topic, they should have a toolkit of resources supporting them and ideas that they
could pull from to help them through challenges or the work that they have to complete. I think that students need preparation for the real world, and that involves equipping students with an understanding that they have the capability, with a can-do attitude, to solve problems and work through challenges without relying on an adult to always help them through. This is the idea of developing independence.

Specifically, this process entails a lot of practice and specific protocols. We have a set of values that we call our class expectations: persistence; using our brain and our resources; using failures, mistakes, and feedback to improve; and critical thinking. We discuss the necessity of each of these expectations regularly. When a student comes up to me, or a classmate, and says something along the lines of, “I don’t get it,” which I hope to reframe over time, we refer this student to the multitude of tools they have to help them. Resources like anchor charts, checklists, rubrics, student-generated reference charts, notes, math manipulatives, sample work, books, and many other tools to help students through the challenge of not getting it.

This shines through in the structure of collaborative work and individual time to struggle productively. Providing students with challenging work, at their level, forces them to use persistence, resources, and critical thinking about other things they have done that connect to this particular challenge. The collaborative piece comes in after kids struggle independently. This is where all the light bulbs go off, connections can be built, and learning from failures, mistakes, and feedback come into play. Kids will share the work they have done with one another, in all subjects, using our class-established “Talk Tips,” checklists, rubrics, and models or samples to help them give each other feedback. From there, students are able to reflect on the direction they need to move in and set goals for themselves as they move forward. This, in a sense, forces kids to buy into the process—a no opt-out mentality.
Inside of these practices, there are also imbedded choices and differentiation for learning and practicing. Students make decisions about what type of work they need moving forward, framed in terms of “skills/just starting,” “more practice/progressing,” and “challenging/pushing myself further.” This guides students in using specific checklists to help them and also in choosing what type of practice they need moving forward. Additionally, this helps in terms of self-awareness and self-reflection as students literally “check-in” with their work and make decisions for their future learning.

In thinking about students who possess strong academic commitment, I believe that they are children who are optimistic through struggles, children who do not give up, and children who persist through challenges. Additionally, they are students who are receptive to feedback and truly appreciate the feedback and the feedback process. They are students who understand themselves and make appropriate decisions for their learning. Finally, they are students who set goals for themselves and care about the outcomes of their work. To share these traits and ideas with students, I try to have the students teach and support one another by providing them with opportunities to discuss and share quality work while talking about the effort that it takes to achieve quality work. I have a “World Citizen of the Week” who is spotlighted for their persistence, their desire to improve, their optimism, and their use of resources. This is very motivating to the kids. Also, showing students how they have grown throughout the process increases buy-in with constant reflection and references to previous work.

**Researcher notes on challenges.** In fully engaging in reflexivity and bracketing, this section will divulge potential biases during the interviews and challenges I faced throughout the interview process. In the initial two interviews, I was quite nervous as I was becoming acquainted with the process of interviewing teachers in the school district. I, as well as the
participants, wanted to make a good impression. In my reflexive journal for first two interviews, instead of only adding clarifying questions or asking new questions, I acknowledged statements that I potentially agreed with by saying things like, “awesome” or “great thought,” and nodding my head a few times. These types of phrases only occurred in the first two interviews, as I noticed this in the transcription process and adjusted my technique.

My reflexive journal noted ideas and thoughts I had about the interviews as well. As an educator in the same school district as the participants, I found myself in agreement with many of the ideas that the teachers expressed, but instead of expressing this to the participants, I wrote in my reflexive journal. Throughout all the interviews, I personally connected most with Jamie, Rachel, and Hannah’s perspectives on the facilitation of academic commitment. Though I connected most strongly with these three participants, I ensured that I remained neutral in the interview process across all interviews, using the reflexive journal to support me in this. Additionally, the process of bracketing was engaged in as I continued to use direct quotes from the participants’ interviews. In the next section, information about the participants will be detailed in their participant profiles and I will further divulge my reflexive notes for bracketing purposes.

**Participant Profiles**

As interviews were conducted, transcribed, coded, and analyzed, participant profiles were developed to depict the essence of academic commitment as personally viewed and experienced by each individual participant. The framework developed for the participant profile (see Appendix H) organized participants’ responses and the interview experiences. The essence of each participant’s experiences will be disclosed, gaining further access to the heart of phenomenology: the participant’s experiences with the given phenomenon (Creswell & Poth,
Information gathered from the interviews distinguished the varying participant experiences with the phenomenon of academic commitment, also illuminating each participant’s passion for this process and the disposition of academic commitment. This section will portray the essence of the interviews conducted with each participant, chronologically, through the lens of the two research questions, while exposing engagement in reflexivity and bracketing and discussing recurring codes and ensued themes.

To bracket the researcher’s personal beliefs and experiences out of this discussion, direct quotations were employed from the participants, along with statements made in response. Furthermore, the process of data triangulation will become apparent as the criterion selection of these participants, the ATLAS.ti code co-occurrence data, and the discourse of participants’ personal experiences is revealed. The discussion of the participant profiles, organized, sequentially by participant, are structured by discussing the essence of the interview experiences, sharing and elaborating on 15 of the most frequently recurring codes across each of the participant interviews, and sharing major and subcodes. The participant profiles also reveal meaningful quotes as they pertained to both research questions.

Profile of Jamie. On a cold November afternoon, the first interview with Jamie was conducted, which was the very first interview of this study. The weather was quite poor, and Jamie was asked if she wanted to reschedule, but she expressed eagerness in keeping our interview time. Her room was warm and inviting, with detailed charts and important information hung across the walls with intention. By her desk, she had a shelf of personal photographs and signs, which one could tell seemed valuable to her. The atmosphere of Jamie’s space was organized and calming, in accordance with her attitudes and expressions throughout her interviews. Jamie also seemed quite calm about the process, and as gratitude was expressed for
her participation, she noted that she was honored to engage in this process and enthusiastic to help.

As Jamie’s interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed, recurring codes were found across the two interviews. The recurring codes supported the development of Jamie’s participant profile and framed the entire essence of her described experience with the phenomenon of academic commitment. The 15 recurring codes (see Appendix 1) highlight how Jamie’s personal experiences with academic commitment supported the way that she facilitated academic commitment in her students.

The code occurring most frequently across Jamie’s interviews was the code of feeling successful/confident. In both interviews, Jamie expressed how she structures her lessons and her classroom experiences around supporting students in feeling successful and confident in their work. Jamie noted that for every lesson and activity she plans, students’ “feeling successful and confident,” is in the forefront of her thoughts and her principal aim. Particularly in her second interview, Jamie revealed that her parents always supported her in pursuing her happiness and this motivated her to feel confident and successful in her choices. She noted that these experiences guide how she facilitates academic commitment.

In association with the code of feeling successful/confident, other subcodes noted across Jamie’s interviews were meeting students at their levels, differentiation, learning about yourself, and personalization of learning. These codes were noted in addition to the code of feeling successful/confident as Jamie discussed her personal beliefs about academic commitment, and her beliefs framed the way she purposely planned lessons. Jamie shared the deep perception that when meeting students at their “levels” and personalizing their learning based on this, students could feel more successful and confident.
Related to the concept of feeling successful/confident, the second recurring code throughout Jamie’s interviews was individualized learning and choice. Jamie shared that she allowed students space within her lessons and activities to choose how they would like to learn, and to choose the modes of expressing their learning. Jamie shared her belief that having students set personal goals and giving them a choice in their modes of practice for achieving their goals motivates students while supporting their growth as academically committed individuals. Other subcodes prevalent in Jamie’s interviews and associated with individualized learning and choice, are reflection process, differentiation, goal-setting, processes and procedures, meeting students at their levels, and different levels.

Separate from the codes of feeling confident/successful, and individualized learning and choice, Jamie regularly mentioned phrases and ideas that were coded as teachers as models of commitment, and dedication/focus in both of her interviews. Jamie felt strongly about teachers, especially herself, as models of academic commitment for students, as she believed that students model the behaviors they witness. She further shared, intermittently throughout her interviews, that she felt as though teachers as models of commitment increased the opportunities for students to develop their dedication/focus in their learning and their personal academic commitment.

**Jamie’s responses in connection with the first research question.** The first research question sought to further understand how teachers define academic commitment. The recurring codes discussed in the previous section will be threaded throughout this discussion, explicitly quoting Jamie’s interview to gain access into the essence of her definition of academic commitment. As previously mentioned, Jamie frequently referenced the importance of feeling confident/successful concerning academic commitment. In discussing her intentions for supporting students in becoming academically committed, Jamie revealed:
I just want them to feel good about themselves and feel positive. I explain exactly what we're doing; exactly what I'm looking for, the goal of every lesson, and then when they leave, I explain whether they got there or not. I hold them to high standards and I think I push them but not to the point that it's too far and . . . I think they all have a positive experience when they leave my room so that's pretty much my biggest concern.

In coding Jamie’s interview, the recurring idea that students must feel successful/confident to develop their academic commitment was revealed in the quote above, and was related to how Jamie described her planning and facilitation of academic commitment. In response to this exchange, I stated, “that sounds awesome.” This type of exchange on my part only occurred in this instance, and did not appear to alter Jamie’s account moving forward.

Furthermore, Jamie additionally noted her personal view of traits that individuals with strong academic commitment possess as “teamwork, commitment, they are leaders, role models, willing to help whenever they can and just overall positive and happy, pushing themselves and pushing others but not in a negative way, and being able to take criticism.” Subcodes noted in Jamie’s interviews associated with traits for academic commitment are feeling successful/confident, dedication and focus, open-mindedness, and optimism from struggle, and are apparent in the above quote. These quotes surmised the overall beliefs Jamie expressed throughout her interviews and consistently represented the codes that frequently recurred when analyzing her interview transcriptions.

Jamie’s views on academic commitment seem to have derived from her upbringing, her family, and her academic opportunities as a young adult. In discussing how her beliefs and personal academic commitment developed, she stated:
I think it started when I was younger; my parents always encouraged me to try everything, and told me that I don't have to stick with one thing. If I wanted to change something that was okay . . . They also instilled the importance of getting an education, in me at a very young age. Being one of [number] kids, they always told us to that we had to get an education . . . They encouraged me to find my happiness and I think that's what I really focused on . . . trying to find and figure out what I wanted to do that so could go to work every day and be positive and being able to see that reflect on my students is really important for me.

The recurring ideas and codes of feeling successful/confident, learning about oneself, that motivation drives purpose, and individualized learning and choice are discernible in the quote above. They ideas are reflective of Jamie’s opinions throughout the entire interview process and the manner in which she facilitates academic commitment.

**Jamie’s responses in connection with the second research question.** The second research question was designed to investigate how teachers’ views on academic commitment shape their facilitation. In gaining access into how Jamie’s beliefs about academic commitment have shaped the way that she facilitates academic commitment, it is necessary to discuss the codes that repeated throughout her interviews—chiefly those associated with the facilitation of academic commitment—as well as to quote her interviews directly. In regard to facilitating academic commitment, Jamie referred to teachers as models of commitment, reflection processes, differentiation, and goal-setting.

When answering an interview question regarding her values when it comes to facilitating academic commitment, Jamie expressed:
I think that’s important to really push for academic commitment because everybody is a different type of learner, and in order to reach that, it's important to remember that everybody is different and has different levels. So I think it's best to let them [students] figure out what’s best for them, like setting personal goals.

Thus, Jamie is noting the importance of differentiation when it comes to facilitating academic commitment. Jamie also shared her beliefs for facilitating academic commitment as:

I think academic commitment, especially as an educator, is crucial, because I think the kids can definitely pick up on it and I've noticed it over the years . . . So I think that showing them that you are committed to developing in your profession, trying new things, admitting that you're wrong or when something doesn't work, when you tried . . . I think it just shows the kids that you’re human, that you do make mistakes, but that you're committed to trying and committed to getting better.

This exposed the recurring sentiment that modeling commitment, especially in reflection, and goal-setting, is primarily purposeful to Jamie when facilitating academic commitment in her students. Additionally, in another exchange, Jamie said:

I think it's important to demonstrate academic commitment and commitment to others as a teacher, so I think just being positive and showing that you work together with one another and that we're [teachers] always willing to help one another is a big thing that we do here and I think that they [students] see that and feel that. Just giving that extra hand, and wanting to connect with them, listening to them, actively listening to them and showing them that respect and just the letting them tell you a story and be able to have something to say back to them and remember it is going a long way.
This final quote further expressed the sentiment that Jamie has projected as teachers as models of commitment and the development of student-teacher relationships throughout this work, and generally surmised the essence of her experience with the phenomenon of academic commitment.

**Profile of Rachel.** During her first interview, Rachel seemed quite excited but a little nervous about the process. Upon entering her classroom, the sheer number of student-created resources that were displayed around the room was immediately apparent. There were student-created charts, signs, and checklists that one could easily tell were used frequently. Rachel sat at a back table, where she explained that she conducted small group work. Across this student-centered classroom, there were various artifacts revealing values of commitment, student independence, and collaboration. Throughout the entire interview, there was an honesty and reflectiveness that Rachel expressed that was evident in both the way she shared her ideas and how she explained her teaching. Rachel’s classroom was a showcase of the positive sentiment she expressed towards academic commitment and how she facilitated commitment in her students.

Throughout Rachel’s interviews, I personally noticed a similarity between our educational values and the manner in which we facilitate academic commitment. As I had conducted a few interviews at this point, I can honestly disclose that I remained as neutral as possible and just nodded and asked questions as Rachel divulged her account and responded to questions. As noted in my reflexive journal, I did smile frequently throughout this interview to calm Rachel’s apprehension towards the process. I believe this may have contributed to her ability to feel more comfortable but still completely honest in disclosing her experiences with the phenomenon in focus.
Throughout the process of developing Rachel’s participant profile, frequently recurring codes materialized. Five major codes were goal-setting processes and procedures, dedication and focus, feedback with the process in mind, differentiation, and accountability, with the other recurring codes as subcodes (see Appendix G for all 15 recurring codes). In reviewing and analyzing Rachel’s interviews, these four major codes framed her beliefs regarding academic commitment and, in turn, how she facilitates this disposition.

Goal-setting processes and procedures, as major codes, appear to be the most crucial to Rachel, in regard to being academically committed as well as to facilitating academic commitment. Rachel expressed that the process of setting goals was chiefly important in her teaching and how she personally experiences academic commitment. Additional codes associated with the major code of goal-setting processes and procedures are feedback with the process in mind, the process of growth, and process versus product. As Rachel repeatedly discussed, her intentions in regard to facilitating goal-setting in her classroom were to provide students with opportunities to set and monitor appropriate goals using feedback and to discuss how this process supports growth in academic commitment. Later sections will elaborate on Rachel’s discussion about goal-setting through direct quotes.

In addition to goal-setting processes and procedures, another major code that repeatedly surfaced across Rachel’s interviews was dedication/focus. Rachel framed the concept of dedication/focus as a byproduct of students setting and monitoring personal goals and growth. She also discussed the ideas, or, subcodes, of student-created resources, feeling valued in a community, and how motivation drives purpose when discussing dedication/focus.

Two additional major codes Rachel often referenced were accountability and differentiation. Similar to the major code of dedication/focus as a byproduct of setting and
monitoring goals, Rachel surmised that accountability, is an outgrowth of providing students with opportunities for collaboration, communication, and teamwork; models or mentor texts, and partnerships. When these procedures are in place, Rachel expressed that the development of independence occurs as well. Each of these quoted terms are subcodes associated with the major code of accountability.

In Rachel’s interviews, the major code of differentiation, referred to how she structures the above opportunities for her students to meet them at their varying levels and needs. Subcodes Rachel also frequently discussed in association with differentiation, are providing purpose, structure, and choice. Rachel proposed that through differentiation, students are given the opportunity for choice, and this supports goal-setting and the development of dedication/focus, accountability, and independence. Rachel also noted that within differentiation, there must be a clear purpose and structure provided to the students.

**Rachel’s responses in connection with the first research question.** The interview experience with Rachel revealed an honest and dedicated perspective towards understanding and developing academic commitment in her students. When asked about what she valued in regard to facilitating academic commitment, Rachel disclosed:

First and foremost, I value autonomy in a classroom. I feel like when they [students] feel like they're a big part of a community and they have a lot of roles . . . like if they're not there or if they don't do their job, the community will be falling apart. It's a lot of work in the beginning of the year to front load that kind of community, but it always feels worth it this time of year when you kind of sit back and see the problems getting solved, and you see kids stepping up when they need to when normally they wouldn't have. That’s what helps each piece of them, where they feel like they have a purpose and they
feel like they need to reach their goals. They feel like they need to be committed.

Whenever I felt like I was valued in a community . . . that I was important, that's when I worked my hardest and I think of it that way for them [students] too.

Here, Rachel expressed the importance she places on goal-setting processes and procedures and how her personal experiences impact the way she facilitates academic commitment in her students. Moreover, Rachel divulged that the trait she understands academic commitment to be centered on and how she grapples with understanding it further:

Grit . . . I want to believe that every kid has every bit of potential as everybody else. I . . . I just believe that grit is a thing and I believe that watching some kids who just have this deeply motivated self . . . I wonder where that comes from and I see it in adults too . . . I think it has a lot to do with your open-mindedness, wanting to learn, if kids and adults feel the bigger meaning behind it.

This exchange reiterated the major code of dedication/focus in Rachel’s beliefs on academic commitment, as well as revealing her underlying intentions the other major code of differentiation. These two quotes shed light on the code of motivation drives purpose, as Rachel expressed the sentiment that individuals who feel valued and have purposeful goals can become dedicated and focused and thus motivated—the essence of academic commitment.

As with Jamie, Rachel also shared how her personal academic commitment connects to the way she views academic commitment in stating:

I think my brain is wired to know what to do to help people and help move the world in the direction it needs to be, and it’s scary for me because I can be such an idealist, I just believe something and I just can’t stop doing things until I’m there, and that’s hard
because my goals are always moving and getting bigger and bigger. I am grateful for being like that.

Rachel expressed valuing the process of goal-setting, not only in her teaching, but in her personal life as well.

**Rachel’s responses in connection with the second research question.** Rachel’s values, when it comes to her personal academic commitment, support her in facilitating academic commitment in her students. As expressed in the quote above, Rachel personally sets and monitors goals with an optimistic outlook. Consequently, Rachel noted this in her teaching as well. In her first interview, she explained:

I think the most success comes from goal-setting . . . I'm big on goal-setting in our room. I feel like it should just come naturally to kids, to be able to think of where they want to go, and what they want to do, and how they want to get better. And again that's obviously going to look different for everybody. I want them to think a lot about the process. I think, a lot of times, it's easy to just set goals, even for me as an adult, but thinking more and reflecting more about how to get there is what matters to me most when it comes to academic commitment.

In conjunction with goal-setting, Rachel expressed the opportunities she provides her students with to develop their independence:

Another big part of this is independence . . . so they are using everything that's best for them . . . you know, there's a lot of paper choices, there's revision tools, and mentor texts, and other things that we think that they might need to be able to be successful and independent. They have all the materials . . . I give them all the tools that I think are best
for them. And then it's an expectation, in their commitment, that they have everything there and they have to put it together themselves.

Here, Rachel conveyed the structures that she provides to support students in achieving their goals, being accountable, and developing independence in their learning. The supports she provides her students with are choices and tools to independently progress towards their goals. In describing the essence of this in her classroom and her ideals behind this, Rachel indicated:

Where they’re [students] goal-setting and they're giving feedback in partnerships, and they aren't afraid to struggle and they're not afraid to have something be hard for them in their struggle because they know that their persistence gets them where they need to be. I think a lot of that came from this learning community I did, it was a [name of college] learning facility. It was the very first day and I knew they weren’t going to like what they would see. It was the toughest five years . . . So I do think that this process helped frame my idea of feedback . . . that even though it’s hard to hear, even for adults, that it helps us through and gives us opportunities for more persistence.

This quote exemplified the essence of Rachel’s views on academic commitment, as it divulged her beliefs that setting and working towards goals, having choices, using resources, and hearing feedback all support the development of academic commitment in an independent and life-impacting manner.

**Profile of Jane.** On a bright Monday morning in December, Jane entered my room with a cheerful smile and confident gate. She preferred to meet in my classroom and she sat across from me, at my desk, eager to begin the process. Jane mentioned that she loved getting to speak with teachers and getting to know them so, she was truly looking forward to this experience. This sentiment was also made apparent as Jane was one of the first to respond to the initial email
about participation in this study. Throughout the interview process, Jane expressed great dedication to her personal academic commitment and facilitating academic commitment in her students.

In accordance with Jane’s apparent passion for and dedication to academic commitment, the recurring code across Jane’s interviews was the code of dedication/focus. Throughout her interviews, Jane discussed her own dedication and focus in terms of how committed she is personally, as well as how she values the development of dedication/focus in her students. This sentiment will be expanded upon in the following sections, as dedication/focus pertains to the research questions. However, in further exchanges involving dedication/focus, Jane expressed the importance of persistence and goal-setting processes and procedures. For herself and her students, Jane values setting goals and being persistent in achieving and reaching those goals.

Germane to the concept of dedication and focus, another primary recurring code, threaded through Jane’s interviews is personal accountability. Jane expressed that having dedication/focus is connected to personal accountability. In discussing personal accountability, Jane referenced how she is accountable for supporting her students’ development of academic commitment and working with other teachers to build structures for developing academic commitment as well. Conjointly, Jane mentioned how she supports her student in their personal accountability through exchanges involving teamwork and sport references, which she considers beneficial in this process. Jane also believes that this requires knowing your students well, and planning accordingly. Additional codes pertinent to the code of personal accountability are communication/collaboration/teamwork, collaboration amongst teachers, and knowing your students well and planning accordingly.
Similar to personal accountability, Jane’s dialogue revealed the understanding that students enter classrooms with varying levels of commitment, and these exchanges were coded as levels of personal expectation. Throughout her 15 years of teaching, Jane divulged that students have varying attitudes and different levels of commitment. Jane deals with this through developing strong home-school connections and connections with parents. In regard to levels of personal expectation, Jane valued differentiation and making particular choices for her students and their learning, with respect to her observed levels of commitment. This sentiment is associated with the previously mentioned code of knowing your students well, as planning for differentiation and choice, in Jane’s view, requires a deeper understanding of the students.

Jane’s responses in connection with the first research question. Throughout Jane’s interviews, and especially in the first interview, she exhibited a purpose and drive in Jane’s responses that framed the entire essence of the interview. Overall, Jane expressed the belief that academic commitment involved action and a level of accountability that develops through experiences and attitudes. From the first interview, when asked about her personal beliefs and ideas about academic commitment, Jane responded by stating:

Academic commitment starts with whatever, however you're genetically made up and what you’re thinking about and how you’re operating . . . I mean everyone is so different in commitment . . . so academic commitment is the goals you set and how you then proceed to follow through, and are you able to follow through, and how you react if you can't or what is your bar set to.

This quote defined Jane’s view that individuals have varying levels of academic commitment. However, to Jane, the concepts of goal-setting, persistence, attitudes, and dedication and focus are relevant for all levels of academic commitment. Moreover, Jane
elaborated upon her outlook that, “they [students] are coming in with different levels and different goals . . . it depends on what their personalities are like and what their support at home is like.”

Personally, Jane disclosed her experiences with academic commitment and how she developed her academic commitment as a child, and how this influenced her as an adult. In discussing a particular musical instrument that she began to learn, Jane shared:

And I practiced . . . I just practiced all the time, so I already had that make-up . . . whether I knew it at the time that I would have that perseverance and I would have that obsessiveness to practice and that strive for excellence . . . I didn't know. You don't think about that when you're a teenager.

In addition to this musical instrument, Jane also described a sport that she has been playing since the age of 22, competitively and quite successfully. Jane noted the importance of setting goals and taking action in regard to developing a personal commitment. Furthermore, Jane discussed how she values persistence and dedication towards excellence as it pertains to academic commitment, both personally and for her students as well. Jane’s personal experiences are associated with her definition of academic commitment and how she facilitates this in her students. Jane holds herself and her students to high levels of accountability when it comes to academic commitment.

The essence of Jane’s view of academic commitment was represented in this quote:

You have to have academic commitment; it’s absolutely essential. I feel sorry for people that don't, but some don’t . . . I fully believe it's all genetic makeup and also from your upbringing and how you look at life . . . how do I look at it at . . . it’s absolutely essential.

You have to have it. And it could drive you crazy, and other people around you crazy,
but it’s the only way to get better. It's the only way to explore. It’s the only way to learn and grow.

Here, Jane divulged how personal experiences, outlook, and this dedication to persistence and goals are essential to success, regardless of how others viewed commitment.

**Jane’s responses in connection with the second research question.** As Jane’s interviews revealed, she is equally as passionate about her personal academic commitment as she is about facilitating academic commitment in her students. Jane shared this view, and ruminated about how she grew up:

You know, whatever I do, I take it seriously. So one of the reasons I didn’t teach for [number] of years was that I had gotten an opportunity to take courses with professors that I loved and wanted to learn from at [specific college], and then I just traveled and I played [sport] for three summers across [other nation], and) then I got into [sport], and then I got into managing [Athletic Facility], so I managed those and had six [Athletic Facilities] under me and played [sport] and was a manager and tutored. I have a strong sense of commitment to self and I am quite loyal to my friends as well, friends, family, children.

To facilitate a dedication towards academic commitment in her students, Jane uses sports references to build communication, collaboration, and teamwork. Jane expressed that sports-related references support her students in “rising to the occasion.” She shared:

You're on the team . . . a lot of sports stuff . . . you know, everything is kind of sports-related . . . I have a sense of excellence and it's probably going to drive everybody crazy, and I say, “you’re in it and you’re on the team so we’re doing it!” So I raise the bar and they [students] do it . . . I have to have it challenging and they [students] rise to it.
Additionally, as Jane managed, and still manages, many tasks with dedication and focus, she facilitates this type of behavior in her students as well:

They have a calendar that they have to fill out what they have practiced. If they haven’t practiced, I circle it, and I write where the practicing is on it . . . I have the parents sign it and I send it to the parents.

Jane encourages her students to use calendars and track the progress they are making towards their goals in this manner. This practice further supports Jane’s values in personal accountability, developing a “connection with parents, and growing the home-school connection.

Similar to the use of calendars to track growth and goals, Jane described her protocol for involving parents into her class to promote facilitation of academic commitment:

There's a lot of verbal support. I am constantly writing the parents about practicing or about their [students’] potential or about their commitment to practicing or if they are struggling. I suggest a high school student help them or they come in and see me for extra help. I try to get the parents on board . . . and a lot of times I will bring the parents and the child in because I have found that if I don't have the parents on board, I often lose them [students]. It builds that connection, so now the parents are accountable for this too . . . so we're accountable together and that collaboration is really nice.

In accordance with the recurring codes across Jane’s interview, this quote expressed Jane’s dedication to facilitating personal accountability in her herself as a teacher, in her students, and in the parents of the students. She disclosed the importance of communication, collaboration, and teamwork in building personal accountability, thus better facilitating academic commitment.
**Profile of Sarah.** The first interview with Sarah was conducted during an afternoon in December. As I entered her classroom, Sarah immediately rose from her desk in the back corner of her cozy and inviting classroom and warmly gestured for me to sit at her conference table. Desks were arranged in groups and there were different types of seats, stools, cushions, and chairs for students to choose. Sarah admitted to being a little nervous, but we immediately got off to a great start with some laughter. Throughout the interview, Sarah projected a warm and fun-loving attitude towards the process and teaching. As the interview progressed and we discussed academic commitment and her facilitation of academic commitment, Sarah’s excitement and devotion to her students and her profession became overtly palpable.

In analyzing the recurring codes associated with Sarah’s interviews, the primary codes were noted as dedication and focus, differentiation, and collaboration amongst teachers. Throughout the interview process, Sarah frequently discussed how she valued dedication and focus as traits that support academic commitment in herself and her students. Specifically, Sarah discussed particular traits and students whom she felt best embodied academic commitment, and shared ways that she personally maintains her academic commitment through professional learning opportunities and research. In her discourse, the primary code of dedication and focus seemed to be associated with other codes such as persistence, self-awareness, being prepared, the desire to improve, and being open-minded. Sarah explicitly illustrated the importance of persistence and the desire to improve, in supporting students in growth and “moving levels.”

Pertinent to dedication and focus, another primary recurring code noted across Sarah’s interviews was differentiation. In explaining differentiation, Sarah referenced goal-setting processes and procedures, exploration, and choice. Sarah described how she used differentiation to provide her students with choices and help them develop personal goals. Expanding upon
differentiation, Sarah briefly elaborated on how she provides her students with opportunities for structured play and exploration within academic subjects, allowing her to observe students in a more social setting. The exploration and play experiences that Sarah described occurred during subjects like mathematics, which she structured to let students have choices in their learning and practice.

Sarah additionally expressed the need for collaboration amongst teachers, which she noted was supportive when it comes to planning, observing students, and being flexible as an educator. This directly connects to Sarah’s inherent passion for continued learning, as she referenced and detailed various personally directed learning opportunities that she had provided for herself throughout the years. Continued learning, to Sarah, meant reading educational books to improve her teaching practices, attending various collegial circles, and attending out-of-district learning opportunities as well.

**Sarah’s responses in connection with the first research question.** Throughout Sarah’s interviews, there was a passion and thoroughness in Sarah’s responses placing emphasis on the importance of dedication and focus, persistence, and the desire to improve in terms of defining academic commitment. Comprehensively, Sarah expounded that academic commitment was just trying, and the desire to keep on trying in all different ways. She specifically expressed this sentiment when asked about traits that students with strong academic commitment possess:

They [students] listen, they try, they turn and talk, they’re talking about what you're talking about . . . it's just that they pay attention. It's a whole different ballgame when kids are just focused on you for at least a little bit of the day . . . they are willing to try what you did . . . at least willing to try and are really listening are the ones I think are committed.
Notable in the quote above, Sarah disclosed her personal value that academic commitment primarily involves a desire to improve and persistence. In her first interview, Sarah also described how she shares her values with her students and supports them in developing these views:

We have actually just started talking about persistence and how they [the students] have been persistent . . . Mindfulness and about your thoughts, and when your thoughts go somewhere else what you can do to get them back on track . . . it’s a lot of self-reflecting because I can’t know what they are thinking all the time and I do not know if you are doing your work or not. Zoning them in to their work and their thoughts.

Sarah further expressed how her personal academic commitment formed, and how that shaped the way she views academic commitment as a teacher:

I was always the student in the library at 3 to 5 pm, you could find me there. I was always committed to being in school and doing really well. My mom always made sure we had a schedule and we did our homework. She always prepared us for the next step; you were always ready to go.

Sarah’s dedication and commitment to school and how her mother supported her in developing academic commitment seems to have molded the way she described academic commitment, expressing value in being prepared, persistence, and having a desire to improve.

**Sarah’s responses in connection with the second research question.** Sarah’s personal academic commitment fostered her beliefs as a teacher as well as how she continues to develop herself in her craft and profession. Relevant to the second research question, Sarah divulged her practice, each summer, to grow in her personal academic commitment and her profession:
I am very committed to teaching. I read at least two teaching books a summer and type lessons using them and think about good strategies to use from them. I type the lessons up on the computer and my husband thinks I’m crazy. So, this summer, I read a book by . . . Jeanette Smith, I read her reading conferences book and took a lot of notes, wrote up different kind of lessons to do with the kids.

As Sarah shared the book that she read this summer to support reading conferences, she had difficulty recalling the author’s name. I asked her if the author was Jeanette Smith and confirmed that it was. This did not change Sarah’s responses or her demeanor during the remainder of this interview. She seemed relieved that she finally could recall the author’s name.

The quote above expresses Sarah’s ideals for academic commitment and continued learning. This corresponds to Sarah’s view on the facilitation of academic commitment, as she shared here: “I think I really expect kids to try; I like to step back and see what they are doing, compliment, and teach on to what they are doing and learning.” Sarah personally tries and uses many resources to help her foster her personal academic commitment, and this sentiment is evident and expressed in her facilitation of academic commitment as well.

Furthermore, Sarah expressed how she utilizes the practice of mindfulness to build self-awareness and become open-minded and how she uses persistence when facilitating academic commitment in her classroom. Sarah described this practice:

Things are going to be hard and that they can't give up . . . the mindfulness goes with it too. We talked about the breaths, when things get tough take a couple of breaths, maybe put your work to the side go back to it later . . . so, yeah, we talked about all those strategies.
To summarize Sarah’s values regarding the facilitation of academic commitment, she emphasized the value of collaboration amongst teachers when it comes to supporting students in their development of academic commitment. Sarah particularly disclosed:

I think it's helpful to have other people [teachers] to go to . . . to help you because sometimes if you're trying to bring kids up to the next level you can’t always do it by yourself . . . so I think teachers have to be willing to go find that help and get that help.

Repeating the sentiment of the desire to improve, Sarah urged that teachers also seek support and be open-minded when it comes to facilitating academic commitment in students and supporting their growth towards becoming academically committed individuals.

Profile of Hannah. As Hannah entered my classroom on a December afternoon, her enthusiasm for the process and for facilitating the disposition of academic commitment was evident. Hannah admitted to preparing for the first interview, as she wanted to be as concise and detailed as possible. Her enthusiasm and dedication were made clear as she began to describe her beliefs and values regarding academic commitment. Throughout the interview process, Hannah’s optimism and sincerity became increasingly apparent, and as she shared her thoughts and beliefs, one could easily tell that she valued developing positive relationships with her students while expressing clear expectations for them. Her feel passion for teaching shone through.

In concordance with Hannah’s enthusiasm and passion towards teaching and the disposition of academic commitment, the most prominent recurring code across Hannah’s interviews was persistence. Hannah referenced this code of persistence with the code of passion quite frequently across her interviews. In her personal experiences, Hannah also referred to
passion, persistence, and dedication and focus as traits she grew to associate with academic commitment.

Hannah further noted the value of defining moments and transitions and that commitment now helps future commitment, which all were rooted in the major concept that beliefs transpire from experiences. Hannah’s personal experiences truly resonated with her as she disclosed her values when it comes to defining academic commitment as well as facilitating academic commitment in her classroom. Growing up, Hannah’s family and other influential figures influenced her to progress in her commitment to school and other activities.

In addition to persistence and beliefs from experiences, Hannah primarily discussed the idea of building community and positive relationships with her students and in her classroom as crucial in facilitating and supporting students in their development of academic commitment. Hannah shared that in building a positive classroom community, there must be reminders, honesty about expectations and quality of work, transparency, and accountability. Hannah shared that teachers are the prominent examples of academic commitment for students. Thus, to establish a positive classroom community and relationships with students, teachers must exhibit transparency and honesty when it comes to their expectations.

Conjointly, Hannah frequently referenced the power of communicating with students and leading by example for her students. These exchanges were coded as teachers as models of commitment. In Hannah’s exchanges, she discussed essentiality in fostering positive relationships with students through being an example of the type of academic commitment she was supporting her students in developing. Aside from structure through reminders, Hannah described the power of speaking with students to discuss expectations, give positive feedback, and motivate them to get back on track. Similarly, Hannah expressed that collaboration amongst
teachers motivates teachers to pursue high levels of commitment in the same way that teachers facilitate this in their students.

**Hannah’s responses in connection with the first research question.** The sentiment that Hannah expressed towards persistence and passion—that it is critical to the development of academic commitment—resonated throughout her interviews. Generally, Hannah disclosed the view that academic commitment involved persistence, dedication and focus, a desire to improve, and a positive attitude. In answering the first interview question regarding personal definitions of academic commitment, Hannah revealed:

> Academic commitment—without seeing your end goal, you can still invest yourself in something and not be deterred easily from finishing out a task or understanding a topic.

> It’s perseverance . . . kids who are willing to persevere, kids who are ready to see things through to the end, no matter what challenges come in their way.

This quote exemplified Hannah’s view that persistence and dedication and focus are essential when it comes to academic commitment. Furthermore, in elaborating on traits that students with strong academic commitment possess, Hannah disclosed:

> Passion for anything, not just for school, a passion for an instrument, like anything done passionately they are invested in. I think helps their commitment to school. Thinking about kids who are passionate about things outside of school, they have that understanding inside of them that they could transfer to something else. That would be my big word, passion. They are kids who are persistent, kids who are truthfully positive, kids who can get knocked down again and again and keep positive, it makes all the difference.

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As Hannah noted, this persistence and passion for school and other hobbies for is important for students to be academically committed. Hannah also holds herself to this standard as well. Personally, Hannah shared some defining moments where she had her academic commitment tested and that truly supported her definitions and views of academic commitment still to this day. When asked to describe experiences that defined personal academic commitment, Hannah stated:

Being waitlisted to go to college totally made me realize that I was committed to [name of sport] but with school I was like, it would get done. And it was a huge eye-opener that there were other people doing way more, better more meaningful things. It was a huge eye-opener, and it was like, when I get there, I need to do bigger and better things.

Definitely motivating.

In further explaining how her personal academic commitment defined her values for the manner in which she facilitates academic commitment, Hannah shared how her parents and high school track coach influenced her current beliefs, explaining:

My parents were always telling me that I needed to do my best, 110% effort, if you started something you had to see it through and when you were there you had to give 110%. I think that didn’t totally transfer to school, but it took time to help me realize that it mattered. I was definitely social. My parents were always like, you’re in it you have to figure it out, you started. My high school track coach, he had a tough luck, deal with it mentality, you make your own luck; you make your own fate. So I think that was something, going for interviews and teaching you make your own luck, and it’s going to go as well as you make it.
Hannah’s personal experiences framed her views and definition of academic commitment as an individual and as a teacher. After this exchange with Hannah, I commented that my experience as a high school student was quite similar, particularly noting that I was more social during high school and was less devoted to my academic work than during college. This did not seem to have any bearing on the way Hannah continued to respond.

The essence of Hannah’s beliefs towards academic commitment is depicted in this quote:

So personal beliefs that it's necessary, there must be some level of commitment, no matter how smart you are, to be successful and that transfers to life as an adult ... you know, just how like if you’re younger and in school and you’re not committing to something it makes it much harder later on in life to make that connection and commit to something. Even if you’re not so passionate about school, I think it sets the groundwork for things later on in life because you will be forced to do things you don’t want to but you have to.

Here, Hannah shared the importance of academic commitment and her perspectives on academic commitment as she grew up understanding that persistence, dedication and focus, and a desire to improve were necessary traits for success, not only in school, but in life as well.

**Hannah’s responses in connection with the second research question.** The importance of persistence, dedication and focus, and a desire to improve were prominent in the way that Hannah described and outlined her facilitation of academic commitment. Similar to the way Hannah’s track coach motivated her, Hannah described her classroom philosophy to be a:

No excuses mentality, if you want it bad enough you have to make sacrifices. If you want to get better at math and you don’t come to extra help, and they’re like, “I’d rather do a club,” you have to walk the walk and talk the talk. I think that we have to model this
for them. We would never just abandon a lesson because it’s not going well, we’d say to them “I don’t think this is going well as I thought it would,” like problem solving, try something new. I think that it’s like an example of who we are.

As Hannah described a “no excuses mentality” when it comes to fostering academic commitment in her students. She revealed that as a teacher, she is a model for academic commitment, and this requires honesty and transparency in her facilitation of academic commitment. Hannah elaborated on this concept of teachers as models of commitment when she discussed how she fosters academic commitment in her students. Hannah articulated:

It’s all about relationships; how the kids see you, how you interact with the kids, the kids pick up on all of that, even notes that you write about their work, and that’s changing their commitment path. Whether it keeps them on board or having them be like never mind, forget it. But constant communication with them and relationships, I’m not just here to be your teacher, I’m here to support you as you are learning. Not just to show you how to do something. So I think that putting the time and effort, throughout the year to build the relationships, academically and just within a classroom community is going to make or break their commitment.

Moreover, Hannah indicated that in order to build relationships with students and communicate expectations to them, there must be honesty between the teacher and student, especially when facilitating academic commitment. Specifically, Hannah revealed:

Honesty, it’s a huge piece. “Honestly, this isn't your best work.” “Honestly, I’ve seen you do better.” “Let’s take what you know and keep trying.” . . . because they then milk it and get into the “I’m not good at it.” So being honest with them and giving them the next steps helps with academic commitment.
As Hannah further described ways in which she facilitated academic commitment, the importance of communicating clear expectations and teachers as models of commitment were illuminated. When asked to elaborate on how she expressed the ideals she valued when involving academic commitment, Hannah stated:

Highlighting the traits to the kids, calling them [the traits and behaviors] out. “I am aware of all the time and effort you put into things” and telling them about all the time and effort you put into things and how sometimes they totally flop. Sometimes I say, “I put so much time and effort into planning this and I don’t know how it’s going to go.”

You know, I think when they hear people say that, especially people who are supposed to be in charge of them, they are more willing to develop those characteristics within themselves, they want to imitate us.

Overall, Hannah’s interview exchanges involving academic commitment revealed a strong emphasis towards persistence and a desire to improve. Hannah believes that teachers should be models of academic commitment for students, especially when it comes to facilitating dispositions.

**Profile of Billie-Jean.** On another December afternoon, I entered Billie-Jean’s welcoming and student-centered classroom. Desks were arranged in clusters along with various tables and a large carpet area, and students seemingly had a choice in where they would like to work around the room. Holiday string lights hung from the whiteboard and cabinets, and set the mood for a calm and insightful interview. Billie-Jean had a calming presence and was extremely thoughtful and reflective in answering interview questions. Her presence aligned with the mood of her classroom: calm, yet thoughtful and dedicated. As we took seats around a table in the
front of the classroom, Billie-Jean shared how she was very interested in the disposition of academic commitment and looked forward to the results of this research.

Throughout both interviews, Billie-Jean conveyed an optimistic yet realistic view of students. This translated to the ways that she plans for and facilitates academic commitment in her classroom. In accordance with Billie-Jean’s thoughtful and reflective presence, the most recurring code across her interviews was developing a positive relationships with students. Billie-Jean discussed the value she felt in building positive relationships with her students to develop an environment where academic commitment was fostered. To build positive relationships with students, Billie-Jean particularly honored and praised students for their commitment, as well as honestly expressing expectations for her students. In further exchanges involving positive relationships with students, Billie-Jean additionally noted concepts of personal expectations, honesty in expectations, and teachers as models of academic commitment. Other codes threaded through Billie-Jean’s exchanges about positive relationships with students were levels of personal expectation, being honest about expectations, and teachers as models of commitment.

In fostering positive relationships with students, Billie-Jean valued the trait of curiosity as essential in developing and facilitating academic commitment in students. Billie-Jean discussed curiosity in terms of how students built connections between areas of learning, how they persisted through challenges, and how their motivation towards learning drove their purpose. To Billie-Jean, curious students are those who are motivated towards a given purpose. Billie-Jean alluded to the necessity of classroom opportunities and experiences designed for curiosity and capitalizing on moments of curiosity in her teaching.
Germane to the trait of curiosity, Billie-Jean placed emphasis on the value of choice when it came to providing students opportunities for expressing curiosity, as well as facilitating academic commitment in her students. As Billie-Jean fosters opportunities for curiosity, she individualizes learning through differentiation. She believes this to impact students’ passion towards learning and their own academic commitment as they have a choice in what they want to learn or how they would like to express their learning. From Billie-Jean’s perspective, passion, stemming from choice, promotes motivation and driving purpose and supports persistence in students.

**Billie-Jean’s responses in connection with the first research question.** From Billie-Jean’s first interview, it was evident she held passionate beliefs that academic commitment centered on students being curious and having a desire to learn, and on teachers’ responsibility in facilitating these opportunities. When asked about how she defined academic commitment, Billie-Jean shared “it is that it's a purposeful learning . . . you’re learning to enrich your own life. It's an independent willingness, it's that desire to seek meaning in the connections and try to figure things out.” Here, Billie-Jean proposed the importance of choice in expanding upon new learning and being curious in developing connections between areas of learning when defining academic commitment.

Billie-Jean elaborated on her personal definition of academic commitment in sharing specific traits that she values when it comes to developing strong academic commitment. Billie-Jean expressed:

I value the natural curiosity of kids. That wide-eyed, bright bushy-tailed, kind of attitude, and anytime you can see that to really capitalize on it and just praise it and celebrate it so
that it's . . . it's more infectious. It's that feeding frenzy of watching the light bulbs go off and then watching one help the next to get to that point.

Moreover, Billie-Jean further described the particular trait of curiosity as being pertinent in the development of academic commitment. She stated:

In one word, I think it’s heart. They have heart, as well, and curiosity. I think it's both . . . they have to be driven, they have to have some kind of passion inside . . . un-bush like, un-shrub like . . . that desire to make something out of nothing, but they've got to have that yearning.

The values of curiosity and persistence originated in elementary school for Billie-Jean. She referenced two particular teachers, who influenced her views on academic commitment in her second interview, divulging:

Just thinking about teaching and being committed to yourself and your learning, Ms. [name of teacher] was my fourth grade teacher and she was the first one that made me care, at all, about what I was doing. And she really did it through fun, she connected learning to songs on the radio, she gave extra credit, she was very musical. She made learning and doing what you had to do to get better just a natural part of life and she always stuck out in terms of doing what you had to do and not making apologies or excuses for yourself and just staying on your path. Contrarily, I had a third grade teacher, Ms. [name of teacher], who was a sterile teacher and no one cared about anything . . . we did the minimum and I think that’s where I learned the opposite, learning from your negative experiences. So those two teachers were very memorable and I carry them with me each day I come to work.
**Billie-Jean’s responses in connection with the second research question.** As Billie-Jean’s interviews exposed, she is truly passionate about developing opportunities for curiosity in her classroom. Thus, Billie-Jean noted the value of choice when it comes to facilitating academic commitment in students, and particularly curiosity, as she stated:

> So I think you see it the most when they have a choice in what they are doing and with whom they are working. It’s that stick-with-it-ness, even as time is running out when they are racing to finish up, not because they don’t want to be caught without but because they want to add everything they’ve got. When they become experts and want to help a friend or when they go that extra mile and apply it, or connect it, or tell you a story about it.

Billie-Jean discussed how she values this motivation and truly aims to capitalize on this in daily classroom activities. Furthermore, Billie-Jean expressed the importance of individualizing learning, as she noted the varying levels of academic commitment with which students enter her classroom, and her approach for supporting this in her room:

> Because I think that in my heart, recognizing that kids are coming, at this moment, with different expectations and baggage, and I adjust how I interact with them and my expectations of them but always ensuring that they are doing their very best. I just had the “fair and equal” conversation with them yesterday, because kids want everything to be the same but that’s always in the forefront of my mind with kids. I always try to connect with them on a personal level way before academic because if that’s not there, there is no sense.

This quote also revealed the sentiment that Billie-Jean strongly expressed regarding developing positive relationships with her students and providing them with honest feedback to facilitate
academic commitment. After sharing this sentiment, Billie-Jean and the researcher engaged in a small side conversation about the power and importance of students understanding the difference between “fair versus equal” when it comes to academic commitment. This conversation was more of a side-note and did not deter or influence Billie-Jean in continuing the discussion as she would have. When asked about what facilitating academic commitment looks like in her classroom, Billie-Jean described situations like:

Definitely personal sharing and personal connections . . . celebrating them where they are . . . celebrating what they bring to the party so to speak, like their own uniqueness and then also pushing them a little bit . . . questioning them . . . helping them wonder more or digging more deeply but connecting with them.

Building positive relationships with students to foster curiosity and persistence in academic commitment is at the core of how Billie-Jean facilitates academic commitment. In talking about having open and honest conversations, Billie-Jean disclosed the importance of students understanding the value of their actions in developing their personal academic commitment. The essence of Billie-Jean’s facilitation of academic commitment is represented as follows:

I use an analogy with my kids: every time you do something you plant a seed and that makes your garden, you can plant a seed and your garden can be gorgeous, or it could be a real cactus or drive people away interpersonally; anything you make or produce affects your garden.

**Recurring Concepts in Connection With the First Research Question**

As previously noted in the Summary of the Findings section of this chapter, recurring codes, or themes, were analyzed, amassed, and organized utilizing the ATLAS.ti software. Across all the interviews, two clusters of meaning emerged with respect to the first research
question, which was designed to gain access into how teachers view and define academic commitment. The two clusters of meaning were previously summarized as traits for strong academic commitment and the development of traits for strong academic commitment. Within these two clusters of meaning, themes began to emerge and illuminate an understanding of the first research question. The themes transpired from frequently recurring codes across all participant interviews in regard to traits for strong academic commitment and the development of traits for strong academic commitment.

Themes from the traits for strong academic commitment cluster of meaning emerged as dedication and focus and persistence, perseverance, and grit. Across all interview transcriptions, participants discussed dedication and focus as traits that both teachers and students needed to possess in order to have strong academic commitment. Participants collectively expressed how dedication and focus supports purpose and drive towards setting goals and growing as individuals. Additionally, participants noted that teachers must exhibit dedication and focus to aid as models for students to develop dedication and focus. Persistence, perseverance, and grit were referenced throughout the interview transcriptions as continuing to move forward with a positive attitude in the face of challenging situations. Each of the participants noted that they believed persistence, perseverance, and grit to be a necessary component of academic commitment.

Themes from the development of traits for strong academic commitment cluster of meaning included personal experiences shaping commitment and value in a community, roles, or purpose. The participants each discussed how their personal experiences throughout their lives shaped their academic commitment and subsequently influenced their teaching. Furthermore, the participants noted that building a classroom community that allowed students to have
purpose and roles within the classroom was highly regarded in the development of traits for strong academic commitment.

Both clusters of meaning—traits for strong academic commitment and the development of traits for strong academic commitment—supported the development of themes recurring throughout all the interview transcriptions and illuminated thoughts and beliefs regarding the first research question.

**Recurring Concepts in Connection With the Second Research Question**

The second research question sought to gain insight into how teachers facilitate academic commitment based on their beliefs and definition of academic commitment. In association with the second research question, as discussed in the Summary of Findings section, two clusters of meaning emerged. These clusters were summarized as strategies, tools, or modes of facilitating academic commitment and impacts of developing academic commitment traits. Within these two clusters of meaning, two themes were revealed through the analysis stages of this research: teachers modeling commitment, or role models, and knowing students well, or positive student-teacher relationships. Across the interviews, the participants indicated the essentiality of teachers as models of academic commitment. As teachers described their roles as facilitators, the sentiment was made clear that teachers must model the behaviors they are expecting and planning for their students to develop. In addition to teachers being models and examples of commitment, knowing students well, or positive-student teacher relationships, was deemed necessary by the participants when planning for facilitation of academic commitment. Each of these themes exposed the participants’ collective beliefs in association with the second research question, providing insight into the importance of teachers as role models of academic
commitment as well as the importance of developing positive and meaningful relationships with students.

**Summary**

In comprehensively collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data collected throughout this research, the essence of academic commitment was found in the concepts of teachers as models of commitment; knowing students well, or positive relationships with students; differentiation; dedication and focus; and persistence, perseverance, and grit. These codes provided insight into the lived experiences of the six participants of this study as they personally and professionally experienced academic commitment. These frequently recurring concepts and codes allowed a deeper understanding of how the teachers of this school district defined academic commitment and how this influenced the manner in which they facilitated academic commitment.

In accordance with the first research question, defining traits that recurred across all of the interviews, were dedication and focus and persistence, perseverance, and grit. Other noteworthy traits expressed by the participants of this study included communication and collaboration and motivation, purpose, and drive. Additionally, strategies, tools, and modes of facilitating academic commitment utilized by the participants of this study that were relevant to the second research question were noted as teachers modeling commitment, knowing students well/positive relationships with students, and differentiation. Other noteworthy strategies, tools, and modes of facilitating academic commitment were giving students choices and goal-setting (processes and procedures). This analysis illuminated the essence of the phenomenon of academic commitment as experienced by the six participants of this study and revealed the importance of academic commitment in schools.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

As schools and researchers valiantly strive to prepare students for the changing and demanding expectations of the 21st century, the development of particular traits and dispositions for success are of the utmost importance when it comes to educating students (Farrington et al., 2012; Pattaro, 2016; Ripley, 2014; Tough, 2012; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). These persistently changing and demanding expectations evoke the question: how do schools begin to prepare students for the demands and inconstant expectations of 21st century life? An answer to this question is character education, noted as programs that foster students in developing noteworthy dispositions and traits for success in the 21st century (Pattaro, 2016).

In reviewing the literature surrounding character education research and 21st century life success, a substantial amount of research was conducted on the impact that particular programs had on students’ development of outlined traits (Bavarian et al., 2013; Durlak et al., 2011; Flay et al., 2012; Flay et al., 2013; Lewis et al., 2016; Mattix-Foster & Daly, 2016; Parker, 2016; Smokowski et al., 2016; Snyder et al., 2012; Snyder et al. 2013; Stewart-Burrison, 2014; Top, 2015). The research revealed a greater understanding of how particular programs not only supported the development of the outlined 21st century traits for success, but also how these programs influenced school climate, attendance, student behavior, and test scores (Bavarian et al., 2013; Bedard, 2016; Flay et al., 2012; Goss & Holt, 2014; Pike, 2009; Snyder et al., 2012, Snyder et al., 2013; Stewart-Burrison, 2014; Top, 2015). Furthermore, character education research has revealed that regardless of age, race, and gender, exposure to any type of regarded character education program promotes academic success and the development of other noteworthy traits for emotional learning (Jeynes, 2019).
Although many character education studies aim to further understand the impacts of character education programs on students and schools, there exists a gap in the research regarding teacher perspectives on and practices involving 21st century traits for success. Because the development of appropriate dispositions is crucial in maximizing academic and 21st century success, investigating teachers’ views on and methods of facilitating the development of certain dispositions is pertinent to implementing character education programs and evaluating their success.

This phenomenological study was designed to gain access into teachers’ views and facilitation of certain dispositions, particularly the disposition of academic commitment. Academic commitment, as a disposition necessary for 21st century success, involves the exhibition of perseverance, grit, and resilience towards academic challenges with an emphasis on setting goals, using failures to improve, reflecting on progress, and accepting feedback (Human-Vogel, 2013). From the criterion sampling of the district of focus’s administrators, six elementary school teachers from a Northeastern United States school district who were highly regarded in their facilitation of academic commitment were chosen and interviewed about their lived experiences with academic commitment, both professionally and personally. This investigation examined how teachers personally defined academic commitment, which traits they associated with academic commitment, strategies they employed for facilitating academic commitment, how they viewed academic commitment, factors they felt affected their views on academic commitment, and how these factors influenced the way they facilitated academic commitment.
This chapter will summarize the overall findings of this research study, particularly how teachers defined, viewed, and facilitated academic commitment. It will connect and illuminate the new knowledge that this research adds to the larger community of character education and also recommend further research on the phenomenon of academic commitment.

**Summary of the Results**

Because educators are the disseminators of instruction and the designers of academic experiences involving the facilitation of 21st century dispositions for their students, this research was designed to be teacher-centered. Even in implementing a guided character education program, teachers facilitate prescribed lessons in varying ways based on their beliefs and values when it comes to particular dispositions (Holtzapple et al., 2011). This research study was designed with the intention to illuminate teachers’ views on 21st century dispositions, specifically academic commitment, and to investigate how their views influence the manner in which they facilitate academic commitment in their students. This section will review the components of this study, explicitly discussing the research questions, theory, significance, and literature surrounding this research. It will also include the methodology and a brief summary of the findings.

**Review of research questions.** To fully discuss the collected and analyzed data from this research and generate conclusions, it is pertinent to review the research questions that framed and guided this entire research process. The two research questions, which were designed to gain access into the lived experiences of teachers distinguished in their facilitation of academic commitment, are:

1. How do teachers define and view academic commitment?
2. How does a teacher’s definition and view shape the way he or she facilitates academic commitment in students?

These questions were deliberately devised to establish a deeper understanding of the participants’ perspectives and journeys with the disposition of academic commitment. The two overarching research questions structured the two sets of interview questions, purposely created to divulge teachers’ views and strategies for facilitating academic commitment. The interview questions also explored how teachers’ personal academic journeys influenced their facilitation when it came to academic commitment.

**Theory, significance, and review of the literature.** To examine these research questions fully, it is essential to understand the underpinnings of character education and traits for 21st century success, such as academic commitment. Character education and character education programs are widely implemented to support students in developing necessary traits for 21st century success (Tough, 2012). Highly regarded character education programs, like SECD, SEL, the PA program, and various others have been found to support the development of specific traits for 21st century success (Bavarian et al., 2013; Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth, 2011; Durlak et al., 2011; Flay et al., 2012; Flay et al., 2013; Lewis et al., 2016; Martinez, 2015; Seider et al., 2013; Snyder et al., 2012; Snyder et al., 2013; Stewart-Burrison, 2014). Additionally, character education programs have been shown to support students of all ages, races, and genders in educational success and in developing traits for positive emotional development (Jeynes, 2019).

Character education programs, generally speaking, highlight particular traits deemed valuable for 21st century success. Traits frequently and highly regarded across character education research have been noted as persistence, grit, tenacity, self-control, and open-
mindedness (Scelfo, 2016; Tough, 2012). The school district of focus for this research had developed its own set of traits for success, which were described as dispositions and called the Shared Value Outcomes (SVOs). This research was designed to investigate the disposition of academic commitment, which was one of the district’s noted SVOs.

As the review of the literature progressed, the intention was to elucidate teachers’ beliefs and teaching practices regarding academic commitment. After reviewing the literature surrounding character education and 21st century life skills for success, it was noted that most of this research was student-centered and program-focused. These research studies were designed with the purpose of analyzing the impact of a particular program on student development of outlined traits or to demonstrate how particular programs influence school climate, attendance, behaviors, and test scores (Bavarian et al., 2013; Bedard, 2016; Clark, 2016; Durlak et al., 2011; Flay et al., 2012; Lewis, et al., 2016; Martinez, 2015; Parker, 2016; Seider et al., 2013; Smokowski et al., 2016; Snyder et al., 2013; Stewart-Burrison, 2014; Top, 2015; Washington, 2016).

As most of the reviewed character education research aimed to understand the impact of particular programs on student success, little research focused on how teachers support and facilitate academic and behavior skills for 21st century life success (Holtzapple et al., 2011; Snyder et al., 2012; Stuart, 2003). Character education research looking at teachers’ perspectives generally investigated how teachers valued particular traits rather than how they facilitated these traits in their students (Holtzapple et al., 2011; Snyder et al., 2012; Stuart, 2003). Due to the lack of research involving teacher perspectives and teaching practices, this study sought to further discern how teachers viewed and facilitated academic commitment in students with the greater
understanding that their personal experiences would ultimately influence their views and facilitation methods.

**Methodology**

To explore teachers’ experiences with facilitating academic commitment, this study employed the qualitative research methodology of phenomenology. Phenomenology, or phenomenological research, is defined as the study of a lived experience or phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). Phenomenological research was selected as the most suitable research methodology for this current investigation due to the need to understand how teachers assist students in developing academic commitment through the lens of their personal definitions, views, practices, and experiences with academic commitment. Phenomenology is the best way to access the lived experiences of participants, and this study aimed to understand the underpinnings of the participants’ views and perspectives in regard to academic commitment (Gall et al., 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

In designing this phenomenological study, criterion sampling was chosen and employed to recruit and select teachers to participate. Criterion sampling is primarily used in phenomenological research, as each participant must have experience with the outlined phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In employing criterion sampling, four of the district elementary administrators were asked for their support in providing a list of elementary-level teachers who they believed best exemplified the strong facilitation of academic commitment, including teachers who had attended professional development opportunities and collegial circles regarding the SVOs and academic commitment. Through this process, six elementary school teachers were recruited. These teachers served as the participant set for this study.
Each of the six participants was involved in a three-interview cycle designed intentionally to examine how teachers viewed and defined academic commitment, how they facilitated academic commitment, and how their personal experiences influenced their views and facilitation. The first interview specifically asked teachers to define terms, express views, and discuss facilitation strategies in regard to academic commitment. The second interview explored how the participants’ personal experiences influenced their views on and facilitation of academic commitment. The third and final interview was designed to serve as a member check, where participants were provided the opportunity to review their personal contributions to this research and provide any feedback or note any changes that they felt needed to be made before the research was published.

The data analysis process commenced both during and after the interview process. Throughout the interview process, the researcher engaged in reflexivity and bracketing, two necessary data analysis tools for phenomenological research (Ahern, 1999; Chan et al., 2013). To properly employ reflexivity, and thus bracketing, the researcher personally answered each of the interview questions before the interviews began and maintained a reflexive journal to note any potential biases and her personal impressions of each interview. The researcher’s responses to the interview questions and information recorded in the reflexive journal fostered the process of bracketing, where the researcher acknowledged and bracketed personal beliefs out of the findings so that the findings illuminated only the participants’ lived experiences (Ahern, 1999). Furthermore, explicit quotes were used throughout the discussion of the findings to reveal the essence of the participants’ accounts.

In addition to reflexivity and bracketing as data analysis tools, data analysis was structured using the data analysis spiral, specifically Colaizzi’s method—an esteemed tool in
analyzing phenomenological data (Morrow et al., 2015). This process required the repeated review of the interview transcripts to code interviews individually and to recognize commonalities across all interviews. To build connections between interviews and across all interviews, a qualitative data analysis software called ATLAS.ti was used. The ATLAS.ti software supported the coding process of the interview transcriptions and organized co-occurring codes into frequency tables. Additionally, through the co-occurrence function and the co-document table, the ATLAS.ti software provided the capability to analyze recurring codes within a single participant’s interviews as well as to holistically analyze recurring codes across clusters of meaning and all the interviews.

**Summary of Results**

In analyzing the data collected throughout this research process, recurring codes revealed clusters of meaning and supported the emergence of themes across all of the interview transcriptions. In reviewing and analyzing the data from the co-occurrence tables, clusters of meaning emerged. The clusters of meaning came from the codes recurring across all interview transcripts. Overall, five clusters of meaning emerged, and were given the following titles: traits and definitions for strong academic commitment, strategies/tools/modes for facilitating academic commitment, development of traits for academic commitment, impacts of strong academic commitment, and further considerations for supporting students in developing academic commitment (teacher-focused).

In the traits and definitions for strong academic commitment cluster of meaning, four themes emerged: dedication and focus, persistence, self-awareness, and open-mindedness. Each of these traits, from the participants’ perspectives, supported individuals in developing strong academic commitment and were noted in how the participants then facilitated academic
commitment in their students. For this cluster of meaning, these four themes revealed how the teachers defined individuals who were academically committed.

For the strategies/tools/modes for facilitating academic commitment cluster of meaning, six themes emerged: goal-setting processes and procedures, teachers as models of commitment, differentiation, reflection, collaboration, and communication. Each of these themes corresponded with the outlined traits for strong academic commitment that the participants discussed. The participants frequently referred to goal-setting processes and procedures as valuable when facilitating academic commitment. Additionally, the participants emphasized that teacher behavior and personal expectations were necessary, as teachers are models of commitment for their students. Differentiation, reflection, collaboration, and communication were all themes that emerged from the described teaching practices of the participants and were determined to be modes of facilitating academic commitment.

In regard to the development of traits for academic commitment cluster of meaning, themes connected to the reasons that participants provided when selecting particular strategies, tools, and modes of facilitation included the following: that experience impacts beliefs and that motivation drives purpose. The idea that experience impacts beliefs unfolded as the participants shared how their personal experiences influenced the way that they viewed academic commitment, and in turn the strategies, tools, and modes in which they facilitated academic commitment. Similarly, the participants collectively discussed how defining experiences shaped their motivations and purposes. These exchanges formed the theme that motivation drives purpose.

The impacts of possessing strong academic commitment cluster of meaning alluded to the outcomes of the developing traits for academic commitment cluster of meaning. Three themes
connected to this cluster of meaning were confidence, personal accountability, and reframing mindsets. These three themes emerged through participant accounts of designing instruction geared towards having students feel successful in their classrooms and take ownership of their learning and actions, while also reframing the ways that students react if they are struggling.

The final cluster of meaning, entitled *further considerations for teachers supporting students in developing academic commitment*, revealed three themes: collaboration amongst teachers, continued learning, and opportunities for further professional development and training. This cluster of meaning is separate from the other clusters of meaning as it pertains directly to how the participants felt their facilitation and understanding of academic commitment could be broadened. The importance of collaboration amongst teachers was derived from exchanges regarding how varying perspectives and strategies support greater understanding of a topic or a particular student. The theme of continued learning emerged through learning opportunities the participants sought that were not provided by the school district in focus. Finally, the theme of opportunities for further professional development and training arose from powerful experiences the participants described that the district in focus did provide to teachers.

**Discussion of the Results**

As clusters of meaning formed and themes emerged, answers to research questions were illuminated. Through the analysis and interpretation of the transcribed interviews, the essence of each participant’s experience was revealed and exposed the heart of this phenomenological study of how teachers view and facilitate academic commitment. This section will detail the results of this research in regard to the two research questions, the overall meaning of the results, and the theoretical implications for this study.
Implications for the first research question. The first research question was designed to investigate how teachers view and define academic commitment. As previously mentioned, the ways that teachers facilitate programs or particular traits and dispositions, is contingent on the ways that they view the given trait or disposition (Holtzapple et al., 2011). Thus, to fully understand how teachers facilitate academic commitment in students, it is essential to understand how teachers view and define academic commitment.

For this investigation, the participants revealed a positive attitude concerning their collective view of academic commitment, discussing it as a crucial disposition for achieving success in students and adults alike. All the teachers shared the sentiment that academic commitment was pertinent to both present and future success.

In addition to a positive view of academic commitment, the participants expressed similar defining traits for academic commitment. Throughout the analysis of the first and second interviews, the participants outlined traits associated with the development of academic commitment that were most frequently coded as dedication and focus; persistence, perseverance, and grit; communication and collaboration; and motivation, drive, and purpose. The teachers discussed these traits as necessary for teachers and students to possess in order to have strong academic commitment. For this participant set, academic commitment involved the process of being dedicated and focused on a task while persisting through the challenges, collaborating with others, and communicating ideas—all while being motivated to reach a given goal.

Consequently, the outlined traits also connected with how these traits were developed. Teachers in this study commonly discussed the codes of personal experiences shaping commitment and value in a community, roles, or purpose when it came to the development of traits for strong academic commitment, both in their personal lives and for their students.
Through their exchanges, the teachers each divulged how defining personal experiences molded their own academic commitment and subsequently influenced their facilitation of academic commitment in their students. In addition to personal experiences shaping commitment, the participants noted the value in fostering a classroom community that allowed students to feel valued and autonomous within the classroom structure and routines. These exchanges were coded as value in a community, roles, or purpose.

Based on the results of this research, the answer to the question of how teachers view and define academic commitment is that they believe that academic commitment is a necessary disposition for immediate and future success. The teachers defined academic commitment as the exhibition of dedication and focus through goal-setting, while persisting through challenges optimistically, collaborating with others to create connections and meaning, communicating ideas and thoughts, and being motivated to reach goals. In addition, they collectively shared the importance of how personal experiences shape views on academic commitment and esteemed the value of building a classroom community that promoted autonomy, purpose, and feeling valued.

**Implications for the second research question.** The second research question examined how teachers facilitate academic commitment based on their views and definitions of this disposition. In accordance with phenomenological research, this study sought to depict the essence of academic commitment through the lived experiences of the selected participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To depict the essence of academic commitment through the lived experiences of the participants, the second research question investigated how the participants’ personal experiences influenced their views and facilitations of academic commitment.

Across the interviews, when discussing how teachers’ views influenced their facilitations of academic commitment, the teachers of this study most frequently disclosed the impact of
teachers as models of commitment. The participants explained that they each believed that they were the models of the academic commitment that they desired their students to exhibit. Conjointly, the participants noted that knowing students well and having positive student-teacher relationships were crucial to facilitating academic commitment in their students.

Aligned with the findings that teachers should be models of academic commitment for their students and developing positive and deep relationships with their students, the concepts that emerged from the strategies were differentiation and student choice and goal-setting processes and procedures. Overall, as the participants discussed their roles as facilitators of academic commitment, modes of differentiation and providing students with choices in their learning were noted as valuable and necessary. The participants also discussed the relationship that existed between differentiation and student choice when facilitating goal-setting opportunities for their students. Goal-setting, as briefly shared in association with the first research question, was deemed fundamental in developing the disposition of academic commitment and was a component of all of the teachers’ facilitation.

Comprehensively, through the analysis of recurring codes across all the interview transcripts, the teachers’ views and definitions were determined to affect the ways that they facilitated academic commitment. This was revealed more specifically as they discussed modeling academic commitment traits and building positive relationships with their students, as they valued those individuals who influenced their views on academic commitment as well. Furthermore, the participants highlighted differentiation, student choice, and goal-setting as compelling and preferred modes of facilitating academic commitment in their students.

Based on the analysis of the interviews and the results of this study, a complete answer to the second research question is as follows: the teachers understood the impacts of their personal
experiences and the individuals who inspired their definitions of academic commitment to shape the way that they facilitated academic commitment in their students. This sentiment was revealed in the way that the teachers felt they must model academic commitment and foster positive relationships with their students in order to better facilitate academic commitment in their classrooms. The teachers emphasized differentiation, student choice, and goal-setting as the most critical modes of facilitating academic commitment in their students.

**Meaning of the Results**

This research provided deeper insights into the lived experiences of academic commitment from a small set of elementary teachers in a Northeastern United States school district. The selected participants of this research provided accounts illuminating collective definitions and values involved in facilitating academic commitment in this particular school district. Along with the collective definitions and values, this research exposed highly regarded facilitation practices commonly employed by the participants. As the district leadership continues to explore a district-wide understanding of the SVOs and academic commitment, the results uncovered in this study provide insight into the current sentiments and practices surrounding this disposition.

Because the school district at the focus of this research had previously developed the SVOs in response to the demands of 21st century learning, understanding how teachers view and define academic commitment as well as how they facilitate academic commitment is a powerful tool for disseminating instruction involving the SVOs. This research illuminated a shared definition of academic commitment exposed through the interviews with the six participants. Collectively, the participants defined academic commitment as a practice in which individuals
set personal goals, persist through challenges optimistically, collaborate with others to build greater understandings, and communicate newly learned information.

In addition to cultivating a shared definition of academic commitment, this research also supported the revelation of shared teaching practices amongst elementary educators selected by administrators for their exemplary facilitation of academic commitment. This revelation provides the district of focus with a bank of teaching practices promoting academic commitment, collectively utilized by the distinguished teachers. This bank includes practices such as goal-setting practices and procedures, differentiation, providing students with choice, reflection, and providing constructive feedback to students. These noteworthy facilitation practices are valuable in providing the district with a set of all-encompassing indicators for teachers to use district-wide when facilitating academic commitment in their students.

Furthermore, the results of this research elucidated a teacher community that values dispositions at the heart of their instruction. The district of focus should acknowledge that there exists a strong teacher sentiment towards the importance of these dispositions, as the district leadership continues to explore shared definitions and best teaching practices for the SVOs. The participants of this study expressed that they valued the instruction and facilitation of dispositions like academic commitment being at the forefront of their teaching practices as opposed to solely focusing on academic goals and expectations.

**Theoretical Implications**

This research divulged the importance of academic commitment through the development of a shared definition, a collective bank of facilitation strategies, and the synthesis of the participants’ lived experiences. These results occurred in alignment with sound phenomenological research methodology through the research design, organization, and analysis.
The research design, organization, and analysis allowed the research questions to be fully explored.

The soundness of this phenomenological research began with the way this study was designed, as it incorporated phenomenological sampling methods—specifically, criterion sampling. Criterion sampling, noted as the most prominent sampling strategy utilized in phenomenological studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018), supported the selection of teachers who had notably facilitated academic commitment as the participant set for this study. It should be noted that the use of criterion sampling allowed for teachers who were truly esteemed and experienced in facilitating academic commitment. By selecting teachers who were distinguished in their facilitation of academic commitment, as identified by district administrators, there was a certainty that the participants would be familiar with the disposition and have relevant experiences. In providing the option for voluntary participation, teachers who were truly interested and dedicated to facilitating academic commitment in students opted to participate.

Moreover, the research design employing interviews as the primary source of data collection in phenomenological research (Creswell, 1998) permitted in-depth understandings of the participants’ lived experiences of academic commitment. The employment of the interview cycle, compared to a single interview, allowed for increased opportunities to gain access into the lived experiences of the participants (Seidman, 1996). The results of this study were exposed through the transcription and analysis of the interviews. In utilizing a three-cycle interview process, the research questions were able to be completely answered, and the participants were allowed to fully express their accounts and beliefs. In designating each interview for a separate purpose—to understand views and facilitation and then to the divulge personal experiences behind the views—the participants were given the opportunity to focus on the specific topic of
the interview at hand and to build connections between interviews, more completely depicting the essence of the phenomenon of academic commitment.

The structure of the three-cycle interview process, combining informal interview techniques with guiding questions, enhanced the results of this research. The guiding interview questions (see Appendix F) extended the participants’ conversations and uncovered the essence of the participants’ lived experiences. The guiding questions also provided a detailed framework to more explicitly support access to the research questions. As most of the participants expressed a bit of nervousness during the interview process, the guiding questions helped them to be more comfortable in their responses.

In addition to the guiding questions, the engagement in reflexivity and bracketing permitted this research to illuminate only the participants’ lived experiences and beliefs, and not the researcher’s personal beliefs (Morrow et al., 2015). A reflexive journal was kept, where personal beliefs and thoughts pertaining to the interviews were noted. This supported the bracketing of the researcher’s view out of the research, which allowed a clearer depiction of the participants’ experiences. In turn, this validation process enabled sound phenomenological results to emerge.

The soundness of this phenomenological study continued through the analysis stage. The data analysis spiral/Colaizzi’s method and the ATLAS.ti software were unified to examine the transcribed interviews, recurring codes, clusters of meaning, and themes. The reiterative process of reviewing interview transcriptions through the data analysis spiral revealed codes, and consequently, themes related to the two research questions. Using the ATLAS.ti software, the recurring codes were stored and organized with the co-occurrence functionality by code and cluster of meaning, both within interviews and across interviews. This software provided the
capability to export the data into frequency tables and further develop relationships within interviews and across all interviews. This comprehensive data analysis procedure illuminated extensive results in association with the research questions.

**Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

Through the comprehensive data analysis procedure, answers to the research questions were illuminated and results concurrent with the literature surrounding character education were revealed. The results additionally exposed greater implications for the school district at the focus of this research and the greater community of scholars who will engage in future research. As this study builds upon the reviewed literature, the results illustrated the impact teachers have on students’ development towards dispositions, and in particular the disposition of academic commitment. This section will detail how the results of this research provided deeper insights for the community of practice, how they are connected to the literature, and their implications for the community of scholars.

**Implications for the community of focus.** The school district at the focus of this research served as the community of practice. As the community of practice, the school district includes students, staff, parents, and administrators. The results of this research are pertinent to the community of practice as this research was designed with the school district’s SVO of commitment to self, called academic commitment, as the studied phenomenon. In addition to studying the disposition of academic commitment, the researcher interviewed teachers in this school district to better understand how this district’s elementary teachers facilitated academic commitment.

The first implication for the community of practice that the results revealed was a better understanding of academic commitment, leading to a better understanding of the value of the
SVOs in connection with teaching practices. In exploring how the teachers of this school district viewed academic commitment, themes across the interviews supported the development of a deeper understanding of this disposition. Teachers expressed that academic commitment truly revealed itself in traits like dedication, focus, persistence, grit, motivation, open-mindedness, and self-awareness. The participants additionally shared that student practices such as goal-setting and feedback were proponents for developing stronger academic commitment. Along with goal-setting and feedback, teachers believed that their role in facilitating opportunities to support academic commitment growth included being role models for their students, developing positive student-teacher relationships, implementing differentiation, providing students with choices in their learning, and being honest with students.

As this study provided insight into teachers’ views, the district administrators can more fully understand how teachers express positive sentiments towards academic commitment and their values concerning facilitating academic commitment. Similar practices are likely also utilized in facilitating other SVOs as well, thus revealing most valued traits and practices when facilitating academic commitment in the students of the district.

Furthermore, synthesizing the most utilized and valued practices of the teachers supports the district in enhancing their culture of school-wide learning and in facilitating the SVOs across the entire community. Because teachers are at the forefront of the facilitation of SVOs, specifically academic commitment in relation to this study, synthesizing the most commonly employed and most valued practices of distinguished teachers could reinforce the emphasis placed on the SVOs moving forward.

**Implications for the literature.** As expressed, in relation to the community of practice, the results of this study aligned with the results of the literature reviewed. In particular, this
study revealed traits that teachers believed to be necessary in developing and facilitating academic commitment. *Effort traits*, concurrent with the research surrounding character education, were persistence, grit, perseverance, dedication, focus, and motivation, (Duckworth et al., 2007; Laursen, 2015; Seider et al., 2013; Seligman & Peterson, 2004; Tough, 2012). Other noted traits from the results of this study, also concurrent with the literature and relating to mindset, included optimism in facing struggle, self-awareness, and open-mindedness (Chowdhury, 2016; Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth, 2011; Lewis et al., 2016; Smokowski et al., 2016).

Holtzapple et al. (2011) emphasized that facilitating 21st century dispositions yields the best results when administrators express the importance of these traits. Therefore, teachers are more motivated and dedicated to facilitating dispositions and character education programs when the administrators emphasize the importance of these dispositions (Holtzapple et al., 2011). His emphasis connects to the results of this current study as the teachers expressed the importance of teachers as role models for students when it comes to facilitating dispositions like academic commitment. As both administrators and teachers in the district emphasize the importance of these dispositions, the students could become more motivated to work towards the development of the SVOs.

Teachers in this study discussed the value in developing positive relationships and classroom communities in which each student felt important when facilitating dispositions. The development positive relationships and classroom communities connected to the literature as the amount of exposure that students had to practicing dispositions in quality classroom environments with esteemed teachers was positively correlated with gaining dispositions (Holtzapple et al., 2011). The teachers in this research study expressed how fostering a
classroom community of positive relationships and autonomy created the strongest environment for facilitating dispositions like academic commitment.

**Implications for the community of scholars.** As this research was designed to investigate teachers’ perspectives and facilitation of dispositions, particularly academic commitment, the results of this study illuminated new understandings for the larger community of scholars on character education. Specifically, it revealed teachers’ attitudes, defined traits and student practices, and illuminated teacher strategies and modes of facilitation, all in relation to academic commitment. As teachers are the ultimate facilitators of academic commitment, examining their values, perspectives, and facilitation strategies affects the education community at large.

First, understanding that esteemed teachers value dispositions like academic commitment when planning lessons and educating students is important to the community at large because teachers are the individuals most directly working with students. Therefore, exposing the belief that teachers’ modes and attitudes towards facilitation come from profound experiences and influential individuals throughout their personal and professional journeys sheds light on how views are developed and how facilitation strategies are selected. As teachers noted that profound experiences and influential individuals shaped their views of the dispositions, providing students with firsthand experiences and opportunities to practice are essential in facilitating disposition growth in students (Brannon, 2012; Laursen, 2015; Lee, 2013).

Second, when teachers model and promote traits and dispositions for 21st century success, the participants felt that it increased the buy-in for students to embody these traits as well. If modeling academic commitment is crucial to teachers when it comes to facilitating students in developing these dispositions, providing students with opportunities to practice these
traits will be a natural consequence. As teachers foster and facilitate opportunities for students to receive more exposure to dispositions highlighted for 21st century success, students’ chances to experience more growth in these dispositions and traits will increase (Smokowski et al., 2016). The participants placed great emphasis on developing a culture that values dispositions for 21st century success where administrators, teachers, students, and the school community emphasize and continually express the importance of developing these traits for success.

**Limitations**

Though this research truly unveiled the essence of academic commitment as experienced by the six participants, there some limitations existed that could be improved upon by extended research on this phenomenon. Limitations of this research involved the selection of participants and the focus on one particular school district.

First, this study recruited a small number of teachers who served as the participant set for this research. Although the small number of participants was within the recommended range of participants for phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994), the limited number of teachers could have restricted the findings of this study. In addition, the participant set included only elementary school teachers, as they spend the entire school day with a single group of students and foster academic commitment in a more direct way as a result. However, limiting the research to only elementary school teachers may have affected the results and inhibited the transferability to other settings and levels of teachers.

Aside from limiting the research to only elementary school teachers, the employment of criterion sampling enhanced the research in various ways, but may have restricted a general sentiment of academic commitment due to the participants being acknowledged for their
dedication to facilitating academic commitment. Additionally, criterion sampling provided a limited selection of teachers who happened to be only Caucasian females.

A final limitation for this research study was that it focused solely on one school district’s elementary school teachers. The results of this research could look different if the research was implemented in a different school district, especially a district with a lack of training in the particular disposition of academic commitment. Though this study was intentionally designed to explore the focus school district’s facilitation of academic commitment, interviewing only teachers from this district limits the transferability of the results to other programs and school districts focusing on traits and dispositions for 21st century success.

Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

The reviewed literature surrounding character education research has exposed esteemed traits and indicated positive outcomes of success when implementing character education programs. This study reinforced the findings of previous research and illuminated new findings in regard to exploring a teacher-focused perspective on the disposition of academic commitment. In discussing the implications of the results concerning practice, policy, and theory, the following section will divulge the main theory of this research and reveal new understandings gained from this research study.

Implications for theory. Throughout the literature surrounding character education, researchers explored the impacts of various traits and dispositions on the outcomes of students’ academics and behaviors. One major conclusion threaded throughout character education research was that in order to be successful in the 21st century, students will be required to exhibit proficiency in more than just academics (Baehr, 2017; Ripley, 2014; Tough, 2012). When preparing students for proficiency in more than just academics, exposure to and instruction on
traits such as grit, perseverance, and *self* traits are important in supporting students in their futures (Baehr, 2017).

These research studies were mainly focused on understanding the impacts of various character education programs on the exposure of outlined traits and to the improvement of test scores, attendance rates, and school-wide behavior, most frequently utilizing students as participants. Consequently, this research was designed to further explore teachers’ perspectives on the disposition of academic commitment as it involves traits like perseverance and *self* traits, outlined by character education research, and to explore how teachers go about facilitating academic commitment in their students, as academic commitment is valued for 21st century success.

The main theory of the current research, as expressed in the literature review, is that instructing students in the development of dispositions like academic commitment will support students in attaining 21st century success. Furthermore, exploring how teachers facilitate academic commitment in their students would be valuable, as little research has exposed teacher practices and views regarding character education.

This study was developed and operated under the premise developed through extensive prior research surrounding 21st century success that facilitating dispositions and traits, outlined as *traits for success*, supports students in succeeding in the present and in their futures (Baehr, 2017; Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth, 2011; Ripley, 2014; Seligman, 2011; Tough, 2012). The results of this study supported the finding that facilitating dispositions and traits support students in their present and future success, as the participants expressed the importance of facilitating academic commitment in their students and highly valued assisting students in developing these traits. The traits participants divulged as critical in facilitating academic
commitment were dedication, focus, persistence, perseverance, grit, communication, collaboration, self-awareness, open-mindedness, and motivation.

The traits that the participants of this study outlined correlated with traits noted throughout the literature analyzed. Particular traits that frame the facilitation of academic commitment, as exposed by both this research and previous research, are persistence, perseverance, grit, motivation, open-mindedness, and self-awareness (Baehr, 2017; Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth, 2011; Seligman & Peterson, 2004; Ripley, 2014; Seligman, 2011; Tough, 2012). These traits were found to support students and schools in improving test scores and GPAs, behaviors, attendance rates, and school climate, in both short and long-term evaluations (Bavarian et al., 2013; Chowdhury, 2016; Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth, 2011; Durlak et al., 2011; Flay et al., 2012; Flay et al., 2013; Lewis et al., 2016; Martinez, 2015; Seider et al., 2013; Snyder et al., 2012; Snyder et al., 2013; Stewart-Burrison, 2014; Top, 2015). Similarly, the teachers in this research expressed the value of these traits and provided instruction on these traits to facilitate academic commitment in their students. The participants also noted the impact that they believed these traits to have on students’ growth towards becoming academically committed.

**New understandings from this research.** As this research was designed to illuminate a gap in the reviewed research, in which students were generally the focus and participant set, new understandings were divulged regarding the ways that teachers view and facilitate a disposition for 21st century success. Thus, as other researchers have aimed to understand impacts on students as opposed to evaluating teachers’ positions in facilitating dispositions like academic commitment, new understandings gained from this research relate to teacher views and facilitation techniques regarding academic commitment. In selecting participants who were
distinguished in their facilitation of academic commitment, noteworthy practices and sentiments surrounding academic commitment were illuminated. Noteworthy practices and sentiments towards academic commitment are new findings in the field of character education research.

The participants expressed that their beliefs and facilitation practices had formed from their prior experiences and is a new finding in character education research. These experiences transformed the teachers’ personal life journeys, and their professional careers as well. In delving deeper into the meaning behind these experiences, teachers discussed how defining moments where their commitment was tested supported their beliefs, views, and attitudes towards the disposition of academic commitment. Additionally, in relation to experiences transforming academic commitment, the participants discussed various individuals who inspired and molded their views, beliefs, and attitudes. Individuals like parents, coaches, professional development presenters, and teachers inspired these participants’ views and definitions of academic commitment.

The most prominent new understanding gained from the current research study is the view that teachers should be and are models of academic commitment for students. Teachers expressed the essentiality of how they modeled commitment for their students, particularly noting how students admired and imitated teachers’ behaviors. These viewpoints were developed through experiences and role models of commitment that supported the transformation of the participants’ views and definitions. As the participants shared the strong sentiment that their students could sense their academic commitment, they expressed how other teachers and collaborative opportunities had shifted their views and perspectives on academic commitment in turn.
Furthermore, the valued practices of teachers as models of commitment were built from another theme: that fostering positive relationships with students mattered most in creating a culture of commitment in classrooms. The teachers expressed how students needed to trust their teachers in order to feel comfortable and become more academically committed. Building positive relationships with students took place through being honest, giving both positive and constructive feedback, and being transparent with expectations. Fostering these relationships, as the participants expressed, requires teachers to express challenges that they face and display the behaviors that they are expecting of their students—again, acting as models of commitment. As positive relationships are built, teachers also noted that students begin to feel valued in the classroom community, and to feel that they are important to the community as a whole. Furthermore, the participants shared, that when students feel valued in the classroom community they will become motivated to reach higher levels of academic commitment.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Reading and reviewing quality research provokes critical thinking and inspires new and further investigations. An initial recommendation for further research would be to replicate this study in other settings and across varied grade levels. Replicating this research in other regions of the United States could provide deeper insights into the disposition of academic commitment. If the replication of this research study following similar methodology generated similar results, the findings of these studies could expound important findings in regard to facilitating academic commitment and other dispositions noted for 21st century success.

In response to limited emphasis on teachers as participants in character education research, this study was designed to illuminate teachers’ perspectives in regard to facilitating dispositions. It could be informative and constructive if further research studies sought to
investigate teachers’ impressions and facilitation practices regarding dispositions other than academic commitment highlighted for success in the 21st century. Information regarding impressions and facilitation practices for other dispositions could provide deeper insights into best teaching practices regarding academic commitment and reveal a dedication towards facilitating traits for future student success. As character education and disposition facilitation becomes more relevant and more commonly employed, understanding how teachers view these dispositions and the ways that they facilitate these dispositions will be helpful in cultivating programs and cultures of disposition learning.

Similarly, in addition to using criterion sampling, further research could highlight and bring awareness to how teachers view particular dispositions by using surveys. The surveys could direct participants to personally associate with particular personality traits and dispositions. The employment of these surveys could provide researchers with information regarding particular traits that teachers believe they possess. Findings of the surveys would provide the capability to build connections between the traits that teachers most associate academic commitment with and how these traits influence their facilitation of dispositions. The research question driving this research could be: how do particular personality traits influence the ways teachers view and facilitate academic commitment?

Finally, understanding how professional development, either self-directed or school-district-directed, would be useful. Professional development was briefly exposed in this research as teachers noted quality experiences that had supported their beliefs and their facilitations of academic commitment in their students. Further research centered on how professional learning opportunities influence teaching practices regarding 21st century traits for success could disclose compelling information for school district administrators to consider when planning professional development.
development for their staff. Noting particular professional development presenters and programs that influenced teachers’ facilitation techniques as well as understanding self-directed learning opportunities that teachers engage in could provide school district leaders with valuable information with which to support the development of stronger character education programs and teaching strategies. Additionally, the organization of quality faculty professional development and higher quality professional development could support school districts nationwide.

Conclusion

This research study illuminated the viewpoints and methods of six elementary school teachers, distinguished for their facilitation of academic commitment and experiences with the phenomenon of academic commitment. In illuminating the lived experiences of the participants involved in this research study, this study sought to understand teachers’ views on and methods for facilitating the disposition of academic commitment. An understanding of how teachers form positive views of academic commitment could support the school district of focus in cultivating a school-wide culture of commitment and other SVOs.

In this study, themes in defining academic commitment and shaping facilitation of academic commitment emerged. First, educators deem traits such as persistence, perseverance, grit, motivation, purpose, dedication, focus, open-mindedness, and self-awareness as valuable when facilitating and defining academic commitment. Teachers expressed the value of both students and teachers developing and possessing these traits to further academic commitment and success.

Second, as a new finding in regard to research involving character education, the educators interviewed divulged how their personal experiences greatly influenced their values in regard to facilitating academic commitment in their students. Through the interviews, the
teachers shared that the most valuable mode of facilitating academic commitment was for teachers to be models of the expectations they set for their students. Being a model of academic commitment, to the teachers, involved embodying traits like being persistent, being optimistic through challenges, and transparently expressing their dedication to their profession.

In addition to modeling academic commitment for their students, these educators disclosed the importance of nurturing an inclusive, positive, classroom community through building relationships and providing roles for each student within the community. The general sentiment expressed by the teachers in regard to building a positive classroom community was that in order to persist through challenges, students needed to feel supported and connected to the classroom; students needed to feel valued in order to become more academically committed.

Feeling valued in a community applied personally to the teachers in this study, as they expressed motivation to persist when they felt valued and needed in a community, which provides insight for the school district leaders as they continue to foster a culture that primarily values the development and facilitation of dispositions in their community. Fostering a culture of facilitating dispositions reveals the value of possessing these SVOs for students and staff and creates a culture that is devoted to success.

Teachers dedicated to facilitating academic commitment in their students strive to provide opportunities that promote students in becoming successful 21st century learners. These teachers have outlined the embodiment of the dispositions for success and highlighted nurturing positive relationships with their students as pertinent in facilitating academic commitment in their classrooms. As these teachers revealed the importance of embodying specific values and nurturing supportive relationships, the culture of developing academic commitment should be centered on providing community members with opportunities to develop specified traits for
academic commitment coupled with signifying the importance of developing academic commitment. The development of this culture ultimately should help to prepare students for the demanding expectations of 21st century life and workplaces.
References


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Appendix A: Components of Character Education and 21st Century Life Skills

How do character education programs help students develop attributes essential to 21st century work place success?

**Programs (and Terms)**
- Social Emotional Character Development (SECD)
- Social Emotional Learning (SEL)
- Positive Action (PA)
- Early Act Knight First (EAKF)
- Primary Years Programme (PYP)
- Character Counts!

**Influential Theorists/Researchers**
- Aristotle
- Poffenberger & Carpenter (1924)
- Martin Seligman: Learned Optimism
- Dave Levin (KIPP Schools)
- Stuart and Bostrom (2005)

**Outputs for Success**
- Test Scores, Grades, GPA
- Prosocial Behavior
- Attendance
- Decrease in Substance Abuse and Violence

**Methods/Evaluation Tools**
- Surveys, Questionnaires, Scales
  - Resilience Scales
  - Academic Motivation and Integrity Survey
  - Children's Empathic Attitudes Questionnaire
  - Youth Social Responsibility Scale
  - Values in Action Inventory of Character Strengths in Youth
- Pre/Post Test (Analysis of Attendance, GPA, etc.)
- Interviews

**Character Traits & Attributes**
- Grit
- Resilience
- Perseverance
- Tenacity
- “Self” Traits
- Openness
- Adversity
- Learned Optimism
Given the data on character education and development of character traits, it is apparent that character education programs are valued as solutions to various educational issues such as academic grades, behaviors, attendance, substance abuse, and violence.
Appendix C: Consent Form

Research Study Title: How Teachers Facilitate Academic Commitment in Elementary School Students: A Phenomenological Study
Principal Investigator: Lindsay Feibus
Research Institution: Concordia University–Portland
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Trish Lichau

Purpose and what you will be doing:
The purpose of this study is to better understand how elementary teachers facilitate academic commitment in their students. We expect approximately six volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on __________ and end enrollment on __________. To be in the study, you will be asked to participate in a three-cycle interview process involving three one-to-one interviews, which will be audio recorded and deleted after the interviews have been transcribed and member checked. You will be asked to collect and bring any documents associated with your facilitation of academic commitment to the first interview. Participation in this research study should take less than four total hours of your time.

Risks:
There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your experiences regarding academic commitment. However, the information provided and collected will be protected. I will audio-record the interviews for accuracy in transcription. The recordings will be transcribed by me, the principal investigator, and the recordings will be deleted after the transcription is completed. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be password protected and encrypted in a secure external storage device. When the researcher reviews the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information attached to it. I will refer to your data with a code that is used consistently throughout all documentation. This way, your personally identifiable information will not be attached to the data. I will not personally identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times, and all study documents will be destroyed three years after this study is concluded.

Benefits:
Information you provide will help support a greater understanding of what academic commitment means to our school district and teachers. You could benefit from this experience by learning more about your personal teaching practices in facilitating academic commitment as well as the practices other teachers use to facilitate academic commitment. Also, as a participant in this study, you will be contributing to strengthening an understanding of how teachers view and facilitate academic commitment. This is a noble effort to improve education in general.
Confidentiality:
This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential at all times. As I am a mandated reporter, the only exception to this assurance is if you tell me about a situation involving abuse or neglect that would make me seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:
Your participation is greatly appreciated, but I acknowledge that the questions I am asking may be personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, I will stop asking you questions.

Contact Information:
You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have, any questions feel free to talk to or write the principal investigator, Lindsay Feibus at the email addresses [redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

Participant Name ___________________________ Date ___________
Participant Signature ___________________________ Date ___________
Investigator Name ___________________________ Date ___________
Investigator Signature ___________________________ Date ___________

Investigator: Lindsay Feibus email: [redacted]
c/o: Professor Trish Lichau
Concordia University–Portland
2811 NE Holman Street
Portland, Oregon 97221
Appendix D: Initial Recruitment Email

Dear ________________,

I am currently pursuing my doctoral degree, and I am writing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in my research. The purpose of the research I am conducting is to better understand how teachers facilitate academic commitment (commitment to self) in elementary school students.

I am seeking six elementary-level teachers, highlighted by administrators, for their notable work in fostering academic commitment in their students and classrooms. Administrators have highlighted you as a strong candidate for this research, however, they will not know if you choose to participate for confidentiality purposes.

Participation in this research will require three one-to-one interviews and in total, less than four hours of your time. Please see the attached flyer for more details.

If you are interested, please email me at [redacted].

Thank you for your time and interest.

Lindsay Feibus
What does academic commitment mean to you?

How do you foster academic commitment in your students?

Purpose: The investigator seeks to better understand how elementary school teachers are facilitating academic commitment (commitment to self) in students.

Criteria: Participants of this study must be elementary school teachers who have notable experience (identified by district administrators) facilitating academic commitment (commitment to self) in elementary school students.

Participation Requirements: Participation in this study will involve three one-to-one interviews, which will be audio recorded for transcription (deleted upon transcription). Participation in this study will total to less than 4 hours of your time.

Benefits: As a participant in this study, you will be contributing to a greater cause which will help strengthen an understanding of how teachers view and facilitate academic commitment.

Seeking Elementary School Teachers for a Doctoral Research Study

Contact Information

If interested, please contact:
Lindsay Feibus at [redacted]
Appendix F: Interview Questions

Interview #1 Questions

Directions: Describe your experiences with teaching and facilitating academic commitment.

Academic commitment for the purposes of this research is defined as persistence towards academic challenges, including goal-setting, monitoring, acceptance, the implementation of feedback, self-reflection, and using failure to improve. You will be asked to describe your values when it comes to teaching students how to develop academic commitment and what academic commitment looks like in your classroom. You will also be asked to bring documents to this interview to use as talking points throughout this discussion. Please feel free to elaborate on the questions. You may elect to not answer questions, as well.

1) Describe your personal definition of academic commitment. How do you define academic commitment?

2) What does academic commitment generally look like in your classroom? Describe any particular activities, protocols, procedures, practices, and so on that you would like to discuss.

3) What do you value, as a teacher, when it comes to supporting students as academically committed individuals?

4) How do you portray/reveal/share these values with your students?

5) Describe some of the techniques you have used and continue to use to facilitate academic commitment.

6) Which noteworthy characteristics/traits/skills do students who exhibit strong academic commitment possess?

7) How do you go about fostering these characteristics/traits/skills?
**Interview #2 Questions**

**Directions**: You will describe your own personal experiences with the disposition of academic commitment as well as how those experiences influence the way you facilitate academic commitment today.

1) What are your beliefs/opinions about academic commitment, both in school and as an adult?

2) Please describe your past and present experiences as an academically committed individual (commitment to self).

3) Which personal experiences with academic commitment were most memorable? Why?

4) How do you infuse your personal academic commitment experiences into your teaching?

5) How do these experiences shape the way you facilitate academic commitment with students?

6) How have your experiences as an academically committed individual influenced how you plan for student learning in your classroom?

7) How has your training for academic commitment supported your planning for your classroom?
Interview #3 Questions

Directions: This interview will serve as a member check to ensure that you are comfortable and agree with the details of your contributions to this research. I will ask you to closely review the findings of the study and share your thoughts and opinions about the collected information. Feel free to ask questions and clarify any misunderstandings you encounter.

Discussion will be completely open-ended here. The researcher will not ask specific questions.
## Appendix G: Most Recurrent Codes by Research Question

### Most Frequent Codes Separated by Research Question

#### Research Question 1: How do teachers define and view academic commitment?  
(Traits for Strong Academic Commitment and the Development of these Traits)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Title</th>
<th>Frequency (all interviews)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedication/focus</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence/perseverance/grit</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication/collaboration</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation/purpose/drive</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varying levels of commitment</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal experiences shaping commitment</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value in a community/roles/purpose</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-minded/self-aware</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment as a process</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal accountability/group accountability</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence/seek feedback/use resources</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Research Question 2: How does a teacher’s definition and view shape the way they facilitate academic commitment in students?  
(Strategies/Tools/Modes of Facilitating Academic Commitment and the Impacts of Developing Academic Commitment Traits)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Title</th>
<th>Frequency (all interviews)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers modeling commitment/role models</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing students well/positive student-teacher relationships</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving students choices</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal-setting (processes and procedures)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being honest/feedback/teacher transparency</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value in a community; feeling successful/confident</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honoring growth/ownership of end product</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindset/attitude/opportunities for struggle</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Further Considerations for Facilitating Academic Commitment: Teacher-Focused

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Title</th>
<th>Frequency (all interviews)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration amongst teachers</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside professional development opportunities</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal continued learning</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording growth and reflection</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H: Participant Framework Used for Profile Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Degree Level Held:</th>
<th>Additional Credit Hours:</th>
<th>Number of Years Teaching:</th>
<th>Grade Level Range:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School:</td>
<td>Gender:</td>
<td>Ethnicity:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes on Classroom Environment and Essence of Interview Experience:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Frequent Codes Related to Research Question #1</th>
<th>Most Frequent Codes Related to Research Question #2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideas about Further Considerations for Teachers:</td>
<td>Major Points/Important Quotes:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I: Participant Profile Recurring Codes

**Recurring Codes Across Interviews 1 and 2 for Jamie**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recurring Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>feeling successful, confidence</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>individualize learning, choice</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reflection process</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teachers as models of commitment</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication, collaboration, teamwork</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dedication, focus</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>different levels</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meeting students at their levels</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher planning/organization</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differentiation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goal-setting, processes, procedures</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning about yourself</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motivation drives purpose</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open-minded</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>optimism from struggle</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recurring Codes Across Interviews 1 and 2 for Rachel**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recurring Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>goal-setting, processes, procedures</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dedication, focus</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feedback with the process in mind</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>process of growth and understanding</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accountability</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication, collaboration, teamwork</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differentiation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>independence</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motivation drives purpose</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>process versus product</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>providing purpose and structure</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student-constructed resources</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>choice</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partnerships for accountability</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>models, mentor texts</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Recurring Codes Across Interviews 1 and 2 for Jane

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recurring Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dedication, focus</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>levels of personal expectation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal accountability</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goal-setting, processes, procedures</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowing your students well, planning accordingly</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration amongst teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication, collaboration, teamwork</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>different levels</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>movement, growth</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>persistence</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attitudes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>choice</td>
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<tr>
<td>home-school connection</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>connection with parents</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>differentiation</td>
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</table>

### Recurring Codes Across Interviews 1 and 2 for Sarah

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recurring Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dedication, focus</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differentiation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goal-setting, processes, procedures</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>persistence</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-awareness</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration amongst teachers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>continued learning</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mindfulness</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>observing children</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open-minded</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being prepared</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>choice</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>desire to improve</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exploration</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flexibility</td>
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</table>
### Recurring Codes Across Interviews 1 and 2 for Hannah

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recurring Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>persistence</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>teachers as models of commitment</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>desire to improve</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>build community, positive environment</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transparency</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accountability</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attitudes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being honest about expectations</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beliefs from experiences</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>structure through reminding</td>
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<tr>
<td>commitment is a choice</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commitment now helps future commitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>communication, collaboration, teamwork</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>dedication, focus</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>defining moments, transitions</td>
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### Recurring Codes Across Interviews 1 and 2 for Billie-Jean

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recurring Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<td>positive relationships with students</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>choice</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curiosity</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dedication, focus</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>individualized learning, choice</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>levels of personal expectation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>making connections in learning</td>
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<td>passion</td>
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<tr>
<td>persistence</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being honest about expectations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beliefs from experiences</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>build community, positive environment</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teachers as models of commitment</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differentiation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motivation drives purpose</td>
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Appendix J: Participant Profile Outliers

Outliers in the Coded Data based on Theme Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traits for Strong Academic Commitment</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Code Title</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-behaved/quiet</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being prepared</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment is innate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies/Tools/Modes of Facilitating Academic Commitment</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Code Title</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play (kids playing)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development of Academic Commitment Traits</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Code Title</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time for kids to play</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice (repetition)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impacts of Developing Academic Commitment Traits</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Code Title</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing new outlooks and perspectives</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does “fraudulent” mean?

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

What is “unauthorized” assistance?

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.
Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

Lindsay T. Feibus

Digital Signature

Lindsay T. Feibus

Name (Typed)

5/18/2019

Date