Novice Teacher Attrition in Title I Schools: A Case Study

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Novice Teacher Attrition in Title I Schools: A Case Study

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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
Teacher Leadership

Julie M. McCann, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee
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Abstract

Novice teacher attrition is an international K–12 problem. This dilemma is most prevalent in low-performing schools that are also classified as hard-to-staff. In this qualitative case study, data were collected through a confidential online survey, a one-on-one interview, and a conference call focus group. Five teachers who taught at low-performing Title I middle schools during their first three years teaching were selected to participate in the study. The inquiry was viewed through a conceptual framework that combined social constructivism, human capital theory, path-goal theory, and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. In this study, the factors found to contribute most to novice teacher attrition were leadership, collegiality, and school culture. The results revealed that the intermingling of these factors made it possible to identify that each variable contributed to the problem but made it difficult to specify how each one impacted the others. The novice teachers’ decisions to leave their initial teaching assignment proved to be a product of the interconnected elements. The conclusions of the study have significant practical implications for school district leaders and school building leadership to provide support for their highly qualified novice teachers, deliberately foster collegiality and grow the school culture.

Keywords: novice teacher attrition, leadership, collegiality, school culture
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my granddaughter, Sabai, and to all of my grandchildren to follow.

Always step forward and grow, don’t take solace in what you already know. (paraphrase of Abraham Maslow)
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Above all, I give thanks to Almighty God, my Savior, who gave me strength to battle on and complete not just this degree, but this dissertation. Truly His grace was sufficient for me and His strength was made perfect in my weakness throughout this process.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Teacher attrition is a barrier that negatively impacts school success, school district efficiency, teachers’ career plans, and more significantly, student achievement. This phenomenon refers to a departure from one’s teaching assignment, including leaving the profession permanently or voluntarily changing the location at which a teacher is employed (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008; Karsenti & Collins, 2013). Several studies provided results that indicated teacher attrition was one of the most critical issues American education faced (Boyer & Hamil, 2008; Croasmun, Hampton, & Herrmann, 1997; Frankson, 2017). Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas (2016) posited that teacher attrition had grown in epic proportions that lead to a crisis in the United States as the annual shortfall for teachers was projected to range between 40,000 and 112,000 by 2018 and remain above 100,000 in the 2020s. The exodus of large numbers of trained teachers from the profession created a severe drain. Facilitating teacher growth towards instructional effectiveness and increasing teacher retention within schools were major means of reversing this adverse trend in the world of K–12 education. This study was an investigation of the conditions within Title I schools that influence the decision of teachers with three years of teaching experience or less who either left the profession or sought employment at another school.

Introduction to the Problem

Many school systems across the United States faced a severe shortage of knowledgeable and skilled teachers (Ingersoll, 2002; Jacob, 2007; Sutcher et al., 2016). Conventional wisdom would suggest that this was a result of veteran teachers retiring at a rate that exceeded the ability of teacher education programs to produce their replacements. However, research revealed that
this was not the case (Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll, Merrill, Stuckey, & Collins, 2018; Sutcher et al., 2016). Sutcher et al. (2016) asserted that “[t]he teaching force . . . [loses] hundreds of thousands of teachers each year—the majority of them before retirement age” (p. 2). In fact, Sutcher et al. (2016) further stated that teachers who retire were less than one third of the teachers who leave the professional annually.

Teaching is known to be one of the most challenging occupations in today’s society (Vesely, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013). The constantly increasing demands and ever-changing requirements, both within and outside of the classroom, increase the obligations of teachers (Caruso, Giammanco, & Gitto, 2014; Hancock & Scherff, 2010). Requirements for documenting special needs services as well as accommodations and modifications made to instruction for English Language Learners have created added responsibilities for teachers. Additionally, data-driven instruction, standards-based planning and the inclusion of new technology in the classroom have also generated more responsibilities for teachers. In many cases, the teacher’s response to the multiple requirements of the job is to leave the profession (Bisaillon, 2018; Mulvahill, 2018; Reichardt, Snow, Schlang, & Hupfeld, 2008).

Some level of attrition is common among newcomers to any profession (Lindqvist, Nordänger, & Carlsson, 2014; Riggs, 2013; Westervelt, 2016). However, attrition is alarmingly prevalent among those new to teaching, especially in underachieving schools (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009). Over the last three decades, researchers examined the high attrition rate among novice teachers. Many of these studies focused on concerns such as poor working circumstances, lack of autonomy in the classroom, and the stresses of high-stakes testing. Costigan (2005) referred to these matters as “quality-of-life issues” (p. 126) that were introduced into all teachers’ lives as a direct result of the nature of modern-day teaching.
Ingersoll (2002) reported that all non-teaching professions combined have an annual attrition rate of 11% which increased to 15.7% for teaching at the time of this study. A report of the data collected in a longitudinal study of attrition and movement of novice teachers prepared for the United States Department of Education in 2014 revealed that in public schools across the nation during the 2010/2011 academic year more than 17% of teachers (26,000) left the teaching profession (Gray & Taie, 2015).

Gray and Taie in the National Center for Educational Statistics report of 2015 stated that 37% of beginning teachers who began teaching in the 2008/2009 academic year left the profession during the first three years in pursuit of other careers. This number was comparable to 33.5% in a similar report published in 2004 (Yost, 2006). Other researchers reported teacher attrition ranges between 10% and 50% across the country (DiCarlo, 2015; Will, 2018). Regardless of which end of the spectrum a school fell, the problem of novice teacher attrition outpaced the increasing numbers of annual graduation and employment of teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Downey, 2019; Lindqvist et al., 2014). While turnover was unsettlingly high among teachers at large, at an annual rate of 8% (Sutcher et al., 2016), it is highest among novice teachers in the early years of their career (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Marvel et al., 2007; NYU, 2017). As a result, many teachers left the classroom before gaining sufficient experience required to excel in their chosen profession. Research indicated that, for most teachers, “effectiveness increases with experience” (Kini & Podolsky, 2016).

New teachers often became overwhelmed by the many challenges of the school environment and sometimes they were unable to cope (Goodwin, 2012; Mulvahill, 2018). This was more evident in atmospheres that did not surround, nurture, and assist teachers enough for them to succeed and flourish as they gained on-the-job experience (Goodwin, 2012;
Maciejewski, 2007). Oftentimes, when teachers found themselves feeling isolated and faced with difficult working conditions early in their careers, they chose either to move to another school in an attempt to find the support, nurturing and professional development they desired or to serve higher achieving students with higher socioeconomic statuses, or they left the teaching profession altogether (Joiner & Edwards, 2008). Research examining the reasons for teacher attrition indicated that there were several causes for this phenomenon, ranging from inadequacies in professional support to inefficiencies in leadership (Sutcher et al., 2016; Westervelt & Lonsdorf, 2016).

It was critical to have experienced teachers for the benefit of student achievement, academically and in other areas like school attendance. Researchers postulated that there was a direct causal relationship between competent, experienced teachers and students’ academic achievement (Akiri, 2013; Meissel, Parr, & Timperley, 2016). Teacher quality and experience translated into higher levels of student achievement (Goe & Stickler, 2008; Policy Studies Associates, 2005). Kini and Podolsky (2016) even contended that experienced teachers in classrooms led to higher levels of student school attendance and create opportunities for higher levels of student achievement for their less experienced colleagues. Some researchers hypothesized that the correlation between teacher quality and student performance was negative in cases where there was chronic attrition as the incoming teachers usually lacked the experience and skill set to be better teachers than the ones whom they were replacing (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005; Center for Public Education, 2005; Rand Corporation, 2012; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2012). The relationship between teacher attrition and increased student achievement reinforced the importance of further examination of teacher attrition in the field of education.
Several studies (Baldacci & Johnson, 2006; Flynt & Morton, 2009; Ingersoll, 2001) similar to the current study also investigated teacher attrition, focusing on probing the causes of teacher attrition in an effort to shed light on and quantify the predicament faced by individual schools and school districts at large. It was this researcher’s contention that there was no standardized answer to this problem. The researcher believed that this study would offer significant qualitative insight to policymakers and school building administrators seeking to eliminate the problem of attrition in low-performing Title I schools and improve the education experience offered there for both students and teachers.

**History, Background, and Context**

The problem of teacher attrition is not new. Due to the fact that teaching was initially a contractual form of employment (Lortie, 1975), teacher turnover was not an issue that drew notice, even when teachers remained in one school for several years before opting not to return. Lortie (1975) wrote of high turnover among teachers as continuing into the 1900s, confirming that this was an issue with some history. Ingersoll (2003) explained that

> [s]ince the inception of the public school system in the late 19th century, teaching was socially defined and treated as a temporary line of work suitable for women, prior to their “real” career of child-rearing. For men, teaching was socially defined as a stepping stone, prior to their “real” career in one of the male-dominated skilled blue-collar occupations or white-collar professions. (p. 18)

As a consequence, the turnover of teachers in schools was not viewed as a problem until it rose to the current crisis proportions. Historically, the solution to teachers leaving the classroom had been sought through recruitment rather than retention. However, continuous recruitment efforts were of little or no value if the teachers recruited did not remain in the
classroom (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Papay, Bacher-Hicks, Page, & Marinell, 2018). Although adequate numbers of teachers were trained in the United States annually, inadequate numbers of teachers continue to plague some places and subject areas (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014).

Since the 1970s, there has been much research conducted around the issue of teacher attrition. One significant finding of this research was that teacher attrition was just one segment of the more inclusive issue: teacher turnover. Teacher turnover was multipronged, consisting of on-time retirement due to age, early retirement as a result of predetermined year eligibility for retirement with full benefits, teacher migration, and teacher attrition (Ingersoll, 2001; Sutcher et al., 2016). Studies over the last 40 years discovered that teacher shortage was due in greater part to teacher attrition than any other contributing factor (Boe et al., 2008; Croasmun et al., 1997; Ingersoll, 2017; Westervelt, 2016). Attempts to address the problem of teacher attrition had mainly been directed at the issue of teacher supply (Simon & Johnson, 2015; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). This led to some schools and school districts conducting job searches at great distances from their location. Consideration of the impact of such widespread recruitment efforts set this study apart from others as the researcher pondered whether or not being more than 100 miles away from home had increased attrition levels at the schools under review.

Programs such as alternative routes to licensure for career switchers, scholarships for college students who were studying education and loan forgiveness for college graduates had been instituted to make the profession more attractive (Allyn, 2017; Sutcher et al., 2016). While these incentives were successful at attracting candidates to the profession, they were not designed with a mindset of teacher retention-seeking incentives such as embedded professional learning. Therefore, attrition was not impacted (Ingersoll & May, 2011). The research suggested
that a well-developed induction program could be an effective mechanism for developing and retaining teachers who ventured into a career in the classroom, but this remained underdeveloped in practice, particularly in schools in impoverished neighborhoods and schools with large numbers of novice teachers (DeCesare, Workman, & McClelland, 2016; Hayes, Lachlan-Haché & Williams, 2019). The underdevelopment of adequate induction programs was a gap in the practice rather than research and literature due to school districts not having the structures in place to facilitate the development of successful mentoring and retention programs (Barlin, 2010; Garcia & Weiss, 2019). One lead mentor who, was not a participant in the study, had at least eight novice teachers at his or her school for each of the last five years described the problem thusly,

I struggle with finding suitable mentors for our novice teachers due to the fact that few teachers in the building qualify to be mentors. Additionally, often, it is not possible to find a mentor teaching the same subject or on the same grade level as the mentee.

Being able to implement the induction and mentoring program with fidelity was critical to school success as research had proven that teacher quality was one of the most significant contributing factors to student achievement (Adnot, Dee, Katz, & Wyckoff, 2017; Opper, 2019, Terada, 2019). Teacher recruitment and development were costly, not just financially but also organizationally and instructionally. Perpetual attrition compromised an administrator’s ability to support and maintain the professional culture and instructional core of the school (Marinell, 2011; Schaffhauser, 2014; Sorenson & Ladd, 2018).

High levels of teacher attrition created unfavorable conditions in which teacher attrition thrives and reproduces itself. This cyclic coexistence and interdependence negatively impacted
the school’s budget. More importantly, students’ academic performance was at risk as well
(Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2012; Learning Policy Institute, 2017; Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, &

Statement of the Problem

Teacher attrition is eroding teacher availability numbers. Research revealed that
persistent teacher shortage is becoming a blight on school districts, inhibiting their ability to
provide the high levels of innovative and contemporary education and academic achievement
that most proclaim was available to their students (Adams, 2017; Podolsky & Kini, 2016;
Ronfeldt et al., 2012; Sutcher et al., 2016; Westervelt, 2016). This study reviewed work
conditions such as lack of school culture, professional collegiality, and unsatisfactory leadership,
searching for the catalyst that causes novice teachers to seek alternative employment options.
Through the lens of those who had firsthand experience, particularly novice teachers who
traveled more than 100 miles from home to accept this assignment, specific problems in practice
were pinpointed. It was the hope of the researcher that this identification of particular challenges
would offer administrators, at various levels, a starting point for addressing the issue of lower
teacher availability due to attrition.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive case study was to investigate causes for high
levels of novice teacher attrition in schools in large urban areas on the east coast of the United
States of America. The information in this case study would add to the body of literature,
exploring novice teacher attrition and the experiences of novice teachers who traveled more than
100 miles from home to accept a position at a Title I school as well as the circumstances that
influenced them to leave their initial assignment. The data collected will enlighten school
building leaders and school district officials by providing them with information gleaned specifically from novice teachers who relocated more than 100 miles to their assignment at a Title I school. This information could help leaders to transform practices in educational institutions under their purview as they seek to build stability in their teaching staff.

**Research Questions**

The central question guiding this qualitative case study was: Why is there a current trend of novice teachers at a low-performing Title I school leaving their assignment? In order to gain a very specific understanding of this dilemma, data were collected from teachers who taught in low-performing, Title I middle schools in the northeast of the United States. The researcher interviewed teachers to gather data which allowed the exploration of the following subquestions from the experience of teachers who moved more than 100 miles to accept a teaching position:

- **RQ1:** What experiences contribute to novice teachers at a low-performing Title I school leaving that teaching assignment while they can still be described as novice teachers?
- **RQ2:** How do novice teachers describe their level of job satisfaction when working in a Title I school?

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

This study added the voices of a select group of novice teachers to existing research on the issue of novice teacher attrition. All of the novice teachers included in this study traveled more than 100 miles away from home—their primary familial residence at the time of employment—to accept an assignment at a low-performing Title I middle school, serving Grades 6 to 8, in the northeast region of the United States. The report provided additional information to the existing body of research with regard to novice teacher attrition as seen through these
teachers’ unique situations and needs which could be a function of the fact that the teachers were at least 100 miles away from home or a side effect of the conditions of the school or some combination of those two circumstances. The target group of this study was teachers who traveled more than 100 miles from home to accept teaching positions at low-performing Title I schools because they were an unusual, but existing subgroup of novice teachers. Although many studies about teacher attrition—novice and veterans—had been conducted, novice teachers who traveled more than 100 miles from home to accept the position remained undiscussed. This was quite likely due to the fact that, at the time when this research was being conducted, the numbers of people who were relocating far from home for jobs had decreased significantly over the last 30 years to just about 11% from more than 40% (Florida, 2019; Gibson, 2018; Passy, 2019; Smith, 2017). Additionally, “[t]eacher labor markets are hyperlocal, with most teachers choosing to work within 15 miles of their hometowns” (Partelow, 2019, para. 5). The findings can, hopefully, be used to develop programs and practices to address, curtail and eventually eliminate novice teacher attrition in similar schools in a very targeted manner, especially if several novice teachers who have moved more than 100 miles from home are working there.

The relevance of this study lay in the fact that the provision of quality education to students demanded that schools be staffed with highly trained, skilled and committed teachers. High levels of novice teacher attrition greatly inhibited the building of a highly proficient team of teachers within a school and created a situation in which school districts had difficulty building cadres of qualified teachers (Calams, 2015; Sutcher et al., 2016). This problem was due to the fact that the replacement teachers, often novice teachers themselves, lacked experience also. Researching why so many novice teachers who moved more than 100 miles from home to accept a position in a Title I school then left the classroom was essential to all efforts to combat
this challenge. The data gathered from the teachers who participated in the surveys, interviews and a focus group were an integral part of this effort. The information gleaned facilitated the examination of reasons that contributed to novice teachers leaving their initial assignment or the profession. This examination resulted in steps being taken to lessen the levels of attrition in various schools. Looking at the problem through the lenses of a group of teachers who relocated more than 100 miles from their homes to positions at several Title I schools may persuade even one administrator to address the problem in a school where the teachers faced the same difficulties as the ones the teachers in this study discussed. The ability to provide information that could potentially transform even one school by limiting the degree of novice teacher attrition was what made this study significant. Identifying issues that surrounded novice teacher attrition and providing the perceptions of some of those teachers was not only meaningful theoretical research but also noteworthy action research.

**Definition of Terms**

*Attrition:* Attrition refers to teachers leaving and not returning to the classroom after teaching for some time (Ingersoll, 2001).

*Hard-to-staff school:* A school in which a large percentage of the students are of minority races, low-income and low achieving students that has difficulty finding and retaining qualified and effective teachers is a hard-to-staff-school (Opfer, 2011).

*Leavers:* Teachers who leave the teaching profession altogether are referred to as leavers (Kena et al., 2016).

*Movers:* Teachers who leave their teaching assignment and find employment in another school or school district are considered to be movers (Elfers, Plecki, & Knapp, 2006).
Novice teacher: A novice teacher is a teacher with 3 or fewer years of teaching experience (Davis & Cearley-Key, 2016).

Title I school: A Title I school is a public school in which more than 40% of the students are from low-income families (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Assumptions, Limitations and Delimitations

Assumptions. The following assumptions were at the foundation of this study:

1. All participants would provide the researcher with factual, valid and candid information on their experience teaching at a low performing Title I middle school.

2. The inclusion criteria of the participants are appropriate and, therefore, assures that the experiences of the teachers who participated in the study would be representative of all novice teachers who began their teaching career at a low performing Title I middle school.

Limitations. One major limitation of this study was the small sample size. By restricting the study to include only novice teachers who relocated more than 100 miles from home to work at a particular type of school during a specific time period, the researcher limited the possible size of the population. The fact that the researcher did not have contact information for all of the possible participants further limited the study. Using self-reported data introduced another limitation as the researcher had to rely on the participants’ recall of the events of the time under review. Prospective participants not completing the data-collection tools as they had agreed was an additional limitation. This further decreased the sample size.

Delimitations. The delimitations of this study shifted as the research was conducted. Teachers from more than one site were included. Nonetheless, the researcher was still able to intentionally confine the study to novice teachers who traveled more than 100 miles away from
home in order to accept this assignment in an attempt to add only to the body of literature that explored novice teacher attrition among this very specific group of novice teachers. Additionally, this study focused only on novice teachers at low-performing Title I middle schools during the academic years 2012/2013 to 2014/2015.

Summary

Nationwide, teachers left the teaching profession during the first 3 years of their career at an alarming rate of 44% (Ingersoll et al., 2018; Will, 2018). This occurrence was creating a major concern for school systems, specifically schools that were affected. Most significantly, the education of the students who attended these schools was adversely affected by this trend as was demonstrated in the students’ lower levels of achievement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Rondfelt et al., 2012). The goal of this qualitative descriptive case study was to determine some of the factors influencing novice teachers to leave teaching or a particular school environment within the first 3 years of being in the profession. To gather data, the study employed a survey as well as one-on-one in-depth interviews of five teachers who taught at a Title I middle school during the time that they were novice teachers and left, whether through resignation or voluntary transfer, during that time. In addition, a focus group discussion with five teachers was conducted as another means of collecting data.

Chapter 1 provided a look at the history, background, and context of the problem being researched as well as descriptive information that is relevant to this study: a statement of the problem; purpose of the study; the research questions; the rationale, relevance and significance of the study; definitions of terms; and the limitations and delimitations of the study. Chapter 2 presented a comprehensive review of the literature, discussing novice teacher attrition. Attention was paid to three of the most common factors listed as contributing to this problem—school
culture, collegiality, and leadership. Chapter 3 discussed the methods used for data collection and analysis in the study. Chapter 4 communicated the findings of the research and the analysis of the collected data. Chapter 5 was a summary, providing the implications of the study, conclusions, and recommendations for further research and strategies for implemented practice to decrease the incidence of novice teacher attrition.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter includes a review of literature that discussed the problem of teacher attrition. The focus of this study was on the attrition of novice teachers. This literature review examined the impact of high levels of teacher attrition on schools’ ability to provide students with the quality of education that resulted in high levels of achievement.

The attrition rate of teachers was a major hindrance to the fulfillment of schools’ missions which, in general, was to provide an outstanding education to the students they served. The annual mass exodus of both novice and veteran teachers suggested a myriad of factors that may be inextricably interwoven causing the pressing issues for the high levels attrition observed in the novice teachers employed at low-performing Title I schools.

Introduction to the Literature Review

Much was written about teacher attrition: ways to avoid or counter it, speculations about the causes of it, where it is most prevalent, types of schools that are most susceptible, characteristics of the teachers most likely to leave their assignment and as many other related topics of which researchers could think. Few studies attempted to definitively explain, with high levels of certainty, why some schools experienced higher attrition rates than others. Additionally, there was little research that was able to explain with specificity why schools that do have high attrition rates tended to be underperforming schools serving large numbers of underprivileged minority students (Balu, Béteille, & Loeb, 2010; Grissom, 2011; Lynch, 2012; Reininger, 2011; Simon & Johnson, 2013). Research on teacher attrition was largely drawn from a wide target population of teachers, producing qualitative and statistical overviews and generalizations of a large population over a particular period of time. In a review of prior research of teacher attrition, Schaefer, Long, and Clandinin (2012) pointed out that the focus seemed to be on providing
correct answers, quick fixes, and decontextualized data. On occasion, attrition had been considered as a process over time where longitudinal analyses of parts of the careers of cohorts of teachers were studied in order to identify patterns or variations of behavior (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). This study, however, sought no quantitative data-collection or analysis. The goal was to describe, through the voices of five novice teachers who traveled more than 100 miles from home to take up the assignment at underperforming Title I schools, why they opted to leave their assignments during the period that they could still be referred to as novice teachers.

Previous research confirmed that there was a disparity between attrition rates in low-performing schools and their higher-achieving counterparts (Almy & Theokas, 2010; Barnwell, 2015; Boyd et al., 2009). The negative impact of excessive teacher attrition was not confined to the academic success of the students served but also included the schools becoming training grounds for novice teachers. Many of the teachers, studied in previous research, who moved on to other schools had honed their skills to the point that they were deemed competent practitioners (Hansen, 2016; Headden, 2014; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2011; Simon & Johnson, 2013). One retired education administrator who was not a participant in this study consented to speak with the researcher. He or she spent the last five years of his or her career as principal at a low-performing Title I school. He or she confirmed the literature when he or she described this phenomenon in the following manner:

I was principal at a low-performing Title I school where teacher attrition was a major problem. Many of the teachers whom we could attract were often those who had scored lowest on their teacher certification exam or those who were in danger of losing their jobs elsewhere due to inadequate performance. Sometimes, we could attract a teacher from a lower-paying district which might be far from us, 100 miles or more, but a significant
problem I encountered was retaining those teachers. The teachers whose rating was low took the opportunity to hone their skills at our school. They often worked hard at it and did become really effective teachers. Then, they left. The teachers who traveled from far distances either left for a better school nearby or went back home because they missed family.

Another education administrator who had served as superintendent of several large school districts also confirmed what the researcher found in the literature about novice teachers honing their skills at low-performing Title I schools and then moving on to another school. This education administrator was not a participant in the study, but consented to discuss the matter with the researcher, but did not want to be named even if his or her words were quoted. He or she stated:

even with providing supports, in the form of mentoring programs, to foster the growth of novice teachers, keeping them in low-performing schools is difficult. The culture of the school and having supportive administration in place go a long way to keeping the turnover low, but often novice teachers move on to higher-performing schools when they become good teachers because they can. The mindset is often “why work harder when I don’t have to?” In my district, we decided not to actively recruit beyond 50 miles away. We lose too many novice teachers—young and single—to the distance. A difficult job too far from home often becomes an unwanted job.

Gray and Taie (2015) reported between 10% and 37% of novice teachers either left the teaching profession or their initial assignment by the end of their third year in the field. In the 2008–2009 academic year, 22.8% of teachers with three years of teaching experience or less did not return to their assignment the following academic year (Keigher, 2010). Furthermore, of
those teachers who did not return to their assignments, 52,600 of them did not return to teaching at all. Years later, in the 2011–2012 academic year, 20% of novice teachers did not return to their assignments the next year (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014).

Underperforming schools in the United States attracted more novice teachers who seldom remained there once they became truly competent and effective (Barnes et al., 2012; Boyd et al., 2005; Simon & Johnson, 2013). In the academic year 2016–2017, federal data revealed that the national average of novice teachers in a low-performing school was 12% and, in some states, like Colorado where it was 17%, that percentage was significantly higher (Meltzer, 2018). In Austin, Texas, underperforming, high-poverty schools had three times more novice teachers than their more affluent counterparts (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). The absence of a cadre of proficient teachers contributed to the continued underperformance of such schools as research proved that teacher training and experience impact student performance (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2011). The high rate of teacher attrition in under-achieving schools, which serve large numbers of minority students, became part of a vicious cycle: the schools were underperforming, so they could not retain the teaching staff and because the teaching staff was constantly changing, the school was under-achieving (Barnes et al., 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2013).

Guided by the following questions, this chapter explored novice teacher attrition as examined, investigated, and evaluated in the existing literature:

RQ1: What experiences contribute to novice teachers at a low-performing Title I school leaving that teaching assignment while they can still be described as novice teachers?
RQ2: How do novice teachers describe their level of job satisfaction when working in a Title I school?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of any research provided a written and a graphic description of the key variables and theories, which undergirded that research. The relationships between those variables and theories were also discussed and pictured as part of the conceptual framework. Furthermore, the conceptual framework encapsulated a speculative outline of the phenomena being investigated and the relationship between observable or measurable events and the variables that influence and impact it. Existing theories and research were the basis of this constructed framework which informed and reinforced research (Maxwell, 2013). As data were collected in the study, the conceptual framework may be modified to reflect changes in the relationships that were revealed by the unfolding research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Ravitch and Riggan (2012) posited that a researcher utilizes a conceptual framework to establish that the topic being studied was worthy of inquiry and that the proposed approach of research was fitting and sufficiently precise and meticulous.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher drew on social constructivism as the worldview through which to answer the research questions. Social constructivism, as described by Vygotsky (1978) and Creswell (2013), was an interpretive framework in which individuals sought to understand the world in which they lived while developing the subjective meaning of their experiences. Due to the varied nature of individual meaning, the researcher was reliant on the participants’ interpretations of the situation and their reality within the circumstances. Each participants’ reality was impacted by their interactions with others as well as the historical and social norms they have encountered. The conceptual framework of this study, therefore, was one
in which individuals constructed knowledge as they made sense of their experiences (Schwandt, 2007) which was fundamental to constructivist theories.

According to Lincoln and Guba (2000), constructivism was set apart from other paradigms, such as positivism, postpositivism, and critical theory, by its ontological nature which allowed the researcher to accept the existence of multiple socially-constructed realities as each participant’s experience was specific to that individual and each one had their own truth. The conceptual framework in this study reviewed the theories explored in previous research alongside the experience of the novice teachers who participated in the inquiry, allowing the researcher to develop unique knowledge of how things work in their experience of the phenomenon being explored. Maslow’s theory of human motivation (1970), the human capital theory (Becker, 1994), and the path-goal leadership theory (House, 1971) were theories found in previous research that were incorporated into this study.

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs was a psychological theory that explained humans’ motivations to achieve various desires, using a five-tiered model often shown as a pyramid. The five levels of needs were labeled physiological, safety, love or belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. The most basic, shown as the base of the pyramid, was physiological and self-actualization was the apex. According to Maslow (1970), some needs were more basic and, as a consequence, took precedence over others. Once those basic needs were met, individuals could advance to the fulfillment of higher-level needs. An important precept of this theory was that achievement of each level was essential in order for an individual to progress to the next level. The most basic needs, under this theory, were physiological like food and water. The desire for safety was on the next level, followed by the need for love or belonging. The need for self-actualization succeeded the esteem need, which included self-esteem, achievement, and the
respect of others. From Maslow’s theory, this study integrated both the lower-level need to feel a part of a group, the desire for collegiality, and the more abstract higher level need to be valued and recognized for one’s abilities and achievements. As the researcher considered the importance of collegiality and the impact of leadership on the novice teachers’ decisions to leave their assignments, the researcher contemplated how Maslow’s hierarchy of needs impacted the novice teachers’ choice.

Human capital theory (Becker, 1994) was an economic theory that described the abilities and qualities of people that made them productive. It took into consideration all of the knowledge, talent, skills, and experience that impacted an individual’s intelligence, judgment, and wisdom. This theory attached an economic value to each employee, his or her education, and his or her employment decisions. From human capital theory, the concept of individual investment risks that propelled a person’s decision-making as he or she valued current employment choices and measured the long-term value of current opportunities versus future ones had been taken into consideration in this study. The novice teachers’ valuation of the employment opportunity at the current Title I school and their determination of whether to remain in that assignment or to move on, either out of the teaching profession or to another school, made human capital theory a focus of this study.

Path-goal theory (House, 1971) described the way in which leaders encouraged and supported subordinates as the subordinates sought to achieve the goals they set. According to this theory, subordinates’ job satisfaction was impacted by whether or not the subordinate believed that the leader made expected goals and the path to those goals clear. Additionally, the subordinates’ confidence that the leader was removing any impediments to his or her success also increased the subordinates’ job satisfaction. It was this perception of leadership held by
novice teachers and its impact on their decision to leave their assignment that brought the path-goal leadership theory under consideration in this study.

Previous research suggested that attrition among novice teachers was a problem that was unfavorable for all involved. “The costs of teacher turnover are substantial in terms of dollars, school efficacy and student learning” (Howey, 2010, para. 5). In this research study, the most important side effect of teacher attrition was school efficacy—school culture and collegial atmosphere. The relationship between novice teacher attrition and student learning was one of a causal loop — “dynamic, interconnected nature . . . linking together [of] key variables . . . indicating the causal [contributory] relationships between them” (Kim, 1992, para. 2) —rather than one of simple cause and effect. In like manner, it appeared that the lack of a well-developed school culture could be a result of high levels of attrition and high attrition could be a side effect of the absence of well-developed school culture. This cyclic relationship between the novice teacher attrition and its perceived causes as well as the theories that framed it are in Figure 1.
Teacher attrition, especially in schools located in high-poverty areas where student achievement was oftentimes lowest, continued to be high (Ingersoll, 2001; Ronfeldt et al., 2012; Sutcher et al., 2016). Although recent research refuted previous numbers of attrition rates over 30%, the percentage of novice teachers who left the classroom, and possibly the profession, within the first five years remained over 17% (Gray & Taie, 2015). Even at that rate, the level of attrition still negatively impacted student achievement and led to the educators in a school being, collectively, unable to maintain an effective learning environment and close the achievement gap (Barnes et al., 2012; Carroll, 2012). Consequently, teacher attrition in high-poverty schools was worthy of study.

In the present qualitative case study, the researcher reviewed previous investigations into teacher attrition, many of which investigated this phenomenon in particular geographic locations.
and under specific conditions. Similarly, this study focused on teacher attrition under specific conditions: low-achieving, high-poverty school in suburban contexts approximately 25 miles from major urban cities in the northeast of the United States. This very specific and localized study significant, informative material to the body of research into this national dilemma. From these efforts, larger projects and an amalgamation of smaller ones could be created. The relevance of this matter on a national scale lay in the fact that if this attrition cannot be stanched, if not reversed, the education system in the United States will be significantly impacted (Ronfeldt et al., 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2013).

**Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature**

The issue of novice teacher attrition, both novice and veteran teachers, is not a new area of concern and has been investigated by scholars for many years. Yet, the novice attrition problem remains a great concern since it continues to afflict school systems. During the review of literature, the researcher considered a discussion of why novice teachers were leaving their initial assignment as being lacking if there was no mention of the distinctions between the various circumstances that caused novice teachers to leave. The literature identifies those novice teachers who leave the profession totally as *leavers* (Kraft, Marinell, & Yee, 2015; Marinell & Coca, 2013). Ingersoll et al. (2014) refer to other teachers who gain employment teaching in a school elsewhere (in the same or another school district) as *movers*. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that the reasons revealed in existing literature as driving teacher attrition often appear to be intricately and inseparably interconnected (Certo & Englebright Fox, 2001). This entanglement allows for the recognition of the various causes of novice attrition but make it difficult to determine which trigger is most responsible for the attrition. Additionally, the degree
to which the different motivations interact with and impact each other is shrouded (Joiner & Edwards, 2008).

Research revealed that the nation’s low-performing, high-poverty schools were even more impacted by teacher attrition than their higher-performing counterparts which served more affluent students (Burke, 2014; Carroll, 2012; Ronfeldt et al., 2012). As a result of high attrition, many schools in urban and rural areas gained high-need or hard-to-staff status as they were mainly able to attract inadequately trained, inexperienced teachers (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2011; Johnson et al., 2011; Long, 2011; Nelson, 2006) to work in an environment where they seldom got the training necessary to develop into the highly skilled educators they were capable of being (Burke, 2014). Even highly qualified teachers who transferred to high-need, hard-to-staff, underperforming schools often lacked the training and the skill set to effectively teach low-performing students who were coming from financially stressed homes (Hansen, 2016). Without the supportive training that teachers needed, these working conditions often led to frustration and a constant feeling of being overwhelmed while offering few opportunities for success (Joiner & Edwards, 2008; Maciejewski, 2007). The frustrations experienced by teachers has influenced large numbers of novice teachers to leave their assignment, either for a more affluent school that served a greater percentage of Caucasian students or finding employment in another field altogether (Carroll, 2012; Donaldson & Johnson, 2011; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Nelson, 2006). While there is no exact data in the literature to quantify the number of teachers who have left schools in impoverished neighborhoods and compare them to those in more affluent ones, research has shown that, between 2005 and 2009, 50% more teachers have left high-poverty schools than those who have left more affluent schools (Burke, 2014; Headden, 2014; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).
It was accepted that at the start of his or her teaching career, a novice educator was constantly experimenting in a sink-or-swim atmosphere (Cherubini, 2008; Green, 2006; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). During the experimentation phase, if the teacher remained in the profession long enough, they gained efficiency through experience, but it was not on the first day on the job. Some researchers (Boyd et al., 2009; Boyd et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2011; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005) postulated that it took new teachers three years to develop to the level of true efficiency and expertise that consistently resulted in high levels of student achievement and growth (Goldrick, 2012). Others claimed that it took five years (Headden, 2014). Regardless of the specific number, it was accepted that teachers did not come out of their teacher-training programs as fully developed teachers. It was widely accepted that they went through three stages of development on their way to maturity. Huling, as cited in Eberhardt, Reinarth-Mondragon, and Stottlemyer (2000), in his presentation to the Beginning Teacher Activity Profile in Texas (BTAPT) Advisory Panel of the Texas State Board for Educator Certification Panel on Novice Teacher Induction Support System, labeled these stages or states as survival, adjustment, and mature. These stages were:

- **Survival**: Usually the first year of teaching when a beginning teacher was being exposed to actual classroom teaching experience.
- **Adjustment**: Consisted of the pivotal year, usually the second year of teaching and the maintenance period, usually during the third and fourth years of teaching. In the pivotal year, the novice teacher was impacted by their successful and unsuccessful experiences to determine whether or not they would remain in the teaching profession. In the maintenance period, having internalized the lessons learned in the survival and pivotal years, the teacher began to apply what he or she had absorbed.
• Mature: Also referred to as the impact stage. Usually by the fifth year of teaching when the teacher’s instruction made a consistently, significant impact on the students’ achievement.

Unfortunately, the number of teachers who were making it to the mature stage was being diminished by the fact that a large percentage of teachers left the profession early in their careers (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Westervelt, 2015). The most current tracking of this data with considerable accuracy was provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the Institute of Education Sciences within the U.S. Department of Education in the Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study (BTLS), a longitudinal study of public school teachers who began teaching in the 2007/2008 academic year and followed their career through the academic year 2011/2012 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Of the novice teachers included in this study, 40% of them did not continue teaching for a five year period. Among all beginning teachers in the 2007–2008 school year, 10% did not teach in the 2008–2009 school year, 12% did not teach during the 2009–2010 school year, 15% did not teach during the 2010–2011 school year, and 17% did not teach in 2011–2012 school year (Gray & Taie, 2015, p. 3). Of these teachers who did not return to the classroom, there were those who did not return involuntarily, primarily because their contracts were not renewed. Their reason for not continuing in education was not clear. Gray and Taie (2015) calculated the voluntary leavers and movers as 73% at the end of the academic year 2008–2009, 64% at the end of the 2009–2010 academic year, 75% at the end of the 2010–2011 academic year, and 80% at the end of the 2011–2012 academic year. That research was a study designed to discover why those who chose to leave or transfer voluntarily made that choice.
A consistent pattern of attrition of so many teachers created a situation in which students were being instructed by teachers who were not at the mature stage and this negatively impacted student achievement (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Rice, 2010; Ronfeldt et al., 2012). Constantly being taught by teachers who were learning to be effective teachers can result in students performing at lower levels than their peers who were being taught by teachers with more years of experience (Joiner & Edwards, 2008; Ronfeldt et al., 2012). The negative impact on student performance was not necessarily a reflection on the quality of the teacher that the replacing teacher would become or was in another setting. It was more likely a side effect of the state of flux that came to a class, and as a consequence, a school, that had frequent teacher changes. The inability to build a strong organizational culture and maintain organized and directed instructional programs was a certain side-effect in such conditions (Johnson et al., 2011). This happened more often in schools that served low-income, high-minority populations not because teachers did not want to teach in such schools, but because these were the schools that seemed plagued by an inability to hire and retain a staff that was competent, highly qualified and beyond novice status (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2011; Haycock & Crawford, 2008; The Education Trust, 2020).

Research corroborated that schools most affected by high levels of teacher turnover both veteran and novice teachers were low-performing with large numbers of minority students and that the teachers were not leaving to escape interacting with their students (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011; Mulvahill, 2017; Podolsky et al., 2016). Teachers were leaving schools due to unsatisfactory working conditions in which little or no teacher support was provided by the administration, no student consequences were in place, inadequate staff collegiality was a factor, and underdeveloped school culture existed (Baldacci, 2006; Boyd et al., 2005; Johnson et al.,
2011). Coincidentally, these schools served populations that were largely minorities, from underprivileged communities and who were performing, in large numbers, below grade level and were unsuccessful on state-mandated standardized tests. The reality was that many schools which served large numbers of minority and impoverished students had dysfunctional organizations and less-than-desirable work conditions, which could be the cause of the lower-than-desired academic performance levels of the students (Ahram, Stembridge, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011; Berry, Smylie, & Fuller, 2008; Kraft, Marinell, & Yee, 2016). Research confirmed that teachers were most likely to leave a school where they deemed that there were inadequacies in the areas of school culture, leadership, and collegial relationships (Boyd et al., 2009; Horng, 2009; Johnson et al., 2011; Kraft et al., 2015; Nelson, 2006) regardless of the student population. Furthermore, teachers were three times more likely to consider transferring from schools with poor working conditions than teachers employed with at least average quality (Johnson et al., 2011). “These high turnover rates erode efforts to foster meaningful collegial relationships, develop instructional capacity and establish a strong organizational culture.” (Johnson et al., 2011, p. 31).

The research confirmed that in all schools, but especially in low-performing, high-minority schools, success with their students came to teachers who were able to rely on their colleagues, the principal, and the organizational structure (Johnson et al., 2014; Mulford, 2003). Novice teacher attrition, therefore, was further tied to job satisfaction due to working conditions than teacher response to the student population (Farber, 2015; Futernick, 2007; Mulvahill, 2017; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

**Novice teacher attrition and school culture.** There were incoming waves of novice teachers who replaced the outgoing ones leading to turnover that greatly diminished a school’s
ability to develop school culture (Grissom, 2011; Simon & Johnson, 2013). School culture referred to the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions. The term also encompassed more concrete issues such as the physical and emotional safety of students, the orderliness of classrooms and public spaces, and or the degree to which a school embraced and celebrated racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity (School culture, 2013).

Ronfeldt et al. (2012) posited that in schools where there was a large amount of attrition annually, there was a significant loss of institutional memory or information that the employees collectively recalled based on their experiences. Retainment of information and institutional memory would allow teachers to understand the history, culture, and reasons for specific decisions, practices, and processes at that workplace (Institutional memory, 2018). The absence or the significant loss of institutional memory was detrimental to the creation and fostering of the school’s culture (Danielson, 2007; Prokopchuk, 2016). Where there was not this great loss of “collective knowledge and learned experiences of a group” (Corb & Hellen, 2009, p. 507), this institutional knowledge was shared with new staff members as they became socialized and assimilated into the instructional community. Socialization into the culture of the school was essential to the retention of highly effective teachers (Joiner & Edwards, 2008; Kraft et al., 2015) as novice teachers grew and were most successful in collaborative instructional cultures (Martin, 2012). Where there was no established and consistently-implemented socialization routine, it was virtually impossible to develop a culture and/or share an existing culture with incoming staff. Schools that had high attrition rates for novice teachers required a school culture that was clearly defined, positive, consistently implemented and practiced as part of the effort to decrease attrition rates.
Schools with high levels of teacher turnover experienced challenges with regard to successful and consistent implementation of instructional and social programs that defined the school’s culture. A continual parade of newly-trained novice teachers created a school with no defined school culture or organizational philosophy for new hires to adapt to and become entrenched in (Carroll, 2012; Ronfeldt et al., 2012) at a time when they needed the established values and expectations most. Consequently, these teachers who had been reported in studies as being under-prepared and inexperienced (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Krasnoff, 2014; Pondiscio, 2014), realizing that they could either find employment at a school with a strong culture of student achievement and teacher support or in a different field, left after a year or two of frustrated isolation (Carroll, 2012).

Much of the prior research done on this issue placed the responsibility of this culture-transition on strong induction programs (Joiner & Edwards, 2008; Maciejewski, 2007). However, too few schools, especially those that were struggling, have fully developed, effective induction programs which included at least two years of systemic support to new teachers (Sun, 2012). Such programs needed to include opportunities for collaboration with peers, regular formative and evaluative assessment of progress based on state teaching standards, and professional development that was tailored to the challenges faced by new teachers. This deficiency demonstrated in programs highlighted in the literature was due, in part, to the fact that, depending on how deeply the attrition cut into the teaching population at these schools, there were too few teachers available to offer the support that an induction program required. This information found in previous research was confirmed by a lead mentor at a middle school which had more than 12 novice teachers each of the last five years stated,
Our mentoring program, a large part of the school district-mandated induction program, is woefully inadequate as we have more novice teachers than available mentors. Too many of our teachers are still in the probationary stage of their careers. This lead mentor was not a participant in the study.

**Novice teacher attrition and collegiality.** From previous research, the researcher learned that most teachers desired a collegial atmosphere in which to work (Berry, Daughtrey, & Wieder, 2009; Eklund, 2009; Shah, 2012). Many teachers who participated in previous research realized that the benefits of collaboration far outweighed the drawbacks (Mirel & Goldin, 2012; Perez, 2015). As they sought to work for the common good of student achievement, it was apparent to teachers that functioning collaboratively in collegial interdependence was more effective than working in isolation (Killion, 2015; Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015).

Many novice teachers who participated in previous research were cognizant of their deficiencies due to their inexperience and they arrived at their initial assignments seeking a collegial atmosphere even more than veteran teachers (Gavish & Friedman, 2011). In Johnson et al.’s (2011) research, novice teachers were aware that they needed and so desired a school environment in which they could benefit from supportive relationships with colleagues from whom they could learn, with whom they could problem-solve, and who would hold them accountable as they grew in the craft of educating. Some teachers studied by other researchers wanted to work with other teachers who would share and support their purposes and expectations, especially those who were intent on working with underachieving, minority, underprivileged students, and remained in the profession and made a difference in the lives of the students (Abdallah, 2009; Shah, 2012). In Allensworth, Ponisciak, and Mazzeo (2009), the
teachers were less likely to leave that assignment quickly if a trusting, positive working environment for them to share and grow in existed. Therefore, schools that fostered an atmosphere of collaborative innovation had lower levels of teacher attrition (Abdallah, 2009; Brown & Wynn, 2007). Sharing the commitment to school improvement and student achievement led to the retention of some teachers in some previous studies, especially novice teachers, in the classroom as they worked in genuine learning organizations.

Novice teacher attrition and leadership. Another factor that influenced novice teacher attrition, significantly, was inadequate leadership from the highest echelons of the school’s administration: the principal. The role of leadership, especially leadership that was ineffective, and how it propelled novice teachers to leave their initial assignment was discussed at length in research by several researchers (Balu et al., 2010; Boyd et al., 2011; Hancock & Scherff, 2010; Vanderslice, 2010). From these discussions in literature reviewed by this researcher, it was revealed that novice teachers’ perception of administrators’ support or lack thereof influenced novice teachers to leave the profession or at least the school. However, there was little ability to quantify or offer some true qualitative measure of the impact on the ever-rising novice teacher attrition rate that could be attributed solely to poor school leadership.

Researchers whose work this researcher reviewed as part of this study were able to state with certainty was that a significant number of teachers surveyed as well as those who were interviewed mentioned the fact that poor leadership and/or lack of support by administration solidified their decision to leave the school (Boyd et al., 2009; Grissom, 2011; Hancock & Scherff, 2010; Johnson et al., 2011; Ladd, 2009). An objective and discrete measure of the extent to which poor leadership was responsible for novice teacher attrition had not been provided in any research considered by this researcher and the extent to which this poor leadership conjoined
with other factors to impact teachers’ decisions to leave or stay at the assigned school remained indistinct.

Despite the fact that research did indicate that inadequate leadership resulted in high levels of teacher attrition, effective principals influenced several areas of his or her school in a positive manner. Hence, the positive effect of good leadership was evident in the establishment and maintenance of a collegial school environment in which novice teachers were able to grow, interact with their peers and successfully teach their students. Therefore, good leadership positively impacted teacher attrition as it made possible the other things that the teacher was seeking most (Balu et al., 2010; Grissom, 2011). Teachers reported that factors related to the principal and their ability to trust him or her were not contingent upon their perceptions of the principal being a strong instructional leader. However, “they found that, although some of the relationship between school leadership and teacher stability was explained by other school-level working conditions, ‘principal leadership remained a strong, significant predictor of teacher stability on its own’” (Simon & Johnson, 2013, p. 12).

**Novice teacher job satisfaction and career plans.** In the past, research into teacher job satisfaction focused on their response to salaries, class size, and contractual issues such as contact time and transfer possibilities. However, in more recent times, research proved that novice teachers’ job satisfaction was a function of working conditions that allowed novice teachers to grow and develop. These conditions included teacher empowerment in a collegial relationship with their peers, effective and supportive school leadership, and useful professional development opportunities (Berry et al., 2008).

Novice teachers who felt supported, whether it was through a strong induction and mentoring program or by a supportive administrator, were less likely to abandon that initial
assignment than their peers who did not have the benefit of these supports. This was due to the fact that they experienced satisfaction in that work environment (Lam & Yan, 2011). While novice teachers were being introduced to the world of an educator, assigning them with too challenging a class load was a mistake that many school leaders made (Cherubini, 2008; Simos & Fink, 2013). Rizga (2019) posited that novice teachers thrived in school environments where they devoted their energy to honing their skills as an educator and advancing the growth of their students. This increased their motivation, satisfaction, and inclination to remain in the classroom at the place that they were assigned, regardless of the student population’s characteristics. Sustaining the motivation and job satisfaction of the novice teacher was essential to their retention. An environment suitable for teaching success allowed novice teachers to focus on the art of teaching and resulted in the job satisfaction that eliminated high attrition numbers. When the work environment was not conducive to growth and success, novice teachers felt overwhelmed, defeated and inadequate which led to early departure from the profession or, at least, from that school (Lam & Yan, 2011).

Attrition as a result of poor work conditions was not only unsatisfactory for the school and the district, but also for the teacher as few people came into education without a desire to positively impact students for more than one or two years (Fried, 2013; Marsh, 2015). On entrance into the profession, some teachers desired to spend their career in the classroom while others aspired to advance into areas of leadership—school building administration, school district administration or even state department of education administration (Danielson, 2007; Hewitt, Denny, & Pijanowski, 2011; Riggs, 2013). However, poor work conditions often forced novice teachers to rethink those career goals and find alternative employment, in education or in another field (Baldacci, 2006; Barnwell, 2015). Due to the large numbers of novice teachers employed in
the United States, ranging from approximately 40,258 in academic year 1987–1988 to 80,752 in 2011–2012 (Warner-Griffin, Noel, & Tadler, 2016) to 315,100 in 2015–2016 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018a), and how many of these novice teachers left their initial assignment, there was no national database for keeping track of where dissatisfied novice teachers went after leaving the classroom. Nonetheless, research claimed that many of them remained in education and transfer to other schools: 38% in the academic year 1987–1988 and 46.3% in the academic year 2011–2012 (Warner-Griffin et al., 2016). Reliable data for subsequent years were not yet available.

**Methodology Review**

In the literature reviewed for this study, various methods for data-gathering were employed. Each researcher carefully selected the method most appropriate to adequately provide the information that he or she was seeking with reference to teacher attrition. In each case, the methodology was dictated by the issue being investigated. A review of existing data retrieved from official databases held by school districts and national data warehouses had been used for analysis to support the arguments of some researchers, while others interviewed actual teachers or had the teachers complete surveys.

Boyd et al. (2009) used data retrieved from New York City exit-surveys. A discrete-time competing-risk mathematical model was used in their analysis and subsequent explanation of the careers of teachers who transferred or quit in the first five years. This numerical data was only to explain how much attrition or teacher movement there was, but it could not clarify the cause. Actual contact with the teachers, even by anonymous survey responses, would have provided personal information that the numbers and exit surveys alone could not give. Similarly, Allensworth et al. (2009) used data gathered from the Chicago Public Schools’ records and had
no personal contact with the teachers. As acknowledged in that study, the results were limited by the absence of teacher-performance data and the fact that there was no information about where the teachers have moved to. These shortcomings negatively impacted the data reported in the work, however, they did not prevent the article from providing useful data about the reasons for novice teacher attrition. Actual data from teachers who left the school would have provided greater insight, but the purpose of the study was to reveal information about the schools that the teachers were leaving, and it did just that. Ronfeldt et al. (2012) also relied on data received from an official data warehouse rather than information gained from the teachers themselves. This data-collection method was most appropriate for their study as it also was for Reininger (2011). In both cases, the strength of the study relied on the numerical assessments of student achievement and the impact of teacher turnover on teachers’ preferences of school locations.

On the contrary, Kraft et al. (2015) did not solely rely on the relevant data sets from the New York City Department of Education. This study included information received from teachers via a survey that gave a clear and personal indication of their motivation. Gathering information from the teachers, whether leavers or movers, brought to the study a personal touch and a reality that data sets alone could not convey. It expressed the various perspectives of those experiencing teaching in a low-performing school that served minority students which would not be evident in a data set. In this vein, Johnson et al. (2011) collected data using surveys and the nuances that came with teachers’ personal experiences were important to their findings. Balu et al. (2010) also combined data from a collection warehouse (results from previous surveys) and information from current surveys. This format brought to the reader established information and the personal touch, explaining the role of a principal in the teacher’s decision-making process. This was appropriate as it indicated that the researchers were not just reporting on the previous
research of others, but also presenting information that they had gathered from those in the field. By relying primarily on surveys and interviews with teachers, Simon and Johnson (2013) were able to examine teachers’ decisions to leave their schools on a more individual basis.

Hagaman and Casey (2018), in gathering information for their study on teacher attrition in the very specific field of special education, used focus groups. The focus of their study was the insights of the teachers who left teaching and they determined that the best way to collect this information was to get it directly from the teachers themselves. For this study, the researchers determined that data gathered from surveys would be limiting due to the fact that the conclusions which could be drawn were narrowed by the confines of the design of the survey itself as no opportunity for the explanation of participants’ answers to the questions asked could be offered.

**Review of Methodological Issues**

In much of the literature, the terms *attrition* and *turnover* are used interchangeably (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Nguyen & Springer, 2019; Wang, 2019), often with no apparent distinction or difference in the intended meaning. From the discussions, it is apparent that “attrition” is used with reference to those who left the profession (DiCarlo, 2015). “Turnover,” on the other hand, is used to describe a situation in which a teacher find employment at a different school or within another school district (DiCarlo, 2014). In the present study, the researcher continues the interchangeable use of both terms with no such distinction. Once a novice teacher leaves his or her initial assignment, for the purposes of this study, either term is deemed appropriate.

Many past studies relied on data retrieved from data warehouses and mathematical manipulation of that data for finding patterns and deriving conclusions (Gray & Taie, 2015; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Garcia & Weiss, 2019b). The present study is an
example of qualitative inquiry and references the responses given by a small subset of novice teachers. All of the teachers in this study taught at a specific type of school—low-performing Title I middle school—for three years or fewer during the period 2012/2013 to 2012/2015 before leaving. Data stored in the school districts’ data warehouses or any other data collection sources would have been used only to place the issue under review in context. The data used in this study was collected through participants’ responses in online surveys, one-on-one interviews, and a focus group.

The present study is a small descriptive study of a large international issue with several side effects. This study seeks to add to the burgeoning body of literature dealing with the subject of teacher attrition. There was no comparison with other schools suffering similar plight in any other regard. It simply established that the issue of novice teacher attrition could be a significant problem within a school, preventing the high-needs schools from advancing in terms of student achievement, and the development of a cohesive, stable teaching team (Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Ronfeldt et al., 2012). To give voice to novice teachers, the researcher followed the example of Gonzales, Stallone Brown, and Slate (2008), engaging teachers, novice or former, in semistructured interviews which allowed the researcher to ask probing questions that elicited thoughtful, reflective, insightful answers, based on the interviewees’ experiences, that elucidated and shed light on the issue of novice attrition. In addition, the researcher used confidential surveys. The area of concern with this lay in ensuring that the reliability and validity of the data-collection were sacrosanct (Sagor, 2000). Field testing the data-collection instruments and the triangulation of the data were the methods employed to eliminate this from being a problem.
Synthesis of Research Findings

Teacher attrition is a problem that affects schools all across the nation with hard-to-staff schools being affected the most (Ronfeldt et al., 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2013). Nonetheless, there was not necessarily a causal relationship between the school serving underprivileged, underperforming students and the fact that there was a high level of teacher attrition (Ronfeldt et al., 2012). It was still undetermined whether if schools deemed hard-to-staff, serving primarily minority, underprivileged and underperforming students, was the reason why teachers left at such high rates or if the high rate of attrition was the reason why those students from low-income homes were achieving at levels significantly below their more affluent peers.

Teacher attrition was largely impacted by teachers’ response to school culture, collegiality between peers, and school leadership which often existed in these difficult schools (Kraft et al., 2015). While some teachers were enticed away from a position in a school in an underprivileged community, teaching underperforming students by the ability to earn more in an affluent neighborhood, more teachers would remain on assignment in a school that was close to home if it had a favorable school culture and working environment, effective school leadership (Reininger, 2011) and collegial interactions between the teachers.

Critique of Previous Research

A substantive set of research existed, investigating teacher attrition (Boe et al., 2008; Burke, 2014; Carroll & Fulton, 2004; Costigan, 2005; Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll & May, 2011). The literature review also revealed insightful research into novice teacher attrition and the impact of teacher attrition on student achievement (Barnwell, 2015; Boyd et al., 2009; Ronfeldt et al., 2012). While the data gathered from much of the previous research was generalizable, the specificity of the work of some researchers, exploring novice teacher attrition and the
experiences within a Title I environment (Ahram et al., 2011; Boyd et al., 2005; Boyd et al., 2009) was more useful as a guide to this project.

Summary

Novice teacher attrition is a problem that school districts all around the United States of America were faced with. The predicament was more pronounced in school districts and school buildings which served underprivileged minority students. Research proved that there was no definitive and indisputably traceable causal relationship between the student population and the inability to retain novice teachers. There was an inclination to leave such assignments for schools that served more affluent, Caucasian students as those schools were perceived to have fewer issues that negatively impacted teacher work conditions—for example, poor peer collegiality, ineffective leadership, and unsatisfactory school culture (Feng, 2017; Hunter, 2006; Johnson, 2006). As a consequence, researchers posited that novice teacher attrition was more likely a side effect of poor work conditions.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate and discuss the causes for high levels of novice teacher attrition which plague low-performing Title I schools based on the experiences of novice teachers in a large urban area on the east coast of the United States. This inquiry observed the issue, as manifested in public middle schools, Grades 6 to 8, located near a large urban area on the east coast. The circumstances that fostered high levels of novice teacher attrition, as viewed through the eyes of five novice teachers who have left the school, were examined.

In this chapter, the method of data collection and analysis and the research design that was employed in this study are described. To address the research question and the subquestions, a qualitative case study was conducted. The case study was the appropriate design for this research as this was a project of a modest scale, investigating and offering insights into a contemporary problem in the workplace (Rowley, 2002). A case study allowed the investigator to focus on a particular case while retaining a holistic and real-world viewpoint (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). The use of a qualitative case study research design allowed the researcher to conduct an empirical inquiry, investigating the current problem of novice teacher attrition in its real-life environment while blurring the boundaries dividing the dilemma under review and its context (Wedawatta, Ingirige, & Amaratunga, 2011).

The population and sampling selection are described in this chapter. The source of data is explained and the data collection and analysis procedures are explicitly discussed. Validity and reliability are addressed as are the ethical considerations and limitations of the research.
Research Questions

The exploration, investigation, and analysis of novice teacher attrition were guided in this study by the following research question as they refer to novice teachers who moved more than 100 miles away from home to accept a teaching position: Why is there a current trend of novice teachers at a low-performing Title I school leaving their assignment? More in-depth data was provided by the subquestions:

RQ1. What experiences contribute to novice teachers at a low-performing Title I school leaving that teaching assignment while they can still be described as novice teachers?

RQ2. How do novice teachers describe their level of job satisfaction when working in a Title I school?

Purpose and Design of the Study

In fulfilling its main purpose, this case study added to the existing body of literature on novice teacher attrition. Once the researcher collected and examined the data gathered from the interviews, this study served as a descriptive overview of novice teacher attrition as seen at more than one middle school that employed novice teachers who traveled more than 100 miles from home to accept the position. Taking the years being studied as a single period of time, the study gave a cross-sectional view of the problem rather than a longitudinal perspective.

Research revealed that the problem of novice teacher attrition in the United States had been growing significantly (Flynt & Morton, 2009; Podolsky et al., 2016), resulting in a substantial financial drain on school districts and state education systems, decreasing teacher efficacy, and widening of the achievement gap (Phillips, 2015). This case study sought to inform practice in the very specific discipline of novice teacher development and to help administrators
and policy-makers understand issues that may influence novice teachers who traveled more than 100 miles from home to accept a teaching position to leave that position while they can still be described as novice teachers (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Using the voices of novice teachers who traveled more than 100 miles away from home to accept this position at a low-performing Title I school, this study provided insight for school building and district-level administrators on the causes of novice teacher attrition. Both teachers who leave to teach at another school within the same district and those who left to teach at a school in another school district (Barnett & Hudgens, 2014; Goldring et al., 2014) were examined as sources of information. The knowledge gained from these teachers provided information about the novice teachers’ perspectives on why teachers leave.

A case study was a form of research designed to study real-life experience in its natural context or setting (Creswell, 2013). It was a qualitative study that was used to add to the understanding of and familiarity with a given phenomenon and any related social and political issues (Yin, 2014). It was conducted by a researcher who was exploring a problem with causal variables that could not be easily measured and/or described using numerical or statistical methods (Creswell, 2013). In addition, both Stake (1995) and Yin (2014) stipulated that a case study was based on a constructivist viewpoint which stated that reality was relative and subject to the individual’s outlook. Creswell (2013) described case study research as a qualitative research method in which the researcher investigated an actual phenomenon in its naturally occurring setting. This method of investigation involved the thorough and detailed collection of data from multiple sources over time. The data collected was bounded either by time or place or both and could be in the form of observations, interviews, documents, and reports. From the data, a comprehensive case description and case themes were produced to explain the results.
Pursuing a case study allowed the researcher to provide a rich description of a real-life situation experienced in a specific time frame at several sites. The fact that the data came from several sites made the case study a “multi-site study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). Furthermore, in keeping with the position taken by Yin (2014) that a case study contributed to our knowledge of various phenomena, a case study was most suitable as the researcher desired to produce a study that adds to the existing body of literature dealing with novice teacher attrition. It was the researcher’s belief that studying a single case and focusing on what made it intricate and special—as emphasized in Stake (1995)—highlighted the importance of the natural environment and allowed for it to be examined through the lens of each teacher’s experiences.

Previous research on the issue of novice teacher attrition ran the gamut of methodology from various quantitative research to qualitative designs and even mixed methods. In each case, the method chosen was dictated by the issue being researched (Boyd et al., 2009). This study was best served using qualitative research methods, specifically case study, as it was an observance of the nature of a real-world organizational process through data collected from several sources (Yin, 2014). The information for this study was collected using a researcher-created descriptive survey, individual interviews, and then a focus group discussion. All data-collection instruments were piloted before used for the study.

The survey which was created by the researcher for this study was selected as an integral part of the design for this study as it was an effective means of collecting participant data. This tool allowed the researcher to select a sample group, from the population being studied, and investigate variation in the population. Jansen (2010) described the qualitative survey as a tool for observing diversity within a group and cited Fink (2003) who endorsed qualitative survey analysis as a means of exploring the meaning of experiences. This recommendation was in
keeping with the purpose and design of this study as the researcher sought to explore the experiences of the novice teachers and give meaning to their experiences.

Yin (2014) described the interview as an important source of data collection for a case study. Keller and Conradin (2018) explained that using semistructured interviews in qualitative research provided dependable and comparable data. For this study, the researcher chose to create a semistructured interview as an essential component for evidence gathering as it allowed the researcher to probe the interviewee for details of the experience in a conversational manner while getting reliable data. Although the questions were preset, they were open-ended which afforded each participant the opportunity to describe his or her personal knowledge without restricting his or her self-expression of the study phenomenon that he or she saw and underwent while employed as a novice teacher at a low-performing Title I middle school. This guided opportunity to provide rich and comprehensive details of what they encountered at this Title I school was in harmony with the purpose and design of this study.

A focus group was described as a group interview from which the researcher was able to gather information from specific individuals while allowing a group with a common characteristic to provide their shared perspective on the issue being investigated (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). In this study, the common characteristics were having traveled at least 100 miles away from home to accept a teaching position at a low-performing Title I school while being a novice teacher. The researcher determined that a focus group was a worthwhile and meaningful data-collection tool since it provided an opportunity to pose preset open-ended questions to each participant and the group simultaneously, resulting in personalized answers and answers which reflected the group understanding. Furthermore, this third means of data collection allowed for the triangulation of the information being collected from the participants in the study.
Research Setting, Population and Sampling Method

The United States Department of Education characterized public schools around the country based on several features. One of those characteristics highlighted how easy it was to find and maintain qualified staff at a given school. This attribute was significant to this study. This study included five participants who taught at five different schools. Each of the schools was a Title I middle school, serving students in Grades 6 to 8, in a suburban city near a large urban area on the east coast of the U.S. Each school had the hard-to-staff designation because, during the period covered by the study, it met four of the criteria that led to this identification:

- Accredited with warning
- Percentage of Limited English Proficient students exceeds 150% of the statewide average
- Percentage of special education teachers with provisional licenses exceeds 150% of the statewide average
- The school has one or more inexperienced teachers (0 years of teaching experience) in a critical shortage area

During the period of the study, all of these criteria outlined above remained fixed for all schools except one. That school became a Partially Accredited–Reconstituted school. This description was given to schools that have failed to meet the requirements for accreditation for four consecutive years but have been granted permission by the Board of Education to reconstitute. School reconstitution was a corrective measure used to give low-performing schools a fresh start, in which the staff (from the principal to the janitorial staff) was replaced with people who are presumed to be more competent. King Rice & Malen (2010) stipulate that in
most cases, the staff was not terminated. They were allowed to reapply for positions at the school or moved to other positions within the school district.

The average student enrollment of each of these schools over the period of August 2012 to June 2016 was approximately 1,050 students. The number was an approximation because the schools served a highly transient population. More than 90% of the student populations were non-White. More than 70% of the students were Latino or Hispanic, the largest represented ethnic group in the student body. While none of the teachers participating in the study continue to work at these schools, it was their former employment at these schools and the fact that they left that qualified them as participants of the study.

It was not possible to get official documents, specifying how many novice teachers were employed at these schools between August 2012 and June 2016 as no official records were kept by the schools. Additionally, all attempts to get employment information from the Human Resources departments of the school districts proved futile as the claim was that the records kept there did not indicate the prior experience of teachers hired during that period. However, the data for one school was available through the teachers’ union and the mentoring program at that school building (see Appendix D). The mentoring programs of the other schools estimated that each school had approximately 30 novice teachers during the same period, but they had no official documents to confirm that estimate. Additionally, they were unable to provide information about whether those who left continued to teach or left the profession.

A diverse group of novice teachers was employed at each school during the time that is the focus of this study. The recruitment efforts of the school districts and principals during the period of the study brought teachers—novice and experienced—from New York, Ohio, and Virginia to these school districts. They were teachers of Math, Language Arts, Spanish, Science,
and specialist teachers who provided Special Education and English as a Second Language service. The only thing connecting the participants in this study to each other was the fact that they all traveled at least 100 miles from home to teach at a low-performing Title I middle school during the period under review.

The sample pool was the entire group of 56 approximately novice teachers who were employed at these schools between August 2012 and June 2016 who resigned while they were still novice teachers. However, a sample can only be a representative group of that whole so not everyone participated in the study (Fowler, 2014). As a consequence, the sample was selected from the novice teachers who left the schools, if the researcher was able to locate them and they were willing and available to participate. The researcher investigated and analyzed data gathered from five novice teachers who voluntarily left their assignment during the first three years of their teaching careers. Within the group that was being considered for this study—novice teachers who had traveled more than 100 miles to accept a position at a low-performing Title I school and left while they could still be considered a novice teacher—it was a random selection with no bias influencing the choice of participants for the study.

The researcher’s intention was for the teachers who participated in the study to be those who responded to the researcher’s appeal for participants within the first month of the letter of invitation being sent out without any regard for gender, age, or current location (see Appendix E). When that did not yield five participants, the additional participants were again the first to volunteer when the researcher extended the search to those who had taught at other schools than the one initially targeted. In the invitation letter, the participants were informed that the study would be conducted in three parts: a confidential survey, an interview, and a focus group. They would first complete the confidential survey. After the survey had been completed, the
researcher would contact each participant to provide additional information through a
semistructured one-on-one interview (see Appendix B). Once all of the participants completed
the one-on-one interview, then the researcher scheduled the focus group. This researcher
considered the sample to be comprehensive in accordance with the stipulation of Creswell (2013)
that 4 or 5 cases are adequate for a single study.

**Instrumentation**

Three measurement devices—an online survey, a semistructured interview, and a focus
group—were used to gather the data for this study. This researcher created all of these devices.
Much of the described and analyzed data was gleaned from the participants’ confidential
responses to a survey created by the researcher and made available to them online. Surveys were
used because of the convenience of the researcher and the participants. The cost of surveys to the
researcher was minimal, and surveys offered the researcher flexibility of creation (Couper,
Kapteyn, Schonlau, & Winter, 2007). The cost-efficient online survey enabled each respondent
to participate at his or her convenience while contributing real-time data to the researcher
(Gingery, 2011). In addition, surveys were an important part of the design since they allowed the
participants to remain confidential, which encouraged a greater degree of candor (Hauser &
Lewison, 2007; Ogden, 2008).

A researcher-developed online survey was used to gather qualitative data for the purposes
of ascertaining the experiences of the novice teachers being studied and their perceptions and
opinions of those experiences (see Appendix A). The participants were required to respond to 17
questions, some of which had several parts, designed to elicit very specific information. The
initial four questions provided biographical information. The next three questions focused on
certification and the desire to teach. This information was intended to point towards possible
patterns that result from gender, age, certification type and/or route to certification. Question seven introduced the three areas—school culture, collegiality, and leadership—that the literature review had shown to be significant issues in the matter of novice teacher attrition. The researcher asked about these areas specifically so that the component that most impacted the teachers’ decision to leave their initial assignment would be immediately evident. The questions that followed shed light on exactly how these areas impacted the teachers’ decisions to leave their assignment. By asking these questions, the researcher was seeking to confirm or refute the findings from previous research or reveal some previously-unidentified cause for the high levels of novice teacher attrition in this setting. Analysis of the data obtained was combined with the information received from the respondents’ answers to open-ended questions in the interview when each participant had a greater opportunity to elaborate.

The participants responded to the online survey questions in various ways. The survey included dropbox items, Likert survey items with options ranked on a scale of 1 to 5, and comment boxes in which the participants responded to open-ended questions. All participants, prior to consenting to participate in the study, were informed that they would have one opportunity to open the survey which may take approximately 45 minutes to complete. In the email that directed each participant to the survey, they were reminded to allow approximately 45 minutes for participation in this section of the study as they can only access it one time. In like manner, the participants in the interview did not have the opportunity to preview the questions prior to the actual interview.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the survey instruments, the researcher invited five novice teachers to pilot test the survey. These novice teachers had also chosen to leave their initial teaching assignment while still in the first three years of their careers. The pilot test
mirrored the actual survey conditions. The pilot test participants were emailed the letter that the actual study participants received which included the link to the online survey. This pilot was conducted at least two weeks before the researcher sent the survey instrument to the study participants which allowed the researcher to test the adequacy of the survey instrument, identify and address any potential problems with the response mechanism (Brooks, Reed, & Savage, 2016). Once each participant in the pilot test had completed the survey, the researcher debriefed with him or her in order to elicit information about survey question difficulty, clarity, ease of comprehension and response choices. This feedback allowed the researcher to adjust the questions being asked to ensure that the questions were sufficiently issue-specific to garner the data pertinent to the phenomenon being investigated (Rothgeb, 2008).

More in-depth material was gained from each participant during the one-on-one semistructured interviews (Phellas, Bloch, & Seale, 2012). A semistructured interview was conducted with each of the online survey respondents as Yin (2014) stipulated that interviews are vital to a thoroughly developed case study. The researcher used qualitative semistructured research interviews to explore the participants’ world, describe and explain their experiences as uncovered through their responses (Sewell, n.d.). The two methods of data collection from the participants were used in conjunction with each other to allow for a combination of anonymity, candor, and specific details.

The interview question set was used to seek further clarification from the participants in the study to construct a more in-depth picture of the case than the online survey will provide (see Appendix B). The questions were open-ended and general, yet sufficiently focused to allow for a clear understanding of the causes for the high levels of teacher attrition, as seen through the eyes of the participating novice teachers. This structured interview allowed the researcher to gather
comparable information from all of the interviewees (Edwards & Holland, 2013). All participants who completed surveys were invited to interview.

The first three questions were designed to gather information about the participants’ prior teaching experience and why they chose to teach at the school in the study. The fourth question sought to discover if the respondent was a mover or leaver without querying the reason for this. The fifth question probed into the preparedness of the novice teacher. The next four questions explored which of the three areas revealed by the research influenced their decision to leave and how it did so. Question 10 asked the participants about what they found to be most helpful to their development as teachers at their teaching sites, while the next question asked about which of the three areas being studied most impelled them to leave. The final question allowed the participants to provide any additional information that they thought would be of importance to the study.

Due to the fact that the teachers who participated in this study were located in different areas of the country, the interviews took place via telephone. Creswell (2013) stated that while this form of an interview would allow the interviewer to gain the best information from interviewees to whom the researcher did not have direct access, it would not allow the interviewer to observe informal communication, such as body language. One drawback that could be encountered when using this interview practice, according to Creswell (2013), was that interviewees may be reticent and not share sufficient information.

The interviewees were informed that the interviews would be recorded and transcribed verbatim. In addition, the interviewer took notes of observations and insights about the interviewees on the interview form from which the questions were read. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) suggested an interview guide as an appropriate means of obtaining information about the
lived experiences of interviewees which would allow the teachers in this study to describe and give meaning through their eyes.

In a similar fashion to the survey instrument, the interview guide, the list of interview questions, was piloted to ensure the validity and the reliability of the instrument. Five novice teachers who taught at schools other than the ones where the study participants taught were invited to participate in the pilot test. Some of these novice teachers had been a part of the piloting of the survey instrument. All of these novice teachers had chosen to leave their initial teaching assignment before they had taught for 3 years. This pilot gave the researcher the opportunity to develop and refine the interview questions as well as ascertain and eliminate any instance of researcher bias (Sampson, 2004; Yin, 2014).

The focus group question set was used to gain an in-depth understanding of novice teacher attrition (see Appendix C). Through this data collection method, the researcher was able to investigate novice teacher attrition as a social issue (Breen, 2006; Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick, & Mukherjee, 2017) and gather the opinions of some teachers who had lived the experience in an environment where they can influence and be influenced by the opinions voiced by others, just as happens in real life (Casey & Kreuger, 2015). The questions were open-ended and allowed the participants to interact with each other in a conversational manner, providing well-defined insight into the causes of the high levels of teacher attrition. All participants who had completed the online survey and participated in one-on-one interviews were invited to join the focus group.

The first three questions requested information about the participants’ perception of the experience at the Title I school where they taught as novice teachers—what was most valuable, uncomfortable or valuable; support systems that helped them to develop; and the relationships among the teachers. The fourth question grew out of the respondents’ personal views of a
positive school climate. Having described what they considered this to be, there was discussion of whether or not these were seen at the schools where they taught initially. Similarly, the fifth question probed into the teachers’ views on trust and support among teachers. The participants explained what this looks like, in their estimation, and then spoke of whether or not this was present in the Title I school where they were a novice teacher. Question six asked the respondents to reflect on their experiences at the Title I school where they began their teaching careers, identify something that was missing that would be helpful to novice teachers in the future and that should be instituted. The final question on the focus group question guide asked the participants to raise any issue that they had not been asked about which they thought would be important to the research.

As with the one-on-one interviews, the focus group was conducted by phone. This was due to the fact that the teachers who participated in this study lived in various places across the United States. In similar fashion to a telephone interview, Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, and Robson (2002) stated that this method of conducting focus groups results in more candid responses from participants as a result of the anonymity that they are afforded because they are not all sitting in a room looking at each other and the moderator. Kreuger and Casey (2002) further stated conducting a focus group by telephone is less intimidating for the participants because they cannot see the displeasure that other participants’ body language may convey even if they are polite in their verbal responses. While conducting a focus group in this manner would allow the interviewer access to busy participants who are located in several locations, the loss of all nonverbal communication—such as head nodding, smiling, or frowning—may be a significant drawback. Participants’ level of attention to the conversation, according to Kreuger and Casey (2002), could be measured by such indicators.
The participants were told that the focus group would be recorded and transcribed verbatim. Additionally, the researcher took notes of observations and insights about the participants on the question form from which the focus group questions were read. Using an interview guide with a focus group ensured that the moderator was able to confirm that all participants are responding to each question. Using an interview guide allowed the moderator to keep track of the time spent on each question (Breen, 2006; Wilson, 2014). Keeping track of time was important as the rule of thumb is that a focus group does not exceed two hours (Kreuger & Casey, 2000).

The focus group question guide—the list of questions posed to the focus group—like the survey instrument and the interview guide was piloted in order to ensure the validity and the reliability of the instrument. Five novice teachers participated in the pilot test. These teachers taught at schools other than the ones where the study participants taught. Some of these novice teachers had participated in the piloting of the survey instrument and the guide for one-on-one interviews. Like the participants in the study, all of these novice teachers had chosen to leave their initial teaching assignment before they had taught for three years. Piloting the instrument gave the researcher the opportunity to refine the questions asked for the focus group. Additionally, the pilot test enabled the researcher to eliminate any instance of researcher bias (Sampson, 2004; Yin, 2014).

The pilot studies of the online survey, the interview, and the focus group instruments were conducted to enable the researcher to determine that the instruments adequately elicit information about the reasons why the respondents left their teaching assignment. After completion of the piloting of all of the instruments, the researcher sought feedback from those who participated in the pilots with regard to the ambiguity of questions; question bias; the
difficulty of questions; and inadequate or insufficient range of responses, with reference to the survey. This information was used to guide revisions to the survey, interview, and focus group instruments prior to using them to conduct the research that informed this study.

**Data Collection**

Qualitative research involved the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data that was not easily quantifiable (Anderson, 2010). There were three major methodological difficulties regarding data collection: gathering enough data to answer the research question or questions; organizing the data gained from a thorough investigation; and proper interpretation of the information received from the research (Bryant, 2004). It was the researcher’s duty, therefore, to gather a sufficient amount of the correct type of data to answer the research questions and interpret that data accurately.

It was suggested that four to six participants were adequate for a case study (Creswell, 2013) as demonstrated by Kipling (2013) and Korth et al. (2017). These participants allowed the researcher ample opportunity to examine the data and identify commonalities and differences since the purpose of case study research was to identify specific instances of a phenomenon and provide very detailed explanations of its variety. The case study research was descriptive; thus, interviews would be an appropriate method of data collection. In this case study, each of the five participants provided answers to questions in an online survey and then participated in a semistructured interview followed by a focus group discussion. The semistructured one-on-one interview was employed to enable the researcher to have topic guides and use the same questions in each interview. This person-centered interview process provided a deep and holistic understanding of the experiences of the interviewees (Rashid, 2011). Semistructured interviewing was most appropriate because the researcher had some knowledge of what was
happening at one setting of the research in relation to the research topic (Crinson & Leontowitsch, 2006). The focus group discussion was a qualitative approach that allowed the researcher to achieve a thorough comprehension of the social issue, novice teacher attrition, as experienced by five individuals. This method of data collection enabled the researcher to obtain information from a specific group, selected because they met the criteria of the population under review (Nyumba et al., 2017).

The initial data (Table 2, Appendix D), outlining the numbers of novice teachers hired at one of the schools during the time covered by the study, was gathered through the teachers’ union and the mentoring program. These two sources provided numbers of novice teachers hired in each year being considered in the study and revealed how many of these novice teachers remained at the school long enough to get beyond the “novice” designation. The purpose of this data collection was to ascertain how many novice teachers were hired at this school during the period under review and to investigate how many of them left this assignment while they were still novice teachers. Additionally, this information allowed the researcher to explore the possibility of a pattern.

Eight prospective participants in the study received a letter of introduction via email, explaining the purpose of the study (see Appendix E). Each participant in the study was emailed a link to the online survey which was the second source of data. This consent form was unsigned to strengthen the commitment to the online survey as the confidential data-gathering instrument. The teachers’ anonymity was an integral part of this study as it encouraged the teachers to provide honest information about their experience at the schools and their reasons for leaving. Additionally, in that email, the participants were informed that subsequent to the completion of the survey, further participation in the study took the form of telephone interviews. Due to the
fact that many of the participants no longer lived in the area, all of the letters discussing voluntary participation and the participants’ signed consent form (see Appendix G) were transmitted to the participants and returned to the researcher via email with the participants’ signatures, prior to the start of the one-on-one interviews. The use of email for the dissemination of this information rather than a group meeting allowed the researcher “cheap, flexible, rapid access to large, diverse, geographically disparate, and otherwise difficult to access samples” (Roberts & Allen, 2015, p. 95). Furthermore, this method allowed the researcher to contact several participants and also served to further ensure confidentiality, keeping each teacher’s participation unknown to the other participants.

Yin (2014) discussed the four types of triangulation that Patton proposed in his 2002 recommendation for triangulation as a means of ensuring the credibility of the data gathered. In this research, data triangulation came from (a) the summary data of novice teacher employment at the school during the period, gathered from the lead mentor and the union representative; (b) the information gleaned from the surveys; (c) the information given in the interviews; (d) the responses given during the focus group; and (e) researcher notes. This triangulation process allowed the researcher to investigate and present “converging lines of inquiry” (Yin, 2014, p. 120). Gathering data from different sources provided collaboration and credibility for the perspectives revealed by the study (Creswell, 2013; Shenton, 2004). It was a corroboratory strategy with each data source offering another assessment of the same phenomenon, thereby “strengthen[ing] the construct validity” (Yin, 2014, p. 121) of the study.

The researcher sought permission from the Concordia University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to perform this study (see Appendix G). No site permission was needed from specific school districts because participants were recruited through social media, professional
organizations, and other professional contacts. All interviews took place via phone calls initiated at the researcher’s home.

**Identification of Attributes**

Qualitative research occurs in a natural setting which enables the researcher to investigate specific attributes that characterize the phenomenon being studied. This study explored the reasons why novice teachers left their initial assignment at an underperforming Title I underperforming school. In order to investigate this phenomenon, it was necessary to identify specific attributes revealed through the literature review, online surveys, and interviews on which the data-collection was based. The defining attributes directing this research were the perceptions of novice teachers with regard to the support received from administrators, the challenges of unaccommodating peers and undefined school climate for novice teachers, and the impact of underperforming students on the careers of novice teachers.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Data analysis was the process of reviewing and critiquing data gathered and impressions received during the research. In qualitative case study research, the researcher, in his or her analysis, used the data to describe and gave meaning to the information revealed through the data-gathering process (Stake, 1995). There was no single formula, recipe, or rule for turning data gleaned from an interview or other field notes into qualitative data analysis (Lennie, Tacchi, Koirala, Wilmore, & Skuse, 2011). Data analysis was a creative, ongoing, and spiraling process in which the researcher made sense of the data collected. Stake (1995) stipulated that there was no specified time at which this would begin. As a consequence, analysis for this study began as soon as the researcher began to interact with the data that came from the participants’ responses.
to the survey and continued all the way through the completion of the review and analysis process.

Creswell (2013) specified that the data analysis process goes beyond “organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through . . . coding and organizing themes. . . [to] representing the data and forming an interpretation” (p. 179). To that end, the analysis of the data received from this research included four stages of data analysis (Morse, 1994, as cited in Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, & Casey, 2015): comprehending, synthesizing, theorizing, and recontextualizing. The initial stage of the data analysis was ‘comprehending’ which took place while the data was being collected and enabled the researcher to write a detailed and coherent description which was often referred to as ‘broad coding’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994, as cited in Houghton et al., 2015). Creswell (2013) described coding as “aggregating the text . . . into small categories of information” (p. 184), a task completed based on references to a particular theme, person or topic. In this research, NVivo was used to conduct the coding process as this assisted the researcher to identify the nodes or hierarchical relationships between information as well as the themes—“broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (Creswell, 2013, p. 186). This method assisted with organization, identification of patterns and the provision of conceptual clarity within the data.

The comprehending process moved seamlessly into synthesizing. Synthesizing was the process of describing the coded data to explain the patterns which reflected the participants’ perceptions and the researchers’ observations. At this stage, the researcher used memos to create a more meaningful analysis. The memos or “executive summary statements” (Houghton et al., 2015) were summaries of key information revealed during the comprehending process. The
memos moved the analysis beyond coding to the compiling of similar codes into themes or related topics (Creswell, 2013) and, in turn, revealed peculiar occurrences.

Theorizing was the next stage of the analysis process, according to Houghton et al. (2015). This allowed the researcher to create a coherent and comprehensive explanation of the synthesized data. In this explanation, the theory of the research results began to take shape as the researcher examined the relationships among the data, seeking to provide an understanding of the information in the memos. Creswell (2013) described this as “the organization of themes into larger units of abstraction to make sense of the data” (p. 187).

The final step of the analysis was recontextualizing or “the development of propositions that may be applicable to settings and populations” (Houghton et al., 2015). In this stage, the researcher perfected the description of the findings, comparing it to similar previously-conducted research results to validate the rigor of the research. This recontextualizing formed the basis of the final presentation of the findings.

**Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design**

The limitations of any qualitative study were those characteristics of the design or methodology that the researcher could not control which impacted the findings and the interpretation of the same from being applicable as a generalization across the world population (Price & Murnan, 2004; Simon & Goes, 2013). As a consequence, acknowledgment of any shortcomings seen by the researcher indicated that the researcher had given extensive critical thought to not just the research problem but also the research that he or she was undertaking and understood the value of further research.

Regardless of the number of novice teachers employed at the Title I schools where this study was set, one limitation of this study was the small sample size. While a large percentage of
the novice teachers hired during the time being studied have left the school, the researcher did not have contact information for them all, so it was not possible to ask them all to participate. The absence of access to all of the novice teachers who taught at the schools during the three-year period under consideration in this study was another limitation. While using this small group did not allow for a lot of variety of reasons for the attrition or many combinations of the characteristics of the teachers, it did not make the observations invalid. In qualitative research, Creswell (2013) posited, a small number of cases provided “ample opportunity to identify themes of the cases as well as conduct cross-case theme analysis” (p. 157). Additionally, Mason (2010) explained that only one occurrence of a particular data, was necessary to show it as something worthy of note in the analysis. In qualitative research, one occurrence would be as significant as frequent occurrences since the focus would be on the meaning of an occurrence rather than on forming a hypothesis or forming a generalization.

Self-reported data introduced another limitation to the study. The researcher relied on the participants’ honesty and accurate recall of the events of the time they were employed at the sites of the study for completion of the surveys and response to the interview questions. While all participants were deemed honest, it was possible for the passage of time and the combination of events to have impacted their recollections and, as a consequence, skewed the data and introduced bias to the results. Since participants’ responses could not be controlled, field testing or piloting the survey instrument and interview questions were employed to ensure the validity and reliability of the survey and interview instruments and the credibility of the researcher’s work. One means of addressing this limitation in questionnaires was to test them for reliability to ensure that they produce uniform outcomes when used with similar populations at different times. Additionally, the validity of questionnaires could be assessed by checking that the
questionnaire measures the phenomenon for which it was designed. Such tests were done to ensure that the questionnaire was able to discriminate subjects in a similar manner to applicable non-self-report procedures (Hoskin, 2012).

The delimitations of a research study result from decisions made by the researcher to exclude or include specific things as he or she decided the boundaries of the study. Delimitations determined the range and the reach of the research (Simon & Goes, 2013). In spite of the fact that both novice and experienced teacher attrition were very high at the schools being studied, the researcher confined the study to novice teachers in an attempt to gather data and describe the circumstances that contributed to novice teachers not remaining in under-achieving, Title I schools. This narrowing of the study allowed the researcher to add to the body of literature that explored a very particular phenomenon, providing insight into the manifestation of the dilemma that could be useful to address the problem wherever such a crisis existed.

Selecting teachers from one school rather than from multiple sites would have allowed the researcher to avoid inconsistencies in the work conditions being described and maintain as close to homogeneity and consistency of experience as possible. This restricted selection would have provided the researcher with the opportunity to study multiple individuals as “a collective case study... [which] is acceptable practice” (Creswell, 2013, p. 150). The researcher would have avoided the need to compensate for variables that alter the circumstances under which the teachers were employed. However, the fact that all of the originally-invited participants did not participate in the study, made it necessary for the researcher to have to expand the study. This expansion created a study that reflected the experiences of novice teachers in more than one school.
Validation

The trustworthiness of the research was what was being described when the term “validation” was used. It was a measure of the soundness of the design and the method of the research to produce findings that accurately characterize the phenomenon being investigated. Lincoln and Guba, as cited by Sousa (2014), proposed “a group of techniques that establish trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” (p. 213). The credibility and dependability of the data collection methods, the data gathered and reported will be important for the strength and acceptance of the study as research that measures exactly what it claims that it does.

Credibility. The credibility of a study referred to whether or not the data as presented was believable from the perspective of the participants in the study. Qualitative research was designed to describe, elucidate or make a phenomenon understandable, as seen through the eyes of the participants. As a consequence, the participants were the only ones who could reasonably assess the credibility of the findings of the study (Trochim, 2006). To ensure the credibility of the results being reported in this study, the researcher transcribed the information gathered in the interviews and had each interviewee confirm that they were being quoted accurately. Furthermore, the researcher used triangulation—the collection of data from various participants in a specific setting (Holtzhausen, 2001)—as a means of ensuring the credibility of the data in the study and capturing different examples, aspects, and elements of the same phenomenon. Having the participants confirm the data as well as triangulating the data provided a richer and more comprehensive study with more thorough and deeply explored results.

Dependability. Considering the dependability of a study included contemplation of whether or not the researcher had made careless mistakes as he or she theorized and conducted
the research, gathered the data, and interpreted and reported the results (Williams, 2011). A dependable study could be replicated by the same researcher or another at a different time, using the same processes whether the results were the same or not. To ensure that this study was dependable, the researcher documented the research processes and the data gleaned in copious, explicit notes. These notes revealed how the processes could be repeated and the uniqueness of the circumstances being researched.

**Expected Findings**

The objectives of this research were:

1. To increase the body of literature examining the issue of novice teacher attrition as it impacts underachieving Title I schools.

2. To review the main reasons for the high novice attrition in underachieving Title I schools.

3. To discuss the experiences of five novice teachers at an underachieving Title I school that led to them leaving that place of employment.

These outcomes led to a clearer understanding of the issue of novice teacher attrition that plagues many underachieving Title I schools, outlining the teachers’ impetus for leaving their initial assignment and, often, the teaching profession.

Novice teacher attrition was caused by job dissatisfaction as a result of a number of factors, including poor leadership, the absence of a clearly defined, identifying school culture and a lack of collegiality (Mulvahill, 2017; Schaffhauser, 2014). It was this researcher’s belief that the study would reveal that the leading single cause of high levels of novice teacher attrition was poor leadership. Prior research suggested that school administrators’ beliefs and practices influenced the career philosophies, goals, customs, and decisions of novice teachers towards the
teaching profession and their work assignment or location (Horng, 2009; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Pogodzinski, Youngs, Frank, & Belman, 2012). The novice teachers’ underdeveloped skill set could not be nurtured and cultivated in a school where the leadership was deficient or weak. This information would be a confirmation of theories in the existing literature. The uncovering of more information surrounding this phenomenon will better equip researchers who are involved in correcting the issue.

**Ethical Issues**

Including human participants in research has ethical ramifications. As a consequence, researchers must be careful to employ appropriate procedures for data collection and reporting to ensure that highest levels of academic honesty and integrity were maintained and the participants experienced no harm in the process (Breakwell et al., 2006; Creswell, 2013). This study did not involve any deception, unethical treatment of respondents, or revelation of personally identifiable or sensitive information.

**Conflict of interest assessment.** The term conflict of interest in research was used to describe situations in which an individual’s neutrality was or can be compromised by considerations of financial or other personal opportunities to gain or profit (Fischbach & Plaza, 2003). The researcher was not currently employed at a school site where any of the study participants were currently or previously employed. Extra care, such as taking measures to maintain the confidentiality of all participants involved and not discussing the study at the worksites, was taken to ensure that there were no circumstances in this study that would negatively impact or have the appearance of compromising this researcher's professional judgment in the conduct of or reporting research.
**Researcher’s position.** The researcher was the sole investigator for this study. She observed varying levels of novice teacher attrition at several schools at which she taught or served in a capacity other than as a classroom teacher. It was the researcher’s belief that high levels of teacher attrition negatively impact student achievement. School districts needed to be vigilant, monitoring levels of attrition, and be proactive in addressing this problem. By conducting this study, the researcher was seeking to add more data to the body of research and literature that discussed this problem so that school administrators had more resources available to them as they sought to lessen novice teacher attrition and so increase student achievement in their building.

**Ethical issues in the study.** There were no known ethical concerns or reasons that this research caused any ill effects to the respondents or anyone else. Teacher attrition and its occurrence at high levels in any one school building or school district was a topic that would invoke strong feelings among K–12 administrators, particularly those whose schools or districts were affected. However, the researcher was very careful to protect the privacy of the respondents, the school sites studied as well as administrators and teachers who were still there. In the pre-survey and pre-interview letters, all respondents were assured that the researcher will put in place measures to ensure their confidentiality. No names or other identifying information was a part of the report, not even the names of the schools or their exact locations. Furthermore, in an effort to honor each participant’s perceptions as it related to teacher retention, the researcher carefully transcribed the interviews and focus group and forwarded to each participant post-transcription to share with them the verbatim transcription so that they could clarify anything that was contrary to their intention. No one received an interview transcription that they
were not a part of, and the focus group transcription was not sent as a group email. Each participant received an individual email.

During the study and subsequent to its completion, all data have been stored on a password-protected USB drive and in print. When not in use, the device and the papers have been secured in a locked filing cabinet to which only the researcher has access. The material will remain securely stored for 3 years. At the end of that period, all printed material will be shredded using a cross-cut shredder and the USB shall be pulverized.

**Summary**

This case study was an investigation and discussion of the rationales behind novice teacher attrition which is a blight on low-performing Title I schools. In this section, the methodology of the research as well as its purpose and design, the instruments used to collect data and the data analysis procedure were discussed. Data was collected from five novice teachers via self-report surveys, semistructured one-on-one interviews, and a focus group. The data gathered was analyzed using the four stages: comprehending, synthesizing, theorizing, and recontextualizing. The next section will present the findings of the study.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

A large number of teachers have left the profession within the first three years of graduating from a preservice program. If this phenomenon was going to be addressed, it was essential for researchers to hear educators pinpoint the challenges they faced and isolate the supports necessary to resolve the crisis (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). This descriptive qualitative case study focused on describing the causes of attrition among novice teachers (those with three or fewer years of experience) who had traveled 100 miles or more from home to take an assignment at a Title I school. While much research had been done looking into teacher attrition, very few researchers looked at novice teachers who had moved more than 100 miles from home to accept a job at a low-performing Title I school. This was an important population in light of the fact that the number of people who were relocating far from home for jobs had decreased significantly over the last 30 years and most teachers opted to work close to home.

The primary research question for this study was: “Why is there a current trend of novice teachers at a low-performing Title I school leaving their assignment?” The study was guided by the following questions:

RQ1. What experiences contribute to novice teachers at a low-performing Title I school leaving that teaching assignment while they can still be described as novice teachers?

RQ2. How do novice teachers describe their level of job satisfaction when working in a Title I school?

Recognizing qualitative case study research as a beneficial and effective instrument for answering real-world questions, this researcher chose this method to probe why the decision to
leave teaching at a Title I school was made. Primary source data was gathered from five teachers who, at the time of the study, could be described as movers who had taught at hard-to-staff, low-performing Title I schools during the time that they could have been considered as novice teachers. Each participant completed a survey, participated in a one-on-one interview with the researcher and joined in a focus group with all other participants. The full structure of the qualitative analysis was described in this chapter.

**Description of the Sample, Population, and Demographics**

The population in this research study included middle school teachers who had traveled more than 100 miles from home to accept a teaching position at a low-performing Title I middle school. The sample included in the study was five teachers who were the first five volunteers who fit the research criteria. No regard was granted to age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, state of origin, subjects taught or whether the teachers were assigned to sixth grade, seventh grade, eighth grade or any combination of the three grades as the participants were being selected, although there did prove to be diversity in these categories. The study included the responses of four females and one male. Various states on the east coast were represented as states of origin and current place of residence of the participants. The teachers taught in four different subject areas.

The initial recruitment for this study involved recruiting five teachers who had taught at a single school. The five teachers whom the researcher initially petitioned to participate in the study were chosen from among the more than 20 novice teachers who had taught at the initially-selected worksite simply because the researcher knew how to contact them. She was aware that they fit the predetermined criteria of the research. They were all teachers who had taught at the same school during the predetermined time and had fewer than 3 years of teaching experience
which qualified them as novice teachers. Of those five teachers, only two completed the study. The others did not make themselves available to complete any of the sections of the study although they had given the researcher their verbal commitment to participate and two of them actually signed the initial consent form. Due to not meeting the sampling threshold of 5 participants, the researcher initiated a second round of recruitment. To achieve this, the researcher requested and received permission from the IRB to expand the research to include participants who taught at other schools. This permission was granted and three other teachers who met the criteria were included. Of the other three teachers who participated, two were recommended by a now-retired administrator who had served as the researcher’s superior at a previous school. The other teacher was someone whom the researcher met through other professional circles.

**Research Methodology and Analysis**

**Single-topic case study.** This study was an investigation into a single issue—novice teacher attrition—among a very specific group—those who had traveled more than 100 miles to accept the position at a low-performing Title I middle school. The qualitative case study approach facilitated the examination of the phenomenon within its natural context using a variety of data sources, allowing for multiple characteristics of the phenomenon to be exposed and reviewed (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The very specific focus allowed the researcher to investigate and extend the scholarly discussion around the issue of novice teacher attrition and bring to that discussion the personal experiences of teachers which could be informative to administrators seeking to lessen or eliminate this occurrence in their school building or district. This was in keeping with Creswell (2013) who acknowledged the importance of identifying a very precise
case—being certain to be unambiguous and specialized—as well as the significance of having a recognized intent for conducting the case study.

Grounded in a social constructivism worldview (Vygotsky, 1978) in which subjective meaning was drawn from personal involvement, this single-topic case study developed and interpreted meaning from the novice teacher encounters of five education professionals with varied middle school classroom experiences. This framework allowed the researcher to embrace meaning as seen through the eyes of these teachers in response to the research question: “Why is there a current trend of novice teachers at a low-performing Title I school leaving their assignment?” The participants’ understanding of their situation was investigated through three data-collection tools—confidential survey, one-on-one interview with the researcher, and focus group—that incorporated Maslow’s theory of human motivation (1970), the human capital theory (Becker, 1994), and the path-goal leadership theory (House, 1971).

Data collection and sources. Qualitative research answers questions about experiences and their meaning from the perspective of the participant. It is the collection of data that cannot be counted or measured. Qualitative research is most commonly used when the researcher is seeking to explore behavior and gain in-depth information about the underlying motivation. The goal is to develop a deep understanding of a topic from the perspective of the individuals who experienced the phenomenon under review and participate in the study. The diverse responses give meaning to the phenomenon or experience being investigated (Jansen, 2010).

In this study, the data-collection methods that were employed were a confidential online survey, semistructured one-on-one interviews, and a focus group conference call. Fink (2003) stipulates that qualitative surveys can be used to gather information on the meanings that individuals attribute to their experiences. The purpose of the survey in this study was not to
count the frequency of any responses but to collect all possible responses as a descriptive measure to be included in the discussion of the causes of novice teacher attrition as revealed by the participants. Semistructured one-on-one interviews, conducted by telephone because the participants were not local to the researcher, allowed the researcher to gather data using a uniform question scheme. A focus group conference call facilitated participant interaction as they gave voice to and discussed their perceptions of their experiences and how they impacted their decisions to leave their assignments at low-performing Title I schools.

**Data analysis.** Qualitative data analysis, a review and synthesis of text, richly explained the experiences of the participants in the phenomenon being explored. Through a process of discovery, the researcher made meaning of and identified patterns and relationships between the details provided by those whose experiences were being studied (Schutt, 2019). This study took an interpretive approach in which the researcher was concerned with the research participants' perceptions of events and sought to provide a meaningful description of the phenomenon under review (Welsh, 2002).

Qualitative survey data was text-based with the focus being on the responses selected rather than how many times a given response was chosen. The researcher brought order to and analyzed the data collected by descriptively labeling so that meaning could be inferred. In this study, the survey was built in Qualtrics, a web-based application that builds surveys and can generate reports. The reports generated, however, were quantitative. Since the study was qualitative and the number of participants was small, the researcher collated the responses by combing through the information the participants provided once all of the survey responses were submitted and noting the emergence of meaningful patterns. Saldaña (2009) recommended manual coding and qualitative data analysis when there was a small data set that was manageable.
to analyze. The focus of the analysis was not a numerical comparison. On the contrary, the researcher was looking for the variety of responses given by the participants in an effort to discover the essence and variety of their thoughts about their experiences as novice teachers in Title I schools and the reasons why they left.

The analytic technique utilized was the creation of a descriptive framework, a strategy in which the researcher explained the data collected about the phenomenon in a narrative form (Yin, 2014). As a consequence, the researcher returned again and again to the data provided by the participants in each of the data collection tools in an attempt to ensure accuracy in the description provided in each tool and to determine if the descriptions provided reflected each other, thereby providing triangulation of the results. In accordance with Yin (2014), the researcher was looking for data triangulation to strengthen the results discovered and saw this as being demonstrated if the findings were corroborated by more than one data-collection tool.

The online survey results were analyzed with a descriptive framework in mind, paying attention to trends or the absence of a trend. As the researcher sought to describe the participants’ level of satisfaction with the experience at the Title I school rather than explain it, the researcher took note of levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. In addition, it was observed which options were an anomaly (one response, the score did not matter), and which options received uniform responses (the score was noted). This was placed in Table 3 (see Appendix H). The researcher used graphs to further give a pictorial representation of the responses to make the emerging patterns more easily comprehensible.

In this study, the researcher employed NVivo as a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) tool to assist the researcher with coding and identification of emergent themes for the one-on-one interviews and the focus group responses. Being aware of the fact that
the CAQDAS will not do the analysis on its own and software cannot decipher the participants’ emotional tone which was often a critical component of the information provided (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016), the researcher also diligently conducted an iterative process of reviewing the participants’ responses manually (Yin, 2014), carefully memoing observations. In the analysis of the data for this study, the researcher used the CAQDAS results as preliminary analysis before revisiting the raw data. The researcher used In Vivo coding when returning to the data as this allowed for prioritizing and honoring the participants’ voices (Saldaña, 2009) while providing an explanation for the causes of high levels of novice attrition as described in the one-on-one interviews. In the next cycle of coding, the researcher opted for manual coding and careful memoing to include the emotional tone of the participants in the analysis. This allowed for a richer evaluation deriving from the axial coding. The emergence of similar themes as the researcher explored the relationships between the interview responses indicated that, even with a small sample, there was evidence of saturation. Once the themes were identified, the themes and attributes were placed in Table 4 (see Appendix I).

The information gathered from the conference call focus group was all analyzed manually. The researcher read and reread the transcript of the focus group, searching for patterns and emerging themes. As part of this process, the researcher made memos, noting observations. The analysis followed for the focus groups was constant comparison analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). The process involved an initial open coding, followed by axial coding, and finally selective coding (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009). Once the researcher had completed the selective coding process and arrived at a statement that synopsized the data or provided a “storyline” (Gibbs, 2010), the researcher sent that statement by individual email to each participant and asked them to comment on whether or not that
encapsulated their experience and thoughts as a novice teacher at a Title I school. All of the participants responded that it did and none of them recommended any change to the statement that had been sent to them. The researcher’s email had requested suggested changes if the statement did not accurately reflect their position.

**Summary of the Findings**

In this qualitative case study, five teachers—who could be considered as novice teachers during the time period under review—described their experiences while they were at their first teaching assignment, a low-performing Title I middle school. The participants would all be considered as movers since they left that teaching appointment and went on to teach at other schools, some of which are also Title I schools. The fact that some of the teachers went on to teach at other Title I schools was the first interesting finding. It indicated that leaving their teaching assignment at a Title I school during their time as a novice teacher was not an indictment, in their perception, against teaching or Title I schools as several of them were willing to continue their careers in an institution of that same ilk.

From the survey responses, it became apparent that no one cause was independently responsible for these teachers—all of whom, except one, wanted to be teachers before completing their undergraduate degrees—leaving their assignment. All of the participants remained in the teaching profession even though they reported the experience at the Title I school while they were novice teachers as being unsatisfactory. When given the opportunity to identify the reason or reasons that led to them leaving the Title I school, all of the participants chose more than one reason from the selection of school culture, collegiality among instructional staff (including administration), and leadership. Collegiality was the least chosen cause in the survey. Only one person selected that reason. All of the participants selected the administration
as contributing to them leaving their assignment. The responses given to the questions that probed deeper into the participants’ perception of the three areas were very diverse with each option offered being not chosen by at least one participant and each question getting one response that was very different from the others.

The experience for each person was very different after delving into the minutiae. Nonetheless, the survey results revealed that the participants had all been involved in a novice teacher mentoring program with which they were mostly dissatisfied. Additionally, they were mainly in grade-level teams where other teachers offered assistance and support with regard to student behavior, shared stories of success that supported the teams’ values, and ideas by new teachers were accepted, supported and appreciated. This collegial atmosphere did not seem to be present among their grade-level, subject teams as they primarily found that these teams shared very little and did not value an interdependent approach. Although this collegiality was demonstrated to a greater extent in the school-wide subject teams, it was still deemed to be marginally acceptable. School-wide collegiality and school culture were judged similarly by all participants as being less than satisfactory. The administration was deemed to be unsatisfactory by all participants except one who was satisfied with the administration’s performance in the areas of the treatment of teachers and in understanding and being accountable for student learning outcomes.

The results of the one-on-one semistructured interviews demonstrated a lesser degree of diversity of thought than the online survey. While the probing questions made each interview slightly different, each interview was conducted with the same interview guide in hand, and the probing questions provided clarity specific to the responses of each interviewee. The responses revealed that some of the novice teachers in the study had not really selected to teach at a Title I
school. During their tenure at the Title I school, they became frustrated, frantic novice teachers in situations with varying levels of support who were dissatisfied with the administration.

The focus group allowed the participants to discuss their experiences as novice teachers among themselves with the researcher being the mere facilitator or moderator (Nyumba et al., 2017). The discussion revealed much diversity of thought as the participants discussed the things that made them uncomfortable or that they did not find to be valuable at the Title I schools, which were the first thing that they were asked about. However, as the discussion progressed, more similarities became evident in their experiences although there were times when responses were prefaced with an indication of nonagreement. There was consensus on what trust and support should look like in a school, but they did not all state that they had seen it in the Title I school where they taught as novice teachers. The participants voiced the belief that novice teachers joining a Title I staff should have advance instruction about what to expect and how to engage with the student population and their families. In their discussion, the participants emphasized the importance of a supportive administration, being in the classrooms and following through with discipline referrals written by teachers as being significant to the experience of teachers in a low-performing, hard-to-staff Title I school.

**Presentation of Data and Results**

The three data-collection tools—the online survey, the one-on-one interview, and the focus group—allowed the participants more than one opportunity to describe their experiences as novice teachers at Title I schools that they had traveled more than 100 miles from home to teach at. Through the three-pronged research process, data triangulation was achieved. The researcher investigated the high rate of novice teacher attrition at low-performing Title I schools by combing through the personal opinions and theories that the participants expressed to discover
the reality that leads to the phenomenon under review. The repeated examination of the data enabled the researcher to observe themes and find meaning in the information given (Stake, 2010).

The confidentiality of the participants was extremely important to the researcher. Consequently, in the reporting of the data, the respondents were given the designation Teacher Red, Teacher Purple, Teacher Yellow, Teacher Green, and Teacher Blue, based on the colors assigned to them in the graphs first created by Qualtrics. For the one-on-one interview and the focus group conference call, the participants were given the labels Teacher 1 through 5, based on the timing of the one-on-one interview and the order in which they called into the focus group conference call. The number was not necessarily the same for both conversations. If a participant had the same number on both occasions, it was coincidental and not by the researcher’s design. Those pseudonyms remained throughout the reporting of the data.

**Online survey.** The researcher-designed survey was created using Qualtrics and made available to the participants by emailing them the link. The first eight questions required the participants to select one answer which gave demographic information, but not information that would allow for them to be identifiable. The other questions addressed the primary research question—“Why is there a current trend of novice teachers at a low-performing Title I school leaving their assignment? Question nine provided an opportunity for the participants to respond to the underlying research question: “What experiences contribute to novice teachers at a low-performing Title I school leaving that teaching assignment while they can still be described as novice teachers?” Questions 10 to 18 allowed the participants to describe their level of job satisfaction when working at a low-performing Title I school which was in response to the second research question—“How do novice teachers describe their level of job satisfaction when
working in a Title I school?” Responses to questions 13 to 18 were given on a Likert scale. All participants answered all the questions. Although there were cases in which some of the scales were not completed, there was never a case in which a participant gave no responses to all sections of a question.

**Demographic information.** All of the teachers who participated in the online survey were fully certified at the time that they started teaching at a Title I school. Two of them received their certification through state-approved teacher preparation programs. One participant received certification through reciprocity with another state. Two of the participants became certified through a career switcher, alternative licensure program. Four of the respondents were female and one was male. Two of the participants were between the ages of 26 and 30; one was between the ages of 31 and 35; the other two were 36 years old or older. Three of the participants spent 2 years at a Title I school during the time that they could be described as novice teachers while one participant remained there for one year. One participant also left the Title I school after teaching there for one year. Two of the teachers indicated that they always wanted to be teachers. Two others revealed that they made the decision to become teachers while in college. The decision to become a teacher was made by one person while he or she was in another career.

Only one man participated in the survey. This was due to the fact that the other men recruited did not participate in the study although they had agreed to do so. When the researcher expanded the search to include more participants, participation by other men was solicited. No other men responded favorably to the request to participate. The researcher could not control this.

**Reasons for leaving the Title I school.** The three reasons for novice teacher attrition that the researcher learned from the literature to be most pressing were school culture, collegiality,
and leadership. Consequently, the participants were asked to identify which of these three were responsible for them leaving the position that they had taken at a Title I school which was more than 100 miles from home during the time that they were a novice teacher. The participants had the option to select one or all of the choices. Four of the participants chose the school culture. One person chose collegiality. All five of the participants selected leadership.

**Mentoring.** All of the participants had been assigned mentors when they first began teaching at a Title I school as is the practice for novice teachers in many school districts. Meetings with their mentors covered classroom management, instructional strategies, curriculum, lesson planning, district and school policies, organizational culture, resources, and observations. Four of the five teachers indicated that they were dissatisfied with the mentorship program. Only one participant expressed satisfaction with the mentoring program. The researcher made a memo to probe this further if it was mentioned during the one-on-one interviews.

**Collegiality.** Questions 13 to 16 investigated the participants’ level of satisfaction with collegiality within the school. Question 13 asked, “How satisfied were you with the collegiality among your grade level team?” Two participants selected “1.” Another chose “2.” The other two indicated “3.” When the researcher delved into the details of the responses, it became evident that the area of greatest common satisfaction was found to be the assistance and support offered by other teachers when dealing with student behavior issues. Teacher Red (TR), Teacher Yellow (TY), Teacher Green (TG), and Teacher Blue (TB) all selected 3 while Teacher Purple (TP) did not respond. The discussion of student behavior issues across the grade level team was reported as unsatisfactory by 4 of the 5 participants. TR, TG, and TB ranked their level of dissatisfaction at 2 while TY gave it 1. TP did not respond to this question also. Teachers being interdependent
and valuing each other was another area in which the participants showed a level of uniform dissatisfaction with TP, TG, and TB giving it a score of 2 while TR gave it a score of 1. In this case, TY did not respond. In all other areas, the responses varied a lot. The responses to this question were shown in Appendix J.

In response to question 14—“How satisfied were you with the collegiality among your subject-specific, grade level team?”—the responses revealed less variety of thought than those in question 13. Four of the participants responded “1” to the question while the other one responded “3.” However, the responses to the more specific questions indicated varying degrees of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the subject-specific grade-level teams among the participants and TG even indicated that he or she was extremely satisfied with the level of teacher interdependence and the degree to which they valued each other. TR responded with a 1 in all areas. TP did also with the exception of the discussion of curriculum issues to which he or she did not respond. The areas in which participants seemed most dissatisfied were the sharing of responsibilities with regard to lesson planning; the sharing of instructional strategies among teachers; ideas of new teachers being accepted, supported, and appreciated; and teachers meeting or talking outside of school. Each person’s response was reported in Appendix K.

Question 15—“How satisfied were you with the collegiality among your school-wide subject department?”—elicited three responses of “2 while two participants chose “1.” The responses to the probes were very similar, indicating that the participants were less than satisfied with the collegiality displayed in their school-wide subject department. Only in the area of teacher’s meeting and/or talking outside of school did one participant—TP—express minimal satisfaction. In all other areas—the acceptance, support, and appreciation of ideas by new teachers; interdependence and valuing of teachers; the existence of a rich tradition of
acknowledgment and celebration of teacher’s goal achievement—the participants indicated dissatisfaction. TR, TG and TB gave a “1” to the acceptance, support, and appreciation of new teachers’ ideas while TP and TY responded with a “2.” Interdependence and valuing each other received a “2” from TP, TY, and TG. TR’s response was “1” and TB did not respond. All participants—with the exception of TP who did not respond to this section of the question—stated that they were very dissatisfied with the extent to which there was a tradition of acknowledgment and celebration of the teacher’s goal achievement. With regard to the teachers meeting and/or talking outside of school, there was a variety of responses: TR and TG selected “2” while TP chose “3” and TB answered “1.” TY did not respond. The responses to these questions were recorded in Appendix L.

“How satisfied were you with school-wide collegiality?” was question 16. Three of the participants responded with “2.” One participant selected “3” and one selected “1.” One person indicated satisfaction—at a level 3— in the areas of adequate opportunities in the school schedule for teacher communication; teachers telling stories of success that support the school’s values; ideas by new teachers were accepted, supported and appreciated; teachers were interdependent and valued each other, and a rich tradition of acknowledgment and celebration of teacher’s achievement. However, several people made these indications of satisfaction. TG indicated satisfaction with the number of opportunities in the school schedule for teacher communication, teachers telling stories of success that support the school’s values, and the teacher interdependence and value of each other. However, satisfaction with new teacher’s ideas being accepted, supported and appreciated was stated by TY while TP indicated satisfaction with the tradition of acknowledgment and celebration of teacher’s achievement were indicated by two other people. TB responded with a “1” to the three areas that he or she gave an answer. He or she
did not respond to ideas by new teachers being accepted, supported and appreciated or a rich tradition of acknowledgment and celebration of teacher’s achievement. The results of this question were given in Appendix M.

**School culture.** Of the five participants, one person—TP—stipulated that he or she was satisfied with the school culture. Of the other four, two—TR and TY—chose somewhat dissatisfied—“2”—and the other two—TG and TB—stated that they were very dissatisfied by selecting “1.” Question 17—“How satisfied were you with the school culture?”—had 21 subsections, designed to tease out what the culture at the Title I schools looked like and how this impacted novice teachers’ experiences. While two of those surveyed—TR and TG—stated that they were satisfied with the extent to which teachers and administrators collaboratively discussed instructional strategies, the other three of them were so dissatisfied with this that they rated it at “1.” In all cases, the participants gave the lowest ratings to the administrators giving useful feedback on their teaching as well as the administrators being supportive of teachers in times of personal or family crisis. Only one participant—TP—ranked teachers being treated with respect by administrators and parents being involved in the school at a satisfactory rating of “3.” Four of the participants—TR, TP, TY, and TB—provided a response about students being motivated to work hard and achieve excellence. They all ranked it as “1.” Two other areas received significant responses. All participants gave a score of “2” to the question about teachers being proud to tell others that they teach at that school. Additionally, all participants gave either a “2” or a “1” with regard to administrators involving teachers in decision-making.

**Leadership.** The final question of the online survey asked “How satisfied were you with the school leadership? The participants demonstrated a high level of dissatisfaction—indicated by scores of “1” or “2” in all categories—with the exception of TR who revealed minimal
satisfaction in the areas of fair treatment of teachers by administrators and students being familiar with administrators. In both cases, he or she gave a score of “3.” Nonetheless, that participant, like all others, gave a score of “1” in answer to the overarching question.

**One-on-one interviews.** Subsequent to the completion of the online survey, the researcher made arrangements with each participant to conduct a one-on-one interview by telephone. The participants consented to have the interviews recorded so that the researcher could create a verbatim transcript of the conversation for use in the study. The researcher assured each participant that the recordings and the transcripts would be kept in a secure location and no identifying information would be kept with them. To further ensure the confidentiality of the process, at no time during the interview did the researcher refer to the interviewee by name.

The analysis of the responses to the one-on-one interviews revealed several themes. The themes aligned with the research subquestion: “What experiences contribute to novice teachers at a low-performing Title I school leaving that teaching assignment while they can still be described as novice teachers?” The most prevalent themes to emerge were the experience at the Title I school, school culture, challenges faced, administration, and reasons for leaving.

**Theme 1: School experience.** Describing the experience at the school and how they felt when they went to school each day ran the gamut from energizing to panic-inducing for the participants in the study. Teacher 1 (T1) reported that he or she “felt energized. I was usually the first one there in the morning and the last one to leave, making sure that I was a valuable asset to my students and my team which I found to be enjoyable.” This person also found the experience to be “frustrating because there were many things that should have been done to help the students and the staff that were not.” This sentiment was more in keeping with that expressed by his or her peers. Teacher 2 (T2) described the experience as “frantic with a schedule that was
constantly changing along with protocols and procedures that were inconsistent.” Teacher 3 (T3) termed the experience as “challenging and frustrating because we didn’t really get a lot of support from the administration.”

Support was provided in each participant’s experience through the school district’s mentoring program. In one of the five cases, the mentoring program was implemented with fidelity and provided support to the novice teacher that it was designed to. That teacher—Teacher 4 (T4)—stated,

The county had a decent orientation program, and then I was assigned a mentor teacher who was fabulous. I felt extremely supported, not only by her but also the teachers on my team, my content team, so that was great.

In contrast to that teacher’s experience were the experiences that were reported Teacher 5 (T5) as I was not oriented well. The principal was nice to get me in the door, but other than that, teachers were not very supportive, and no mentor was assigned to me. It was as if they were looking to see if I would survive in the climate.

In spite of these less-than-desirable descriptions of the school experience, when asked to identify positive experiences that they had at the school, the participants were able to speak of kind coworkers who were helpful. T4 stated, “I met some really good people who were very helpful to me and others.” All of the participants mentioned the students as being a part of the positive experience at the school. T1 expressed it this way: “I loved working with the students, and I loved working with the staff and the community.”

**Theme 2: School culture.** In response to the questions that asked them to describe their experience at the Title I school and the question about how they felt about coming to school every day, all of the participants made mention of the school culture and/or collegiality among
the staff. It is significant to note that the teachers, even without prompting, considered these two things to be so important to their experience. As a consequence, the researcher created a separate theme for this during the second cycle of coding.

In all teachers’ experiences, except T4, the school culture was “unhealthy,” a term used by T2 who further described it as “extremely unsupportive” and “inconsistent.” This characterization mirrored that of T1 who labeled the school culture at his or her school as “culture du jour” and, on probing, stated that “the constantly changing administration led to ever-changing priorities.” Four of the five participants revealed that there were cliques among the staff members which was stressful for novice teachers as they “were unsure who to interact with for fear of creating a difficult situation with others who I need to work with on my team,” stated T5. This was in stark contrast to T4’s experience where he or she “learned a lot by working with my team and other teachers in the building who were so eager to help.” The participants made mention of assistance coming from unexpected sources. T3 mentioned “a teacher from another team met me in the hallway and asked if I had all of my supplies. She took me to her classroom and gave me colored pencils and paper that she had left over from the year before.” T2 spoke of the teacher in the room next door coming over when grades were due the first time.

She asked me if I had been shown how to do my grades. I said that I had not, but I was reading the guide. She came in and sat with me, showing me how to do it until I had finished all of my classes. I even took notes on the guide. It was amazing to get this type of help in the midst of the chaos and clique-filled community that was the norm for this school.
**Theme 3: Challenges.** Four of the five participants named the administration as a challenge. T3 explained this to be a challenge as “with administration being inept, there was too much chaos for novice teachers to get a firm footing.” T2 further expounded on this by stating, 

In the two and a half years that I worked there, we cycled through approximately five or six different administrators: two principals and several assistant principals. With each change in leadership in that short amount of time, new protocols and procedures would be rolled out, but they were not implemented across the board. It was obvious that the administrators who were rolling out the procedures and protocols had not agreed on what they should be in the first place, so we got lots of mixed messages and confusion ensued.

This was very challenging.

Other teachers cited inadequate supplies, classroom management, and student discipline as being challenges. Several participants discussed the students’ abilities—both varied within one class and being below grade level—as being a significant challenge. T5 described it in these words:

My biggest challenge was preparing a class of students for the state test who had such different abilities and all below grade level. The class was too big, over 30, for me to offer much individual attention and many of the students were so low. Discipline became an issue because it was just too many of them who could not keep up.

T1’s biggest challenge was time-management as he or she made mention of “too many meetings eating up teachers’ time and made new teachers’ jobs even challenging.” That was very similar to T4’s challenge which he or she described as “not having enough time in a day to do all of the things that needed to be done due to many meetings.”
Theme 4: Administration. Much mention was made of the administration throughout the one-on-one interviews. The administration was identified as the biggest challenge and said to have significantly impacted the participants’ experience. It was stated that this challenge did not change and when asked, as a final question—“In light of the fact that this research is an exploration of novice teacher attrition, in particular, how it is impacted by school culture, collegiality, and leadership, is there any other relevant information that you would like to share?”—all of the participants mentioned the administration. Several participants spoke of the lack of administrative support and the need for “strong leadership, working in harmony to provide a stable school environment in order to make novice teachers feel safe in their positions and willing to return,” as T3 expressed it. T1 opined that it was his or her belief that the administration was not “malevolent, but unprepared and inadequate for their job, so they created a stressful atmosphere for the staff.” T4 stated something similar when he or she stated that “the administration meant well, but the job was a little more than they could manage.” In each interview, the researcher asked a probing question, not on the interview guide, about whether or not the participant had considered that the administration may not have been inadequate, but the participant was inexperienced and unaware of what leadership in a school should look like. The responses all indicated that the judgment made by the participants reflected their experiences with other bosses from previous jobs, part-time or full-time, as well as their experiences with other administrators at the schools that they have taught at since leaving the Title I school at which they taught while they were novice teachers. T2 stated,

I first thought that my dissatisfaction was due to the differences between the private sector and the public sector, but I soon came to understand that was not the case at all. The administrators were not up to the job at hand.
T5 responded, “I have administrators in my family. I asked about the things that were happening at my school. I knew the administrators needed help. The administrators I talked to agreed.”

**Theme 5: Causes for leaving.** The penultimate question in the one-on-one survey asked the participants to identify and explain an element of the experience at the school that had the greatest impact on the decision to stop working there. The list provided reflected much of what had been mentioned in previous responses. Dissatisfaction with the administration was mentioned by all participants, but the displeasure varied. Some participants considered the administration to be inadequate while others were affected by the absence of support from administration and others, like T2, were impacted by the turnover. The lack of consistency did not allow for stability from one year to the next or even from one semester to the next. There was an utter and complete lack of organization as a result of the high administration turnover. I knew it was not right or good for the students or staff. I love teaching, but I had to do it somewhere else.

Other reasons given included too many extraneous tasks and meetings, the absence of collaboration and the presence of cliques. T4 felt that the many meetings and ancillary tasks did not allow me time to really hone my craft as a teacher while I was there. I really wanted to be a teacher. I had to go elsewhere in order to have the time to make that happen.

It is important to note that, although the question asked for “an element” of the experience, all of the participants gave more than one reason. Four of the five of the participants asked if they could give more than one reason before answering the question. Three participants—T1, T2, and T5—commented on the below grade level performance of the students
and the lack of discipline, but they assured the researcher that was not a reason for them leaving. In the words of T1: “Although the students were low-performing and lacking in discipline, I would not have left for those reasons.”

**Focus group.** The final data-collection tool was the focus group, conducted by conference call because of the distance between the participants. The participants’ identities were kept unknown to each other as the researcher assigned them numbers by which they were referred during the call—Teacher 1, Teacher 2, and so on—which reflected the order in which they logged on to the call and nothing else. As was the case with the one-on-one interviews, the participants agreed to have the conference call recorded and transcribed verbatim. The participants reviewed the transcription to ensure the accuracy of what was transcribed. The transcripts were sent to the participants by email, individually. None of the participants made any corrections.

The researcher facilitated the discussion and led with some previously crafted questions. The participants did comment on each other’s responses and, at times, the conversation was among them with the researcher simply listening to the exchange. The information gathered through the focus group aligned with the overarching research question—“Why is there a current trend of novice teachers at a low-performing Title I school leaving their assignment?”—and probed both areas covered in the subquestions: novice teacher’s experiences at a Title I school and their job satisfaction. The analysis of the conversation of the focus group uncovered several themes that eventually became encapsulated in the statement: Collegiality, strong support systems, and reliable, competent leadership create an environment that novice teachers want to return to.
Question 1. “Can you talk about your experiences teaching at School X? What are some of the things that you remember most? Was there anything that made you uncomfortable, or you did not consider to be valuable?

The participants mentioned insufficient support systems—“the mentoring provided was weak. I rarely met with my mentor and, when we did, she did not have anything to share to help me grow” in the words of T5—as well as an atmosphere where cliques thrived and inadequate administration. T2 described the ineffective mentoring as most memorable because “not having any guidance made my time there very stressful. I always felt as if I was about to make a mistake.” T3 explained that “there were a lot of cliques. You could see the favoritism which made me uncomfortable and told the new ones that we could never get ahead unless we were a part of the right clique.” T5 further commented about the presence of cliques revealing that “it seemed [to him or her] as if the administration supported if not created a system where cliques could exist in the school. They clearly had their favorites with whom they interacted.” It was also stated that the inefficiency and ineptitude of administration in the schools were most memorable. T2 declared, “I will always remember the administration at my first school. They were all new to the school—the Principal and two Assistant Principals—and they were in over their heads. They could not manage the school.” This sentiment was echoed by T3 who stated, “I understand your pain. My administration was not new, but they could not manage the school and they were not receptive to suggestions from the staff, least of all novice teachers.”

The one thing that T4 mentioned as being most memorable and that he or she did not value was constantly feeling overwhelmed because there was so much to be done and too many meetings.
At first, I thought that I was not managing my time well, but when I took the time to write down what I did in every 30-minute block of my day, I realized that when I was not teaching the students, I was in a meeting—learning team meeting, grade level meeting, subject area meeting, parent-teacher conference—and these meetings ate up my time, leaving little time for lesson prep or grading during the school day.

**Question 2.** Were there any support systems in the school that were helpful to your development as a teacher?

The professional development offered through the school district offices was viewed as being helpful as well as the instructional coaches. T1 expressed his or her satisfaction with professional development by stating,

We had professional development on a quarterly basis. That was very helpful to me. We even had some professional development sessions offered just for our school’s staff. Those dealt specifically with issues we were facing and were a great assistance.

T2 considered “the professional development to be much more helpful than the one-on-one mentoring. I learnt things that I could actually use in my classroom.” T4 stated that his or her mentor did a good job of providing support. With regard to the instructional coaches, the sentiment expressed was best described by T3 who said,

our instructional coaches were knowledgeable, helpful and committed to our success. They visited classes to observe, to co-teach so we could see how it should or could be done, and to offer suggestions. They were not judgmental. They shared valuable materials that a new teacher would have no way of collecting otherwise. They were incredible.
Several other participants agreed and T5 asserted that “the mentors could take a page out of the instructional coaches’ books.”

**Question 3.** How would you describe the relationships among the teachers at your school?

The relationships between the teachers varied from school to school, but all of the participants had noteworthy things to say about the relationships between the teachers. While T5 experienced the teachers getting “together socially and professionally . . . [because] it was such a difficult work environment that we needed each other,” T3 was in a situation where “there were cliques on each grade level and some teachers were very isolated.” T4 stated that “it was the family-oriented atmosphere created by the close relationships that I had with some teachers that made me return to that school after the first year.” T2 made mention of the distance that he or she had traveled from home to take the position. That person described a situation in which, at first, there was talk about supporting each other and working together, but this did not last till the end of the first month. I wondered if they were just not sharing with me because I did not fit in here since I was so far away from home. I soon learnt that was not true. If you were not a part of the clique, there was no sharing with you, regardless of where you came from.

T1’s experience led him or her to speak of, clear evidence of collegiality within groups as they interacted in school and outside of school, but the staff was clearly divided into cliques that I never did understand the uniting factor. It was not just grade level or subject area.
**Question 4.** Can you describe elements of what makes positive school climate in our opinion? Did you experience any of these things while teaching at the Title I school? Did you describe any of these while teaching at School X?

T5 volunteered that, in his or her perception, a positive school climate exists where the teachers are working cooperatively and collaboratively in teams where their expertise as content experts is valued. This participant further stated that

a supportive administrative team will create an atmosphere where students know that discipline will be upheld and enforced so that teachers can get students more receptive to the lessons being taught and less inclined to being disruptive in class or disrespectful to teachers.

This participant said that support from the administration was sporadically evident at the school at which he or she taught. T2 stated that he or she is in agreement with T5 and he or she observed this infrequently in the school that he or she had taught. T2 also added that the school needed a teaching staff that “mirrors the ethnicities and cultures of the students so that the students have a stronger sense of belonging which makes them more inclined to work hard.”

However, he or she stated that was not the case at the Title I school at which he or she had taught. T3 affirmed what had been said before and reiterated that “teachers working together is the basis of positive climate among teachers.” He or she stated that there was little evidence of that collaboration while he or she was teaching at the Title I school. Likewise, T4 and T1 supported what had been said before and emphasized teachers working together cooperatively and collaboratively. The only difference was that T1 made mention of trust while none of the other participants did: “Trust is essential to a positive climate in a school also.” Both T4 and T1 concurred that a positive school climate was hardly encountered, in their experience.
**Question 5.** What does it look like if there is trust and support in a school among staff? What about between staff and administration? Were there signs of that at School X?

All of the participants in the study viewed trust and support among staff in a school as the ability to count on each other to assist wherever and whenever necessary without that assistance being requested by the one who needed it. They stated that support was present in their schools to a certain degree, but not enough. Trust, they explained, was not present because of the cliques and administration not being reliable or consistent with regard to discipline or support of teachers. T3’s response explained that:

the trust and support between teachers was tenuous because of the cliques, but the teachers had to stand together and offer support because students cannot go against a teacher if there was at least one other teacher standing with them and lending support.

T1 stated that while there was “a certain degree of trust and support between teachers . . . there was no trust for the administration because they did not support the teachers when the teachers faced difficulties with students and parents.” This participant further revealed that the trust and support among the teachers were superficial so they seldom withstood differences of opinion. In contrast to the other participants, T4 responded that there was “trust and support among the teachers in his or her Title I school. This participant indicated that “the principal would come to classrooms, not to observe for assessment, but to offer support to the teacher.”

**Question 6.** Reflecting on your experience at School X, is there anything that was missing that you would recommend that would be useful to novice teachers in the future?

The first response to this question, given by T4, identified the need for novice teachers to be open-minded. “Students are from different backgrounds. As a result, their needs differ, and their educational experience is impacted by this. Be patient with the students and do not judge
anyone.” Several participants spoke of the fact that the students did not have the requisite prior knowledge. “It was eye-opening to see and understand where these students’ basic skill levels place them,” said T5. T3 suggested that novice teachers should ask for assistance and not wait for it to be given to them as, “in too many Title I schools, the necessary help is not coming to you if you do not actively seek it.” T2 recommended that novice teachers should “participate in all of the professional development that is offered to you. In many of these opportunities, you will learn something that you can use in the classroom.”

**Question 7.** Is there anything that I have not asked that you would like to talk about?

T3 wanted to discuss the existence of cliques and the negative impact that has on the success of novice teachers. He or she would like all novice teachers to be informed about the existence of cliques among teachers and, while this can be of assistance to those who are members of the cliques, it creates an isolated, unsupported existence for those who are not. “You can’t underestimate the politics in a school. Cliques will tear a school apart from the inside out.” T5 agreed with that and further stated that he or she was of the opinion that the administration approved of and fostered the existence of the cliques. The reason given for holding this belief was that “the administration sets the tone for the whole building and should lead the charge for developing camaraderie, trust and supporting the novice teacher.” T1 stated: “I agree about the dangerous nature of cliques among a staff and I want to suggest that this be a topic discussed during professional development at the start of the year.”

T2 raised the issue of referrals not being processed and how this damages the confidence of novice teachers. He or she labeled this as a deficiency in the administration’s ability to properly manage the school. Further, he or she stated that novice teachers should know about this before the start of the school year. Several participants responded that, while this was a problem,
high rates of turnover among administrators may make it unfair to judge the incoming administrator. “We do not know this to be true of all administrators and, if you are getting a new one, you do not know yet what this one will do,” said T4. As a consequence, as a group, they determined that there was no benefit in telling incoming novice teachers that this would be a problem.

T1 recommended that there should be a discussion with novice teachers about inappropriate student behavior before the start of the school year. This idea was not met with approval. The consensus was that this would prejudice the new teacher against students. T2 reiterated the need to be mindful of the “politics in the school.” He or she asserted that politics could be good or bad and the quality of the administration had a lot to do with determining which one. He or she also said that there was an expectation that they would have been asked for “two or three things that the administration does or does not do that sets either a positive or negative tone in the school.” The other participants voiced their agreement to that expectation. The researcher consented to a discussion of that issue.

To begin that discussion, T5 stated,

I was really lucky because the teachers at the school I went to were so strong that they were able to drive many of the performance criteria in spite of what the principal thought or the record that the principal was trying to protect. The deans also played an active role in student behavioral issues and this allowed the teachers to avoid the frustration of dealing with the principal or assistant principals who did not respond in a manner that was supportive to the teachers.

T1 responded in agreement that T5 was indeed “lucky” as few schools exist where the teachers are able to “circumvent unsupportive administration” and lack of administrative support
does make it hard for teachers, especially those who are new. T3 stated that, as a novice teacher, he or she had not understood the concept of not disciplining a student in a manner that had to be recorded as a means of protecting the school’s record. As a consequence, he or she had been very frustrated watching students not receiving any consequences for their actions. He or she feels that the administration should deal appropriately with student behavior so that students are aware that there are penalties for their actions and teachers feel valued by administration. I left the Title I school I started at because the way that administration had no regard for teachers was more than I could continue to work with.

T2, the final participant to comment on this issue, said that by Thanksgiving each year before he or she left the first school at which he or she was teaching, at least five teachers would leave and all of them stated that “they could not work in a school where teachers did not support each other and administration supported the teachers even less.” The fifth member of the focus group—T4—stated that he or she agreed with all that had been said so far and had nothing to add that had not been said already.

The researcher’s final contact with the participants in the study was to send them individual emails, asking them to comment on the statement that was the result of the selective coding process. The researcher had told them in advance to expect this email and had let them know that the question that would be asked at this time was: “Is this statement representative of what you were trying to say in all of your responses to the various parts of the study?” All of the participants stated that—collegiality, strong support systems, and reliable, competent leadership create an environment that novice teachers want to return to—was indeed a true representation of their feelings.
Summary

In this chapter, the research results of a single-topic case study of the issue of novice teacher attrition of teachers who traveled more than 100 miles from home to accept a position at a low-performing Title I school were presented. The participants in this study were five teachers who continued to teach after leaving their initial positions. The data-collection through an online survey, one-on-one interviews, and a focus group facilitated multiple opportunities for the five teachers to offer some insight and provide information necessary for the researcher to explore and ascertain reasons why the phenomenon proliferates. Careful analysis of the responses given allowed the researcher to extract conclusions free of researcher bias.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

Through this qualitative single-topic case study, the researcher joins the corps of educational scholars involved in the exploration of the challenges of novice teachers that lead to high levels of novice attrition in low-performing Title I schools. While much research has previously been conducted on teacher attrition—novice and veteran—this study fills a gap in existing literature, probing specifically novice teacher attrition among those who traveled more than 100 miles from home to accept a teaching position at a low-performing Title I middle school. It is the researcher’s hope to glean some wisdom from the microcosm of the study that can be applied in schools to stop the flow of novice teachers away from the classroom. In this study, the researcher investigates the experiences of novice teachers who taught at and then left their position at low-performing Title I middle schools. The focus of the study is to understand the reasons why the teachers left their initial positions during the time that they could still be described as novice teachers.

Chapter 1 provides a look at the history, background, and context of the novice teacher attrition in low-performing Title I schools. Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive review of existing literature, discussing the issue of novice teacher attrition, especially with reference to three of the most common factors listed as contributing to this problem—school culture, collegiality, and leadership. Chapter 3 discusses the methods used for data collection and analysis in this study. In Chapter 4, the findings of the research and the analysis of the collected data are communicated. This final chapter of the study, Chapter 5, is a summary, outlining the implications of the study, conclusions, and providing recommendations for further research. Strategies for implemented practice to decrease the incidence of novice teacher attrition in low-
performing Title I middle schools are also discussed in this chapter. Additionally, the summary in this chapter examines the results in Chapter 4 in relation to existing literature, the research questions, and the themes that emerged as the data was analyzed. The limitations of the study are discussed. The data collected and how this information would advise school building leaders and school district officials from the perspective of actual novice teachers who relocated more than 100 miles to their assignment at a Title I school are examined. This material could help leaders to consider changes as they seek to build stability in their teaching staff and, as a consequence, improve student performance. Moreover, recommendations for additional research are discussed in this chapter and a conclusion of the study is given.

**Summary of the Results**

The researcher chose a single-topic case study to examine the experiences of novice teachers who travel more than 100 miles from home to accept an initial teaching position at a low-performing Title I school. Teacher attrition developed into a problem that existed within and beyond the borders of the United States at alarmingly high and concerning rates (Whalen, Majocha, & Van Nuland, 2019), especially among novice teachers. As an educational professional who worked in several countries, the researcher was interested not just in understanding this phenomenon, but also with identifying the various causes in order to be an integral part of the movement to eliminate novice teacher attrition and its negative impact on the education that students receive.

**Research questions.** The basic research question that guided this exploration was: Why is there a current trend of novice teachers at a low-performing Title I school leaving their assignment? In order to get more specific data, the researcher delved into the teachers’ lived experiences through two subquestions:
• What experiences contribute to novice teachers at a low-performing Title I school leaving that teaching assignment while they can still be described as novice teachers?

• How do novice teachers describe their level of job satisfaction when working in a Title I school?

Theories in contextual framework. Several theories interlocked to form the conceptual framework that guided and governed this research. While each of these theories—social constructivism, human capital, path-goal and hierarchy of needs—was significant enough on its own to inform research, for this study, it was the interconnection that gave depth to the data. These theories guided the researcher’s analysis of the responses given by the participants. Each emergent theme was viewed through the lens of the theories in the search for meaning from the experiences of the participating novice teachers.

In social constructivism, social interaction was deemed to be fundamental as the novice teachers were developing the meaning of their experiences based largely on their interactions with others. During the interviews and the focus group, the participants in this study explained just how important social interaction was to them as they spoke of the positive impact of the little assistance that they received from peers, the negative impact of cliques, and social interaction outside of the school being essential to their survival there. Mention was made of experiencing a family-oriented atmosphere based on relationships formed with peers, while other participants spoke of isolation if you were not a member of a clique. Other participants mentioned social interaction being essential as they needed each other because of the difficult work environment. To the researcher, it was apparent that, for the novice teachers involved in this study, professional collegiality was important as they sought to make meaning of the world in which they were working through their experiences with others there. The variety of the realities that
the teachers indicated allowed the researcher a glimpse of how important social interaction and community were to the individual novice teachers.

Human capital theory, in this study, was considered as more than mere economic philosophy. It included the analysis of the individual’s mindset surrounding his or her worth and the value of experience to the individual (Tan, 2014). Kukla-Acevedo (2009) stated,

[O]nce in the teaching workforce, they [teachers] make ongoing assessments of the school environment to determine whether teaching continues to be the most preferable option out of all their alternatives. Current teachers may decide to pursue another occupation, they may decide to transfer to a school with better working conditions, or they may decide that their current post remains the most attractive alternative. (p. 443)

The focus, in this study, was on the personal, intellectual, social, and cultural benefits to the individual which influenced his or her employment decisions. It was the novice teacher’s employment decisions that made human capital theory important to this study. The novice teachers’ valuation of the initial employment opportunity at the current Title I school and their resolve to not remain in that assignment but to move to another school made human capital theory significant to the findings of this study. They expressed resolve to move to another school rather than leave teaching indicated that, while that teaching experience was proving to be unsatisfactory, the novice teachers ascertained that they wanted to remain in teaching and they could do so at another school site.

According to the path-goal theory, subordinates’ job satisfaction was impacted by the motivation and creation of goals provided by the leader to ensure the subordinate’s success. The significance of path-goal theory, in this study, was demonstrated in the novice teachers’ perspective with regard to whether or not the principal was enabling the teachers’ success.
Furthermore, the novice teachers’ belief that the principal was removing any impediments and providing a clear path to the teachers’ success influenced their decision to stay or leave the assignment.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs—presented as a five-tiered model of human needs, labeled physiological, safety, love or belonging, esteem, and self-actualization—ranked human needs in order of importance. In this study, the focus was on both the lower level desire for collegiality—the need to feel a part of a group—and the more abstract higher level need to be respected, appreciated, and accepted for one’s abilities and achievements. Both of these were found to be important to novice teachers and to have impacted the novice teachers’ choice to leave the assignment at a low-performing, Title I school.

**Significance of study.** Novice teacher attrition had proved to be an international problem for educational systems (Whalen et al., 2019) and its causes need to be further investigated and identified so that they can be addressed. Sutcher et al. (2016) in the United States, Weale (2016) in the United Kingdom, and the European Union (2013) reported that between 15 and 50% of novice teachers leave the profession while they could still be considered novice teachers. High teacher turnover and insufficient qualified teachers have created inadequate learning environments for students and harmed school systems (Garcia & Weiss, 2019a). In an attempt to address this phenomenon, research into the reasons why novice teacher attrition continued to grow has provided insight into how to remedy or repair the problem. This study is significant as it joins the compendium written on the subject by highlighting the circumstances that surround a very specific group. The researcher deemed it important to gather information from actual novice teachers who had moved more than 100 miles from home to accept a position at a low-performing Title I school in order to view the reality of the situation as it applied to this subgroup.
of novice teachers. This study allowed the researcher to garner authentic evidence from those who experienced the problem to add to the body of knowledge surrounding novice teacher attrition and to provide insight into implications for teacher recruitment and retention practices.

**Review of literature.** Much previous research (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Joiner & Edwards, 2008; Podolsky et al., 2016; Redding & Henry, 2019) examined novice teachers leaving their initial assignments because of unsatisfactory work conditions. This study, similarly, considered the patterns or variations of the employment behavior of novice teachers. In this case, however, the focus was to identify and describe the conditions that impacted the decision of novice teachers who had traveled more than 100 miles from home to take an assignment at a low-performing Title I school to leave that position. Inadequate and disappointing leadership (Balu et al., 2010; Boyd et al., 2011; Hancock & Scherff, 2010; Vanderslice, 2010), teachers’ desire for collegiality (Berry et al., 2009; Eklund, 2009; Shah, 2012) and the lack of school culture (Danielson, 2007; Prokopchuk, 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2012) proved to be significant causes for novice teacher attrition in literature reviewed and in this study.

**Novice teachers and leadership.** Boyd et al. (2011) postulated that novice teachers’ perception of school administration played a significant role in the decision by novice teachers to remain or leave their teaching position. The role that the novice teachers expected administrators to play included personal and emotional encouragement as well as task-specific or instructional support. Podolsky et al. (2016) posited that support from school leaders was one of the best predictors of teacher attrition. The support that the novice teachers expected from school administrators could be received within their classrooms or without. Novice teachers expected administrators to consistently uphold the rules governing the school. This creation of a stable and
reliable atmosphere in which they could grow and practice their craft was important to novice teachers both in previous research (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2012; Headden, 2014) and in this study. In this research, these expectations by novice teachers were largely unmet and that contributed significantly to the novice teachers who participated in the study leaving their assignment at the low-performing Title I schools where they began their teaching careers. T5 said, during the one-on-one interview, “I just could not teach at a place where the administration did not support the teachers.” This sentiment was expressed in other words by the other participants in the study.

Novice teachers and school culture. In schools with large numbers of teachers leaving like those at which the novice teachers in this study originally taught, school culture bordered on becoming nonexistent as it constantly changed (Grissom, 2011; Simon & Johnson, 2013). Too few teachers remained in the schools, from year to year. As a consequence, there was no building on or replicating the pre-existing culture, passing on the written and unwritten rules, relationships, attitudes and beliefs that guide how the school functions. During his or her one-on-one interview, T1 described this situation when he or she said that “there was no culture that incoming teachers could learn or follow.” To the researcher, it appeared that each year, the schools seemed like new schools with no existing culture and there was not enough school spirit to draw the teachers together to begin to build a community from which the missing culture could grow. There was a significant loss of institutional memory and important information for the integration of novice teachers into the teaching community was missing (Ronfeldt et al., 2012). Prokopchuk (2016) described this situation as being detrimental to the development and fostering of school culture. Analysis of the data from this study indicated that such an erosion of school culture was the case in the schools where the participants were first employed.
Novice teachers and collegiality. Previous research revealed that the presence of collegiality among the teaching staff afforded teachers, especially novice teachers, relationships that enhanced his or her growth as a teacher. Charner-Laird, Szczesiul, Kirkpatrick, Gordon, and Watson (2016) asserted that novice teachers deemed collegial support to be key to their success. In like manner, Pogodzinski (2014) affirmed that novice teachers measured their working conditions by the quality of collegiality they experienced within the school. Many novice teachers desired a collegial atmosphere and considered the benefits of collaboration to be greater than the drawbacks (Perez, 2015). The novice teachers in this study also voiced a desire for collegiality among their peers. T3 stated during his or her one-on-one interview that he or she “would have considered the school as a better place to work if the other teachers were more collegial.”

Review of methodology. The information for this study was gathered using a researcher-created online survey, semistructured one-on-one interviews, and then a focus group discussion. The online survey used in this study enabled the novice teachers to provide information about their experiences at the low-performing Title I school. Semistructured one-on-one interviews allowed the researcher to probe each participant for details of his or her experience in a conversational manner. This enabled the researcher to get reliable data in a semi-formal setting. Keller and Conradin (2018) explained that semistructured interviews provide trustworthy and comparable data. The third data-collection method used in this study was a focus group discussion. This qualitative approach to gaining in-depth knowledge of the social issue of novice teacher attrition involved a discussion with the five novice teachers who participated in the study. All data collection tools were piloted before being used for the study.
Summary of findings. From the beginning of the analysis of the data received through the various data-collection instruments, it became apparent that no one factor was independently responsible for novice teacher attrition. The participants in the study cited various reasons throughout the data-collection process for leaving their initial teaching assignment during the time that they could still be described as being novice teachers. The reasons highlighted in the study, drawn from the literature reviewed as being of great significance, were all identified in this study as being contributing factors for the participants leaving their initial assignments. 

Table 1 highlights the responses to the three reasons for leaving featured in this study.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Leaving</th>
<th>Number of participants who selected that reason</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School culture</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>unhealthy; stressful; extremely unsupportive; inconsistent; culture du jour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>cliques; some really good people; assistance from unexpected sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>unsupportive; inadequate for job; needed to be strong; not malevolent; unprepared for job; needed help</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, it was evident that the causes that led to novice teacher attrition were so intricately interwoven that, while it is possible to list contributing factors, it is not possible to identify one as being the only cause.

The initial finding of this study was that although the terms “novice teacher attrition” and “novice teacher turnover” were often used interchangeably, there was a subtle difference. When considering the number of teachers available to be hired by any school, the two terms were significantly different. In cases of attrition, fewer teachers were available to be hired as more novice teachers became leavers. When novice teachers leave their teaching assignment at one
school for another at a different school, that was found to be a situation of turnover. However, to specific schools that lost a novice teacher, the impact was the same. The importance of the subtle difference became apparent to the researcher during the analysis of the data because all of the participants in the study were movers rather than leavers. Some of the participants transferred to another school in the same school district while others went to other school districts. Some of the participants in the study even continued to teach at low-performing Title I schools.

**Research question 1.** In consideration of the data that indicated why there was a current trend of novice teachers leaving their assignment at a low-performing Title I school, the researcher reviewed data gleaned from the responses given to questions in all of the data collection tools. The analysis of the data from all three data-collection methods resulted in the identification of five themes, highlighted in the reporting of the data results of the online survey in Chapter 4: school experiences, school culture, challenges, administration, and causes for leaving. One question in the online survey explicitly gave the participants in the study the opportunity to select the reason or reasons for leaving the low-performing Title I school at which they began their teaching career. In response to that question, all of the participants selected more than one answer from the options of school culture, collegiality among staff (including administration) and leadership. The responses to that survey question revealed that collegiality was the least important factor to this group of teachers as only one person selected that as a contributing factor to them leaving that teaching assignment. On the other hand, all of the participants selected leadership to be of much greater significance to them. In the one-on-one interviews and the focus group, it was also made clear by the participants that the lack of support from leadership and what they described as the leader’s inability to effectively lead the schools was a major contributing factor to their decision to move to another school.
**Subquestion 1.** The first subquestion looked into the experiences that contributed to novice teachers leaving their initial teaching assignment. The participants in this study made mention of too many additional tasks consuming their planning time, working with administrators who did not know how to run a school, constantly changing priorities, no or inadequate mentoring, being unsure who they could safely interact with, feeling shunned and not knowing why, lack of teacher support by administration as experiences that made them leave their assignment at the low-performing Title I schools at which they had taught. Some of the experiences seemed to be of greater significance to the participants than others.

**Subquestion 2.** The second subquestion focused on how the participants in the study described their level of job satisfaction. These descriptions varied. All of the participants in the study were dissatisfied to the extent that they left their positions. However, the focal point of the dissatisfaction varied from participant to participant. While all of the participants were dissatisfied with the administration at their schools, this proved to be to a greater extent with some than with others. While four of the participants considered their administrations to be a source of great dissatisfaction, one participant was of the opinion that the administration under which he or she initially worked, displayed some satisfactory traits.

Collegiality proved to be an area with significant variation in the level of satisfaction for the participants in this study. While there was concern about the level of support that was extended between teachers by some participants, others described experiencing satisfactory professional support from their peers. Insufficient discussion of student behavior issues when teams met also negatively impacted the experiences of novice teachers. Several of the schools at which the novice teachers taught initially had cliques which also proved to influence collegiality and the school culture negatively as the participants in the study reported that novice teachers
were cautious in their interactions with others as they were uncertain of making the wrong allegiances. T1, T3, and T5 were most vocal about this uncertainty. T1 stated that he or she had “never worked at a place, before that, where I was afraid to talk to people as I did not know if doing so would be held against me.”

**Discussion of the Results**

The data in this single-topic qualitative case study revealed not only the uniqueness of low-performing Title I schools but also the ways in which they were the same, resulting in similar experiences for teachers in these schools although they were miles apart. While the findings of the three data-collection tools were specific to each participant, there was sufficient commonality to be deemed evidence of triangulation. The researcher viewed it as the capturing of various instances of the same phenomenon rather than indications of several related phenomena. The five novice teachers outlined how they were impacted by the conditions at each of the schools at which they began their teaching careers, how these conditions impacted their job satisfaction, and how these conditions influenced their decisions to leave those schools.

**Collegiality.** While collegiality was an area of concern for the teachers who participated in the study, it seemed to the researcher that the data received from the confidential online survey, Questions 13 to 16, may have been somewhat skewed. Each question was followed by probing questions, designed to get further information to explain the response to the initial question. An example is shown in Error! Reference source not found.
The levels of satisfaction indicated in response to the initial question did not always match the responses given to the probing questions that followed. Collegiality was clearly an area of dissatisfaction for the participants, however, the researcher believed from the additional responses given that the level of dissatisfaction that was often registered as 1, the greatest degree of dissatisfaction, was more likely a 2. This mismatch in the responses was confirmed by the discussions during the one-on-one interviews and the focus group. At those times, the participants indicated dissatisfaction in the area of collegiality, especially as it related to teams being interdependent, collaborative and cooperative as well as teachers being supportive of each other’s achievements.

However, this dissatisfaction was not as extreme as a score of 1 suggested. In fact, it seemed to the researcher that there was some confusion that might have stemmed from the difference in meaning between “collegiality” and “congeniality” as there was discussion of staff
members being or not being friendly. T3 stated in his or her one-on-one interview that he or she had encountered “a teacher who was very nice . . . she did not teach in my grade, but she was super helpful” which was in stark contrast to T5 who mentioned that the principal was nice at the start, but that did not last. Additionally, T5 stated that the teachers were not supportive at all. All of the teachers spoke of this “nice” or “helpful” behavior with a sense of surprise as they all, except T4 during the interviews, considered their schools to be “chaos and clique-filled.” This confusion was further exhibited during the focus group when T1 stated that he or she “wish[ed] that there had been more comradery between the entire team rather than just certain members of the team.” To eliminate any such confusion in future research, the researcher realized that providing definitions of important terms would be helpful and serve to preserve the validity and integrity of the results.

Nonetheless, the results from the study were that in low-performing Title I schools where there was little or no collegiality, novice teachers were very likely to leave. Based on the experiences of the novice teachers who participated in this study, the absence of collegiality did contribute to novice teachers leaving their teaching assignments while they could still be considered as novice teachers. T3 was not the only participant to speak of his or her dissatisfaction with the absence of collegiality in what the researcher considered to be extreme terms. He or she spoke of being so dissatisfied with the absence of collegiality that he or she had considered “working in the isolation of a cubicle as being attractive.”

Leadership. Similarly, the results with regard to leadership addressed all of the research questions. Leadership, deemed as inadequate, contributed significantly to novice teachers being dissatisfied at their initial teaching assignment and deciding to leave their teaching assignments. All of the participants in this study indicated that leadership was a major contributing factor in
their decision to leave their initial assignment at a low-performing Title I school. This was made evident in the results of all three data-collection tools, indicating triangulation. In fact, it seemed to the researcher that the participants in the study considered the administration to be responsible for the shortcomings in all three of the major areas—collegiality, school culture, and leadership—that lead to high levels of novice teacher attrition. T5 was not the only participant to state that he or she felt that the administration was in favor of the existence of cliques which was becoming a part of the culture of the school. Several of the participants, during the focus group, stated that they felt that the problems in the area of collegiality could be addressed by the administration. The suggestion was that the leadership could have created events at which the staff interacted socially. The general consensus was that the leadership at all of the schools represented were not sufficiently skilled in the areas of instructional leadership and the building of school culture. The participants stated that the leadership was not sufficiently supportive which created an atmosphere that they could not remain in as they needed the support. The fact that several of the participants mentioned what they considered to be the inadequacy of the leadership convinced the researcher that the participants were deeply impacted by the areas of weakness of the leadership. To the researcher, this perception of the administration was important enough to the participants that it was a significant consideration as they made their decisions to leave the positions at the low-performing Title I schools.

**School culture.** In discussing the school culture, the participants all mentioned the leadership and collegiality which further indicated to the researcher just how interwoven the three areas that were being considered really were in practice. From the participants’ comments with regard to all three of the major causes of novice teacher attrition being reviewed, it became evident to the researcher that, in the participants’ opinion, school culture and collegiality
overlapped and they were both impacted by the school leadership. Figure 2 illustrates this relationship.

![Figure 2. Interconnections between leadership, school culture, and collegiality.](image)

While the participants did encounter some friendly and helpful people in the buildings, they mainly considered the school culture to be unhealthy, unsupportive and inconsistent. The responses to the questions about school culture answered the second subquestion which asked about how novice teachers describe their level of job satisfaction when working in a Title I school. The participants in the study spoke of their dissatisfaction that there was no school culture at the Title I schools at which they worked. Attrition had dug so deep into the staff at these schools that few people, even administration, had been at the schools for three years or fewer. T2 spoke of that when he or she mentioned that the administration was new. He or she had said that “while the teachers were not all novices, few of them had been at the school for more than 3 years.” While analyzing the data, the researcher realized that it would have been informative to have asked all of the participants for an estimate of what percentage of the staff at their schools had been at the school for more than 3 years and how he or she felt about that. This information might have given further insight into the lack of school culture and institutional
memory and how it results from novice teacher attrition. If the percentage of novice teachers in the building was 50% or more, the researcher might have deemed the lack of school culture and institutional memory to have grown from the fact that so few of the teachers at the school had been there for a long time or had interacted with other teachers who had done so. If the percentage of novice teachers in the building was less than 50%, the researcher would be inclined to believe that the lack of school culture and institutional memory was a side effect of something other than novice teacher attrition.

**School experiences.** The school experiences that were discussed in the study provided answers to all of the research questions. In some cases, the experiences led to novice teachers leaving their initial assignment at a low-performing Title I school. Mention was made of the experience being panic-inducing and harried with too many extraneous responsibilities outside of the classroom, insufficient support systems and an inordinate number of meetings during teachers’ planning time. These school experiences led to novice teachers leaving their assignments at low-performing Title I schools and which would continue to have that result. Participants in this study spoke of needing to go elsewhere in order to have the time to hone their craft as teachers. However, the researcher is of the opinion that if these unsatisfactory experiences did not exist, novice teachers would remain in their initial teaching assignments as the study revealed that there were some kind and helpful co-workers. Additionally, the teachers in this study stated that the professional development planned and implemented by the school district as well as the instructional coaches was useful. Of greater consequence was the fact that teachers enjoyed working with the students. In fact, several of the study participants stated that they would not have left because of the students. Even T5 who was very concerned about having
large classes of students who were below grade level disclosed that “the challenging students
would not have been reason enough for me to leave.”

Causes for leaving. The reasons why novice teachers leave their initial assignment at a
down-performing Title I school while they can still be considered a novice teacher was the focus
of this study. In this study, all of the participants identified leadership as a reason they left the
position. It seemed that administrators with weak, inconsistent leadership abilities made teaching
at a low-performing Title I school untenable for novice teachers. T3 mentioned the need for
leadership to create an atmosphere that novice teachers would want to return to. The researcher
was not surprised that leadership had featured so prominently as a reason for novice teacher
attrition. The results confirmed the researcher’s experience gained over more than 20 years in the
field of education, many of those spent in low-performing Title I schools where the researcher
had opportunities to speak with novice teachers and to observe what they were going through.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

This study explored the reasons why novice teachers who travel at least 100 miles from
home to accept a position at a low-performing Title I school leave that position during the time
that they can still be considered as novice teachers. In particular, the experiences that contributed
to them leaving the position as well as how these teachers described their level of job satisfaction
were investigated. Previous research has highlighted each of the major issues addressed in this
study: collegiality, leadership, and school culture. A goal of this qualitative single-topic case
study was to gain a deeper understanding of how these three areas impact novice teacher
attrition, especially those novice teachers who had traveled more than 100 miles from home to
accept their initial position. This study begins to fill a gap in the literature surrounding the causes
of novice teacher attrition.
The responses given by the participants in this study confirmed what was found in previous literature. Like the teachers in earlier research (Berry et al., 2009; Eklund, 2009; Mirel & Goldin, 2012; Perez, 2015; Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Shah, 2012), the teachers in this study wanted to work in a collegial atmosphere. Shah (2012) discussed improvements that come to teachers and schools where there is collegiality. In this study, the teachers realized that collegiality would have brought improvements to their experiences. T5 stated that “it would have been better if we were working together rather than being so isolated.” The novice teachers knew that they need to work with and learn from others so that they could grow as teachers as was advocated in the literature. Killion (2015) postulated that teachers knew that being involved in high-quality collaboration resulted in better achievement gains. While the teachers in this study had not expressed it in those same terms, T2 and T5 made mention of needing to collaborate with their mentors so that they could “grow.” Shah (2012) mentioned administrators and teacher leaders who remained at schools being diligent and deliberate about fostering collegiality. The participants in this study also discussed the deliberate development of collegiality. During the focus group, T1 stated, “We should have been intentional about creating more comradery among the teams and between the various teams—grade level and subject.” T3 mentioned that “our instructional coach was very purposeful about getting the teams together to create lesson plans. She would often encourage us to share resources.”

The participants in this study spoke of the absence of culture within the schools that they originally taught. Prokopchuk (2016) posited that the school culture should be alive, ongoing and safe. This was not the case at the schools at which the participants in the study taught at the start of their teaching careers. The teachers mentioned the culture constantly being rebuilt because there were so few teachers with knowledge of the established culture of the schools. T1 very
aptly described it as the “culture du jour.” Carroll (2012) wrote of the establishment of a school culture in which teachers worked together and administration were committed to facilitating the development of this culture. In this study, such a culture was not seen. In fact, T5 spoke of a staff divided into cliques that he or she felt were orchestrated or, at least, approved of by administration: “It seemed to me as if the administration supported if not created a system where cliques could exist in the school.”

Previous researchers found ineffective leadership to be a cause for teachers to leave low-performing Title I schools. Boyd et al. (2011) stated that administrative support was linked to teacher retention. This study confirmed that finding. The teachers who participated in this study were influenced to leave the schools at which they were initially assigned by the lack of administrative support that they received and their perception that the leadership of the schools were ineffective. The impact of the school’s principal on the novice teachers’ decision to leave the school was central to this study. Prior research revealed that leadership played a key role in influencing teacher satisfaction and turnover (Balu et al., 2010; Boyd et al., 2009; Boyd et al., 2011; Grissom, 2011; Hancock & Scherff, 2010; Johnson et al., 2011; Ladd, 2009; Vanderslice, 2010). In this study, the link between principal effectiveness and teacher satisfaction and turnover was made clear by participants in the study stating clearly that they chose not to continue working with the administration.

Limitations

In this study, data was collected from five participants only. While this was not an inadequate minimum number for a study of this nature, a larger sample size would have provided more data and allowed for a more reliable generalization of the results. A study with a larger sample size would have had greater power in the results. It would have been helpful to include
participants from further afield as well as more than one man. Having more than one male would have allowed the researcher to observe if there were any differences between the perspectives of the teachers of each gender.

Two quarters after beginning the dissertation phase of the Ed.D. program, the researcher was diagnosed with cancer. This interrupted the researcher’s ability to study as she has had five surgeries and is preparing for a sixth soon. Battling a serious disease left the researcher no recourse, but to withdraw several times. This was a limitation of the study as having to shelf the study for health reasons made the research process disjointed. Additionally, the researcher was often incapable of devoting time to the study.

Another limitation was the format of the confidential online survey. The responses might have been more informative if the participants gave short answers rather than selected a number to respond to the questions. However, that might have been a deterrent. If the survey took too long to complete, the participants might have been unwilling to complete the process.

**Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

The gap in the literature that this study was designed to observe was the experiences of novice teachers who had traveled more than 100 miles from home to accept their first full-time teaching position. The novice teachers under examination were those who left their initial assignment during the time that they could still be considered a novice teacher. To a large extent, the results of this study, confirmed existing theories and literature, especially in the areas of collegiality and leadership. This confirmation suggests that having traveled more than 100 miles from home to accept the position was not a factor that impacted the study results.

The results of this study revealed several implications for practice, policy, and theory. It became apparent that more diligent observations of the administration in low-performing Title I
schools were necessary. Such observations may have a significant implication on practice. Taking note of the relationships between administrators and novice teachers and ensuring that the administrators are providing the necessary support may lead to lessening the novice teacher attrition. If it is the case that novice teachers are leaving schools because of a lack of administrative support, then once the support is being provided, more novice teachers should be willing to stay at their initial teaching assignment. A superintendent of a large school district, in the discussion with the researcher about the high levels of novice teacher attrition, stated that he or she had a plan to address this. The plan included “careful selection of the principals” and “placing principals who tend to attract teachers who want to work with them at the schools that are hardest to staff.”

Another implication of the results centered around deliberately fostering collegiality and growing the school culture purposefully. Schedules could be designed to ensure that teachers have the time to interact, both professionally and personally, during the school hours. Mentors should be assigned to all novice teachers and time should be built into the school day for them to interact to build a professional and social bond. Additionally, the administrator should encourage the staff to get together outside of school so that they can know each other better. When the administrator called meetings, he or she should be mindful that not all meetings have to be business related. Meetings could include a social aspect.

Based on the results of this study, there are possible policy changes that could be implemented. The method used for getting teacher input in the review of the principals should be anonymous. Rather than sending the link to the teachers’ school email, place a link on the school district website and then let teachers know that the site is functional. Too few teachers will respond and/or do so honestly based on a link that was sent to the school email. A survey that
protects the identity of the respondent would be more likely to yield honest, investigable, actionable data.

From this study, it is evident that principals sometimes need support to assist them with retaining novice teachers. A focus on procedures to provide the necessary support for novice teacher retention would be helpful. Just as mentors have to complete weekly logs, noting their interactions with their mentee, principals with novice teachers in their buildings could be required to complete a checklist or log which would remind them to have support-rendering interactions with their novice teachers.

Leadership cannot mandate teacher interaction and socialization outside of school hours but recommending that teams or random groups interact socially may assist with building congeniality and trust among teachers which may lead to increased collegiality. Implementing simple efforts that demonstrate collegiality, like sharing at least one lesson plan or teaching strategy with a teammate during a week the principal designates as “Share with a Colleague” week, is one way to execute a policy that is thoughtful and purposeful about increasing collegiality in a school building. The goal would be to get teachers more inclined to share their practice with their colleagues.

The findings of this study reveal that Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivism and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs significantly impact the experiences of novice teachers. The information provided by the participants confirms that the novice teachers tried to understand the worlds of the schools in which they were teaching by making meaning of their experiences. The connection between the honing of their craft as teachers and social interaction was significant to each participant in the study. Kapur (2018) affirms the importance of social interaction in the learning and making meaning of experiences. From the participants’ responses during the study,
it is evident that interaction with others is integral to the acquisition of the knowledge and skills that would make them successful teachers. This interaction with others which satisfies the need to belong, the third need on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, would also make them less apt to leave their assignment during the time that they are still novice teachers.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This study focused on attrition among novice teachers who left their initial assignment at a low-performing Title I school. The results largely confirmed what had been reported in previously conducted research. However, the researcher recommends that further research with a larger sample of novice teachers be conducted to expand on the information gathered. Conducting the same study with more people would provide more data with a greater base for comparison. The researcher believes that a study of such significance to the field of education is worthy of replication and enlargement. The purpose would be to delve deeper into the causes of novice teacher attrition. Further investigation of the novice teachers’ perceptions of leadership in low-performing Title I schools and the impact of these assessments on novice teacher attrition would be useful as administrators in such schools are chosen and groomed in their jobs. In like manner, additional information about the school cultures and levels of collegiality in low-performing Title I schools and the effect on the longevity of novice teachers’ teaching careers would be helpful to the Human Resources and Staff Development departments of school districts as well as to the principals who are considering them as candidates to fill vacancies in their schools. The additional research would provide information that could be used in schools around the country to not only select novice teachers for hire but also to create school environments that are conducive to novice teachers’ successful growth after they are hired.
Furthermore, the researcher recommended repeating the study in various sections of the country—northeast, southeast, midwest, west, for example—to examine the results and observe the similarities or differences. The researcher wondered if there are any differences based on the location of the study. Additionally, the researcher was curious about differences that may result from the novice teachers being from different parts of the country or having moved to different sections of the country.

Including observations as one of the data-collection tools is one recommendation for further research. Within low-performing Title I schools with a rate of novice teacher attrition above 50% each year, the researcher recommends that observations be included as a data-collection tool. The researcher acknowledges that this would possibly make the study a longitudinal study which might make the study somewhat different. However, it might be helpful for all involved to be observed over a period. It might result in an easier adjustment of behavior within schools. School personnel, knowing why they are being observed, may alter their behavior because of the observations and the desired behaviors become a part of their routine.

Research should be done on how to build school culture in a school with high rates of teacher attrition. This may first have to be research into what has already been written on this subject so that there is something to work with. Then, a longitudinal study that includes implementing what was learned from the research would be best, observing how things change or do not.

**Conclusion**

This study explored the causes of novice teacher attrition at low-performing Title I schools in the northeast of the United States of America. The goals of this study were to add to the body of knowledge already existing on the topic of novice teacher attrition as well as to
investigate what experiences contributed to novice teachers leaving their initial assignment. In addition, the study was designed to explore the novice teachers’ level of job satisfaction. Previous literature surrounding the phenomenon was largely confirmed by the findings of this study. This study filled the gap in the literature by focusing on novice teachers who traveled more than 100 miles from home to accept their initial teaching position.

Novice teacher attrition remained prevalent in low-performing Title I schools. In an attempt to investigate the cause of this problem and a means to address it, the researcher used an online survey, a one-on-one interview, and a focus group. The results of this study pointed to leadership as being the main cause with collegiality and school culture enmeshing to create a conglomerate of intertwined reasons that cannot be truly separated one from the other. As a consequence, the participants confirmed that it was their belief that “collegiality, strong support systems, and reliable, competent leadership create an environment that novice teachers want to return to.”
References


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doi:10.1177/0888406417725797


doi:10.1177/0022487110372214


doi:10.1016/j.tate.2014.02.005


Appendix A: Survey

Select the answer to Questions 1 to 11.

1. Gender

□ Female

□ Male

2. Age

□ Under 25

□ 26–30

□ 31–35

□ Over 35

3. Number of years teaching prior to coming to this school to work

□ 0

□ 1

□ 2

□ 3

4. Certification

□ Full standard state certification for subject & grade level you are teaching

□ Emergency or temporary state certification in the subject you are teaching

(If you select this box, answer Question 6 next)

5. Which of the following BEST describes your route to certification?

□ a Virginia state-approved teacher preparation program

□ a state-approved teacher preparation program in another state

□ reciprocity based on a license from another state
alternative licensure
  o endorsement coursework
  o experiential learning/career switcher
  o provisional (special education)

6. When did you decide to become a teacher?
   □ Always wanted to be a teacher
   □ In high school
   □ In college
   □ While employed in another career

7. Reasons for leaving your assignment at this school (check all that apply)
   □ School culture
   □ Collegiality
   □ Leadership
   □ Other: Specify ________________________________

8. Were you assigned a mentor teacher?
   □ Yes
   □ No

9. How often did you meet with your mentor teacher?
   □ Not applicable
   □ Less than an hour a week
   □ 1 to 3 hours a week
   □ More than 3 hours a week

10. What was the focus of your meetings with your mentor? (Check all that apply)
Classroom management
Instructional strategies
Curriculum
Lesson planning
District policies, procedures, expectations
School policies, procedures, expectations
Organizational culture
Resources
Lesson planning
Observations

11. How satisfied were you with the mentor teacher program?

- Very dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Very satisfied
- Not applicable

Select 1 to 5 as your response to Questions 12 to 17, with 1 being the least and 5 being the most.

12. How satisfied were you with the collegiality among your grade level team? 1 2 3 4 5

- Teachers discussed student behavior issues
- Teachers offered assistance and support with student behavior issues
- Teachers shared stories of success that support the team’s values
- Ideas by new teachers were accepted, supported and appreciated

163
Teachers are interdependent and value each other 1 2 3 4 5

There is a rich tradition of acknowledgement and celebration of teacher’s achievement 1 2 3 4 5

Teachers meet/talk outside of school 1 2 3 4 5

13. How satisfied were you with the collegiality among your subject-specific, grade level team?

Teachers shared resources for instructional purposes 1 2 3 4 5

Teachers shared the responsibility of lesson planning 1 2 3 4 5

Teachers shared strategies for instructional success 1 2 3 4 5

Teachers discussed curriculum issues 1 2 3 4 5

Ideas by new teachers were accepted, supported and appreciated 1 2 3 4 5

There is a rich tradition of acknowledgement and celebration of teachers’ goal achievement 1 2 3 4 5

Teachers are interdependent and value each other 1 2 3 4 5

Teachers meet/talk outside of school 1 2 3 4 5

14. How satisfied were you with the collegiality among your school-wide subject department?

Ideas by new teachers were accepted, supported and appreciated 1 2 3 4 5

Teachers are interdependent and value each other 1 2 3 4 5

Teachers meet/talk outside of school 1 2 3 4 5
There is a rich tradition of acknowledgement and celebration of teachers’ goal achievement 1 2 3 4 5

15. How satisfied were you with school-wide collegiality? 1 2 3 4 5

- There were adequate opportunities in the school schedule for teacher communication 1 2 3 4 5
- Teachers tell stories of success that support the school’s values 1 2 3 4 5
- Ideas by new teachers were accepted, supported and appreciated 1 2 3 4 5
- Teachers are interdependent and value each other 1 2 3 4 5
- Teachers meet/talk outside of school 1 2 3 4 5
- There is a rich tradition of acknowledgement and celebration of teacher’s achievement 1 2 3 4 5

16. How satisfied were you with the school culture? 1 2 3 4 5

- Teachers and administration collaboratively discussed instructional strategies 1 2 3 4 5
- Teachers and administration collaboratively discussed curriculum issues 1 2 3 4 5
- Teachers are involved in the decision-making process for resources 1 2 3 4 5
- Most students followed the school rules 1 2 3 4 5
- Rules governing behavior were applied as written and consistently 1 2 3 4 5
- How well did you understand the school culture? 1 2 3 4 5
- How well did you come absorbed into the school culture? 1 2 3 4 5
Teachers work there because they are happy to be there. 1 2 3 4 5
Teachers have high expectations of the students. 1 2 3 4 5
Students are motivated to work hard and achieve excellence. 1 2 3 4 5
Administrators give useful feedback on my teaching. 1 2 3 4 5
Administrators are supportive of teachers in times of personal or family crisis. 1 2 3 4 5
Teachers are treated with respect by administration. 1 2 3 4 5
Students are treated with respect by adults. 1 2 3 4 5
Teachers are treated with respect by students. 1 2 3 4 5
Students treat each other with respect. 1 2 3 4 5
Parents are actively involved in the school. 1 2 3 4 5
Parents care about how their children are doing in school. 1 2 3 4 5
Teachers are proud to tell others that they teach at this school. 1 2 3 4 5
Administrators follow through on commitments to teachers. 1 2 3 4 5
Administrators involve teachers in decision-making. 1 2 3 4 5

17. How satisfied were you with the school leadership? 1 2 3 4 5
School administrators built relationships with teachers based on trust and mutual respect. 1 2 3 4 5
School administrators treated all teachers fairly. 1 2 3 4 5
School administrators demonstrate and interest in, understanding of and an accountability for student learning outcomes. 1 2 3 4 5
Students are familiar with the school administrators. 1 2 3 4 5
School administrators implement processes which result in improved student learning.

School administrators ensure that all groups within the school develop a statement of the school’s purpose.

School administrators inspire and motivate students.

School administrators inspire and motivate teachers.
Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Why did you choose to teach at that school?

2. How long had you been teaching before you came to teach there?

3. How long did you teach there?

4. Are you still teaching?

5. Having taught there, do you think that your teacher training adequately prepared you for that experience? Explain.

6. Did the fact that the school is a low-performing school impact your decision to leave? Explain.

7. Did the fact that the school is a Title I school influence your decision to leave? Explain.

8. Did having a mentor assist you with completing the assigned workload? Explain.

9. Was the culture at the school nurturing to you as a novice teacher? Explain.

10. Was the leadership at the school nurturing to your development as a teacher? Explain.
11. Would you describe the school as having a collegial atmosphere? Explain how this impacted your development as a teacher.

12. Describe the most helpful practice implemented at the school to hone your development as a teacher. Explain how it was helpful.

13. Which of the following elements of the experience at the school—school culture, collegiality, leadership—would you describe as having the greatest impact on your decision to stop working there? Explain.

14. In light of the fact that this research is an exploration of novice teacher attrition, in particular how it is impacted by school culture, collegiality and leadership, is there anything else that you think would be relevant to the study that you would like to share?
Appendix C: Focus Group Questions

1. Can you talk about your experiences teaching at School X? What are some of the things that you remember most? (Was there anything that made you uncomfortable or you did not consider to be valuable?)

2. Were there any support systems in the school that were helpful to your development as a teacher?

3. How would you describe the relationships among the teacher at the school?

4. Can you describe elements of what makes a positive school climate? Did you experience any of these while teaching at School X?

5. What does it look like if there is trust and support in a school among staff? What about between staff and administration? Were there signs of that at School X?

6. Reflecting on your experience at School X, is there anything that was missing that you would recommend that would be useful to novice teachers in the future?

7. Is there anything that I have not asked that you would like to talk about?
Appendix D: Initial Data

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics, Novice Teachers.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Number of Novice Teachers Hired</th>
<th>Number of Novice Teachers Who Left While Still Novice Teachers</th>
<th>Movers</th>
<th>Leavers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012/2013</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013/2014</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014/2015</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E: Letter of Introduction

Dear Teachers,

My name is Beverley Cornish and I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education at Concordia University. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, I am conducting a case study on novice teacher attrition in Title I schools.

I am seeking to understand why the novice teacher attrition rate is so high in such schools. In order to gather the necessary data, I am asking you to contribute to my research by completing an online survey and participating in a one-one-one interview. The purpose of the survey is to understand why novice teachers of under-achieving Title I schools are leaving the classroom and the influences that impact their decision. To glean more specific information about this phenomenon, the one-on-one interview will be conducted. It is my hope that the information learned from this study will help to increase teacher retention at high-poverty Title I schools.

Prior to beginning the online survey, you will be given a consent form that will cover participation in both the survey and the interview which will explain the process of taking part in the research. The survey, which is completely confidential, will take approximately 30 minutes. It will include both general, non-identifiable information as well as questions dealing with your experience at a Title I school. The interview will be completely confidential and take approximately 60 minutes. For the purposes of the research, you will simply be identified as Teacher _______ (the number that you are given will be determined by the order in which you were interviewed). I am the only person who will have access to the interview recording and transcript. Once the audio has been transcribed, I will destroy it to ensure confidentiality.
Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you are unable or unwilling to participate in both sections of the study, please inform me by email at [redacted].

If you have any questions, please contact me at [redacted] or through email at [redacted].

Thank you.

Sincerely,

*Beaverley Cornish*

Beaverley Cornish

Doctoral Candidate

College of Education, Concordia University
Appendix F: Signed Informed Consent Form

Concordia University–Portland Institutional Review Board

Research Study Title: Novice Teacher Attrition at Low-performing Title I Schools: A Study of Five Teachers

Principle Investigator: Beverley Cornish

Research Institution: Concordia University

Faculty Advisor: Julie McCann, Ph.D.

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this study is to understand why teachers in low-performing Title I schools are leaving the classroom in the beginning years of teaching. The investigator will be examining the influences that result in novice teacher attrition.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: If you consent to participate in this portion of the study, the investigator will interview you, asking about your experiences at a low-performing Title I school and the factors that led to you leaving that school. Neither you nor the school will be named in the interview or any of the research material. All interviews and data will be coded to maintain confidentiality. All recordings of interviews will be destroyed immediately after transcription of the interview occurs. Participating in this study will take 60–90 minutes of your time. You will not be paid for participating in this study.

Risks: The only risk associated with your participation in the study that the investigator is aware of could come from the possibility that it become known to others that you participated in the study. To minimize the risk, your name, the years that you taught at the school, the name of the school and the subject that you taught will not be recorded on any of the materials in the study. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. You will only be identified as Teacher 1 to 10, depending on the order in which you were
interviewed. In addition, the investigator will not reveal the names of any of the participants in the online survey or the interview process. All study documents will be destroyed 5 years after I conclude this study.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to answer any question or choose to stop participating at any time. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the treatment you receive or the nature of the ongoing relationship you have with the investigator or with Concordia University.

**Confidentiality:** All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence. Interviews will be audiotaped to allow the investigator to analyze the data. Not even the investigator will know that the answers in the transcribed interview came from you as your assigned Teacher number will not be on this consent form and your name will to be a part of the transcribed record of the interview. Your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law. Your personal information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential.

**Withdrawal from the Study:** You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Concordia University. Should you decide to withdraw from the study, all data generated as a consequence of your participation will be destroyed.

**Questions about the Research:** If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Dr. Julie McCann [redacted]. This research has been reviewed and approved by Concordia University’s Institutional Review Board.
under tracking number [redacted]. If you would like to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of Concordia University’s Institutional Review Board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I, ________________________________, consent to participate in the study, Novice Teacher Attrition at Low-performing Title I Schools: A Study of Five Teachers conducted by Beverley Cornish, Ed.D. Candidate at Concordia University. I understand the nature of this project and wish to participate. My signature below indicates my informed consent and voluntary participation in this study.

__________________________________________  __________
Participant Name  Date

__________________________________________  __________
Participant Signature  Date

__________________________________________  __________
Investigator Name  Date

__________________________________________  __________
Investigator Signature  Date
### Appendix G: Data from Survey Questions 13–18

#### Table 3

**Responses to Survey Questions 13–18**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Anomaly</th>
<th>Uniform response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| How satisfied were you with the collegiality among your grade level team? | *Teachers discussed student behavior issues (0)  
*Teachers offered assistance and support with student behavior issues (0)  
*Ideas by new teachers were accepted, supported and appreciated (3) (0)  
* Teachers were interdependent and value each other (0)  
* There was a rich tradition of acknowledgement and celebration of teachers’ achievement (3) (0)  
* Teachers met/talked outside of school (3) | * Teachers offered assistance and support with student behavior issues (3) |
| How satisfied were you with the collegiality among your subject-specific, grade level team? | * Teachers shared resources for instructional purposes (0) (3)  
*Teachers shared the responsibility of lesson planning (3)  
*Teachers shared strategies for instructional success (2)  
* Teachers discussed curriculum issues (1)  
* There was a rich tradition of acknowledgement and celebration of teachers’ achievement (1)  
*Teachers were interdependent and value each other (5)  
*Teachers met/talked outside of school (3) | * Teachers shared the responsibility of lesson planning (1)  
* Teachers shared strategies for instructional success (1)  
* Ideas by new teachers were accepted, supported and appreciated (1)  
* Teachers met/talked outside of school (1) |
| How satisfied were you with the collegiality among your school-wide subject department? | * Teachers were interdependent and valued each other (0)  
* Teachers met/talked outside of school (0)  
* There’s a rich tradition of acknowledgement and celebration of teacher’s goal achievement (0) | * There is a rich tradition of acknowledgement and celebration of teacher’s goal achievement (1) |
| How satisfied were you with school-wide collegiality?                     | * There were adequate opportunities in the school schedule for teacher communication (0)  
* Teachers told stories of success that support the school’s values (0)  
* There was a rich tradition of acknowledgement and celebration of teachers’ achievement (3)(0)  
* Ideas by new teachers were accepted, supported and appreciated (3) (0) | * Teachers met/talked outside of school (3) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Anomaly</th>
<th>Uniform response</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied were you with the school culture?</td>
<td>* Teachers were interdependent and valued each other (3) (0)</td>
<td>* Administrators gave useful feedback on my teaching (1)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>* Teachers met/talked outside of school (0)(1)</td>
<td>* Administrators were supportive of teachers in times of personal or family crisis (1)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>* Parents were actively involved in the school (3)</td>
<td>* Teachers were proud to tell others that they teach at that school (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>How satisfied were you with the school leadership?</td>
<td>* Administrators built relationships with teachers based on trust and mutual respect (2)</td>
<td>* Administrators built relationships with teachers based on trust and mutual respect (1)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>* Administrators treated all teachers fairly (3)(0)</td>
<td>* Administrators treated all teachers fairly (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Administrators demonstrated an interest in, understanding of, and an accountability for student learning outcomes (0)(2)</td>
<td>* Administrators demonstrated an interest in, understanding of, and an accountability for student learning outcomes (1)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>*Students were familiar with administrators (0)</td>
<td>* Administrators ensured that all groups within the school developed a statement of the school’s purpose (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Administrators implemented processes which resulted in improved student learning (2)</td>
<td>* Administrators inspired and motivated students (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Administrators ensured that all groups within the school developed a statement of the school’s purpose (2)</td>
<td>*Administration inspired and motivated teachers (1)</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Appendix H: Themes and Attributes from One-On-One Interviews

Table 4

*Themes and Associated Attributes From One-on-one Interviews*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Attributes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School experience</td>
<td>energizing, confidence-building, enjoyable, frustrating, frantic,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>disorganized, inconsistent, rewarding, foundation-building, chaotic,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>challenging, stressful, fulfilling, panic-inducing, kind coworkers,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>students, community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School culture</td>
<td>cliques, assistance from unexpected sources, culture du jour, unsupportive,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stressful, inconsistent, no collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>administration, lack of protocols and procedures, changing leadership,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>students’ abilities, inadequate supplies, classroom management, student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>discipline, class sizes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>difficult, unprepared, inadequate, ever-changing, stressful, lax,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causes for leaving</td>
<td>unsupportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>inadequate administration, too many extraneous tasks, too many meetings,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>administrator turnover, leadership opportunities, lack of administrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>support, no collaboration, cliques</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I: Individual Responses to Question 13

Figure 3. How satisfied were you with the collegiality among your grade level team?

Key:

- A: Teachers discussed student behavior issues
- B: Teachers offered assistance and support with student behavior issues
- C: Teachers shared stories of success that support the team’s values
- D: Ideas by new teachers were accepted, supported and appreciated
- E: Teachers were interdependent and value each other
- F: There was a rich tradition of acknowledgement and celebration of teachers’ achievement
- G: Teachers met/talked outside of school
- Each color signals the response of a different person
Appendix J: Individual Responses to Question 14

Figure 4. How satisfied were you with the collegiality among your subject-specific grade level team?

Key:

- A: Teachers shared resources for instructional purposes
- B: Teachers shared the responsibility for lesson planning
- C: Teachers shared strategies for instructional success
- D: Teachers discussed curriculum issues
- E: Ideas by new teachers were accepted, supported and appreciated
- F: There was a rich tradition of acknowledgment and celebration of teachers’ achievement
- G: Teachers were interdependent and value each other
- H: Teachers met/talked outside of school

Each color signals the response of a different person
Appendix K: Individual Responses to Question 15

Figure 5. How satisfied were you with the collegiality among your school-wide subject department?

Key:

- A: Ideas by new teachers were accepted, supported and appreciated
- B: Teachers were interdependent and valued each other
- C: Teachers met/talked outside of school
- D: There is a rich tradition of acknowledgement and celebration of teacher’s goal achievement
- Each color signals the responses of a different person
Appendix M: Individual Responses to Question 16

Figure 6. How satisfied were you with the school-wide collegiality?

Key:

- **A**: There were adequate opportunities in the school schedule for teacher communication
- **B**: Teachers told stories of success that support the school’s values
- **C**: Ideas by new teachers were accepted, supported and appreciated
- **D**: Teachers were interdependent and valued each other
- **E**: Teachers met/talked outside of school
- **F**: There was a rich tradition of acknowledgement and celebration of teacher’s achievement
- Each color represents the responses of a different person
Appendix M: Individual Responses to Question 17

Figure 7. How satisfied were you with the school leadership?

Key:

- A: Administrators built relationships with teachers based on trust and mutual respect
- B: Administrators treated teachers fairly
- C: Administrators demonstrated an interest in, understanding of, and an accountability for student learning outcomes
- D: Students were familiar with administrators
- E: Administrators implemented processes which result in improved student learning
- F: Administrators ensured that all groups within the school developed a statement of the school’s purpose
- G: Administrators inspired and motivated students
- H: Administrators inspired and motivated teachers
- Each color indicates the responses of a different person
Appendix N: 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 (cont.)

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*.

   Beverley Cornish

   Digital Signature

   Beverley Cornish

   Name (Typed)

   February 28, 2020

   Date