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Teacher Of Color Retention: Stories Of Staying From Teachers Of Color In A Suburban School District

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Stories Of Staying From Teachers Of Color In A Suburban School District

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"Finish your dissertation, then go change the world" - so many people!

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Abstract

A teaching force which is representative of the student population is critical to creating equitable learning opportunities in the increasingly diverse United States. Both students of color and White students must see themselves represented in their teachers. Additionally, it is important for all students to see people of color as educators as well as in positions of power. Unfortunately, the proportion of teachers of color currently in the field of education does not come close to the proportion of students of color in public schools in the United States.

While there are many aspects which add to the problem of teacher of color representation, this research addresses teacher of color retention. Current research suggests that while teachers of color enter the field of teaching at a similar rate to White teachers, retention for teachers of color is far worse than for their White peers. Many previous research studies have discussed the challenges faced in the field by teachers of color and why many teachers of color leave due to these challenges. This dissertation, instead, focuses on the positive "stories of staying" from teachers of color who have remained teaching.

This research draws from the narratives of eight teachers of color to bring forward patterns that have supported their retention in the field. All participants were drawn from a teacher of color affinity program in one suburban school district. Participants in this study spoke specifically about the importance of racial matching with their students as an important internal factor for their retention in the field. They also discussed the interpersonal connections with a racial affinity group and/or mentor as critical. Finally, they discussed the external support of their site-level administrators as well as a district focus on providing opportunities for conversations about race as important to their retention in the field.

Based on these participant narratives, recommendations are provided for professional practice which might support conditions favorable to teacher of color retention. Additionally, recommendations for White educators are listed as the overwhelming majority of educators are still White. Finally, a discussion of colorism within the participant narratives provides recommendations for future research to understand how teachers of different races are impacted by challenging racial conditions.

Keywords: Teachers of Color, Retention, Colorism, Race, Racial Affinity, Racial Matching

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Chapter 1

Why Teachers of Color?

As calls for school accountability increases in the United States, there still exists a large gap in achievement as measured on standardized test scores between White and Asian students and their Black, Hispanic, American Indian, Pacific Islander, and Alaskan Native peers (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016). Much debate has occurred on what has at different times been called the achievement gap, opportunity gap, belief gap, or opportunity debt - all of which point to undesirable outcomes for students of color in K-12 education. According to the Minnesota Department of Education (2019), this gap shows that 66.4% of White students are proficient in math while only 29.3% of Black students are proficient in math. Many people have called for school reform due to the evidence of this opportunity gap. One such suggestion is to recruit and retain a teaching force which is representative of the students who attend schools. This suggestion is given credibility by scholars who have shown the positive impacts teachers of color can have on students of color (Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015; Grissom, Rodriguez, & Kern, 2017; Klopfenstein, 2005). Among other impacts, students of color who have a teacher of color are likely to perform higher on standardized tests (Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015) and are more likely to enroll in advanced placement classes (Klopfenstein, 2005). Unfortunately, as the demographics of the student population shift, teachers continue to be primarily White even as this achievement gap persists. This study will examine trends in teacher of color recruitment and retention. The purpose of the study, explained in more detail shortly, is to support more racially equitable teacher representation through learning from the stories of successful teachers of color.

In addition to the positive educational outcomes that often accompany more teachers of color in the field, the issue of a representative teaching population which mirrors the population of students is also important. Recent data show that students of color represent just under 50 percent of the school-aged population in the United States (Boser, 2014) while teachers of color represent less than 20 percent of the teaching workforce nationally (Boser, 2014; Goldring, Gran, & Bitterman, 2013). The US Department of Education's Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, US Department of Education (2016) reported that between the 1987/88 and 2011/12 school years, the percentage of White teachers dropped from 87% to 82% while the percentage of White students dropped from 59% to 52%. These statistics are troubling in that they show the lack of representation of teachers of color in the teaching workforce and they show that the increase of teachers of color in the field is not keeping up with the increase in students of color in schools. This challenge of the lack of representation of teachers of color is made even more significant by the fact that teachers of color leave the field at a rate 24% higher than their white peers, making it difficult to close the teacher representation gap (Ingersoll & May, 2011).

The issue of having a workforce which matches the population of the United States is as urgent in education as it is in many other fields. Recent movements such as "Black Lives Matter" have brought race and representation into the national spotlight. When considering workforce statistics, it is easy to understand the frustration shared by many people of the lack of diversity in the workforce. As of 2017, there were only 4 Black CEOs in Fortune 500 companies (White, 2017). Similarly, in politics, the percent of White men in races for political office continues to be drastically higher than the percent of white men who live in the United States (Reflective Democracy Campaign, 2018). Thus, discussions of equitable representation and calls for

increasing inclusion of voices of underrepresented populations have moved into the mainstream of the general consciousness.

The issue equitable racial representation in the teacher workforce is a critical issue for the United States education system. Having opened this dissertation with a brief discussion of the issue of teacher of color retention, I will now provide an overview of the context of the study before providing more argumentation for why this is an important issue.

Research Context, Purpose, and Research Questions

I have chosen to situate this study in a Minnesota school district. Minnesota, just like the United States, is growing more diverse. In fact, between 2010-2017, census data in Minnesota show an increase in the Black population (up 31%), the Hispanic Population (up 20%), and the Asian Population (up 30%), all of which are far greater than the increase in the White population (up 1%) (DeBilzan, 2018). Despite this influx of people of color, the teaching population has not grown diverse in similar ways. Minnesota schools serve 28% students of color, yet the teaching force is made up of only 4% teachers of color compared with 18% teachers of color nationally (Chu, 2018).

The school district in which the study will be situated is a suburb of the Minneapolis metropolitan area. The district, "Retention District 101" is a diverse district which serves approximately 50% White students and 50% students of color. Despite this statistic, fewer than 10% of the teachers are teachers of color. Retention District 101 has taken steps to retain teachers of color by means of a teacher of color affinity group. Participants in this study have been drawn from this affinity group.

When looking at the problem of the lack of teachers of color, issues such as recruitment, retention, opportunity, interest, English language skills (given many new Minnesotans of color

are immigrants from countries in which languages other than English are spoken), etc. add to the complexity of understanding why more teachers of color are not in the field. However, this study will focus specifically on only one aspect of the issue: teacher of color retention. I hold that it will do little good to recruit more teachers of color to the field if these same teachers of color do not remain teaching.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to:

- Reveal positive narratives and "Stories of Staying" of teachers of color in Recruitment District 101,

- Provide information to school districts and administrators which will help them make decisions to be more responsive to the needs of teachers of color, and

- Work towards a goal of increasing equity of representation of teachers of color in public schools in Minnesota and nationally.

To achieve the goals of this study, I use a qualitative methodology which draws on the narratives of teachers of color to inform recommendations for practice. In an attempt to frame the parameters of this study, I have made the intentional decision to interview participants who are currently teaching as opposed to school administrators or other school professionals. Drawing on the narratives of current teachers of color, I investigate patterns which emerge in the perceptions of those teachers which point to their remaining in the teaching field.

My curiosity into the issue of teacher of color retention has led me think of the impact of two large topics: first, the structural circumstances teachers face (e.g. district hiring procedures, college entrance requirements, teacher observations, school culture/climate, etc.) and second, the personal choices teachers have made (e.g. which district they teach in, moving to be closer to a job, choosing teaching as a career, how they view the profession, their general outlook on life

and education, etc.). I have decided to group these large topics into smaller buckets of internal, interpersonal, and external factors. Taking these parameters into account, this study is grounded in the following research questions:

1. What do teachers of color in Minnesota schools perceive as the reasons for their a) entering and b) staying in the field based on internal, interpersonal, and external factors?

2. What do teachers of color suggest organizations could do to retain teachers of color?

Definitions

As a White male navigating the complex waters of race, identity, and culture, I have found it important to seek multiple perspectives when defining what I mean when I mention "teachers of color." Below are the definitions of other authors which have informed my knowledge and writing:

Of Color: "The modifying term of color refers to persons who self-identify as coming from African American, Latino American, Asian American, or Native American heritage" (Kambutu, Rios, & Castaneda, 2009, p.97). For this research, I have chosen to use "teachers of color" as defined by Kambutu, et al. (2009), but I want to also acknowledge that identities and verbiage will continue to shift and that the generic identifying term "teachers of color" may prove to be inadequate in the future as more specific descriptors are created.

Race: "A social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly color), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic, and political needs of a society at a given period of time." (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007, p. 88)

Racial and Ethnic Identity: "An individual's awareness and experience of being a member of a racial and ethnic group; the racial and ethnic categories that an individual chooses to describe him or herself based on such factors as biological heritage, physical appearance, cultural affiliation, early socialization, and personal experience" (Adams et al., 2007, p. 88).

Racism: "The systematic subordination of members of targeted racial groups who have relatively little social power in the United States (Blacks, Latino/as, Native Americans, and Asians), but the members of the agent racial group who have relatively more social power (Whites). This subordination is supported by the action of individuals, cultural norms and values, and the institutional structures and practices of society" (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007, p. 88-89).

These definitions have helped me frame this study and will allow the reader to understand some of the complexity involved when studying issues of race and identity as it relates to teachers.

Why Teachers of Color?

As previously noted, moving towards teacher demographics being representative of student demographics can be seen as an end in itself. Before diving into research on retention, however, I wanted to discuss some of the other arguments for having teachers of color in the workforce. Building upon the research of Villegas & Irvine (2010), I will briefly discuss three arguments for having teachers of color in the workforce: the role model effect, the unique pedagogy and practice of teachers of color, and, most importantly, the value-added effects of teachers of color in terms of student achievement.

Teachers of color as role models for students of color.

When students walk into a school, they have an opportunity to interact directly with adults who are not part of their family. In many parts of the United States, White students walk into school and see many adults who serve as racial role models and who likely look similar to the parents of those White students. Students of color, on the other hand, often attend schools that have many more White teachers than teachers of color. Consequently, the teaching staff do not match the races of the students of color attending the school (Boser, 2014).

Hess & Leal (1997) studied the effects of increasing the population of teachers of color within a school district. In their findings, they show that teachers of color have a substantial, positive correlation with whether or not students of color attend college and that this effect is amplified when there is a greater number of teachers of color in a district. They caution, however, that the " presence of minority teachers is associated with overall district improvements" and that the combination of a good school system and many teachers of color is likely responsible for gains in the number of students who will go to college (Hess & Leal, 1997, p. 244). Another study found that Black students who have a Black teacher are less likely to be suspended due to a discipline incident (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). This effect means that Black students spend more time learning in school as opposed to at home not learning.

Simply judging the impact of a teacher based on their ability to be a racial role model to students is a challenging argument to make. Empirical research on the connection between students of color and teachers of color as it relates to academic achievement is inconclusive. For example, Dee (2001) found that students of color and White students who had a teacher of their same race in a random experiment showed three to four percentage points of gain on standardized tests. The data from Dee's results, however, was revisited by other researchers who

questioned the validity of the approach and disagreed with Dee's conclusions, claiming that teacher race did not matter in regards to student outcome (Howsen & Trawick, 2007). Whether or not the research was valid, the most that it claimed was that the role model effect was correlative, not causal. A correlative effect, however, can still be seen as a positive reason to encourage districts and schools to ensure more teachers of color remain in the field.

Scholars Lindsay & Hart (2017), Hess & Leal (1997), and Dee (2001) have stated in their research that teachers of color serve as positive role models for students of color. However, there are other research-based arguments for having teachers of color in the workforce. I will next discuss the unique pedagogies and practices of teachers of color and the effect these practices have on students of color.

Pedagogy, practice, and belief.

Teachers and teaching styles are as diverse as the personalities of the teachers themselves. As was shown by Brown (2009), who studied African American male teachers, teachers of color engaged students and their subject matter with multifaceted approaches. It is also important to note that, just as in the role model hypothesis, a teacher's ethnicity is sometimes hard to separate from what they actually do once in the classroom. Teachers of color who match culturally with students in their classes, however, are likely to more easily understand the "cultural archetypes" from which their students come from, than are White teachers (Hammond, 2015, p. 25).

One way that teachers of color are successful in the classroom is when their communication mirrors patterns of communication which are practiced in the homes of students of color. The "warm demander" approach practiced by many teachers of color is a way to create systems of discipline and expectation in the classroom that are similar to the way that many

students of color experience discipline and expectation at home (Ware, 2006). When this approach is practiced by an educator who is racially similar to the student in the classroom, it can come across as a more natural approach as connectedness and kinship are high (Ware, 2006). Other researchers have also found the "warm demander" approach to be effective. Ross, Bondy, Bondy, & Hambacher (2008) found that "insistence" upon students meeting teacher expectations was crucial in culturally responsive pedagogy. Their research included like-raced teachers as well as teachers who did not match the race of students but who also insisted on student excellence.

Teacher belief and expectation also play a role in how teachers of color teach in the classroom. While belief alone is not enough to help students of color exceed, belief can be seen as an underlying prerequisite to both student and teacher performance. By examining teacher beliefs about their students, Beady & Hansell (1981) found that differences in teacher beliefs surfaced when the teachers were asked to predict all the way out to whether or not students would go to college. Both Black and White teachers had high expectations for students in elementary school and even through high school. Black teachers, however, were more likely to believe that their Black students would go to college and be successful once in college (Fránquiz, M. E., Salazar, M. del C., & DeNicolo, C. P. 2011). This belief, when paired with the potential opportunity to share similar life experiences, allows teachers of color to uniquely connect with and support students of color.

Teachers of color have many approaches to instruction and pedagogy as they work with students of color. The terms "of color" here is challenging because it does not acknowledge the variety of races, ethnicities, and cultures represented individually by practicing teachers and learning students. Therefore, it would be a mistake to assume that every teacher of color will

provide positive learning experiences for every student of color. Conversely, it is certainly possible for White teachers to provide positive experiences for students of color. Although there is no one approach that teachers of color use, the combination of a belief in the ability of students of color to achieve at high levels with the practice of engaging students in ways that are familiar to the student from their home culture often leads to students of color often being successful in a classroom with a teacher of color (Ware, 2006). As stated previously, there is some evidence to show that teacher belief and teacher pedagogy is able to change outcomes for students and that this belief and pedagogy is strongest when practiced by teachers of color (Fránquiz et al., 2011). Next, I will explore more quantifiable ways in which teachers of color influence the outcomes of students of color.

Student achievement.

While both the role model hypothesis and the pedagogy and practice of teachers of color are important, another important factor to consider for arguing to increase the number of teachers of color is the impact that teachers of color have on the achievement levels of students of color. If the goal of education is to help children grow and achieve, then showing a connection between teachers of color and the achievement of students of color is critical.

Evaluating teachers based on student achievement is a practice which is debated frequently by educators and policy makers. Policy makers have called for test scores to be an important measure of teacher evaluation and argue that tying things such as teacher tenure and teacher salary to test scores will increase accountability of teachers. Current teacher evaluation practice has instead often consisted of teacher observation and evaluation by the principal. I present this information here to show the challenge already in place when evaluating teachers

based on student achievement. Because of these challenges, it is important to consider research which has found correlative connections between teachers of color and student achievement.

Studies have considered achievement by investigating a) how teachers of color influence student enrollment in advanced courses and b) how teachers of color increase test scores on standardized tests. Klopfenstein (2005) studied the impact of Black math teachers who teach Black students and found that Black students were more likely to take advanced math classes if they had previously had Black math teachers. A study in Florida by Egalite, Kisida, & Winters (2015) found that students who had a matching-race teacher saw a small but substantial positive improvement in their achievement. This positive effect was strongest for Black and White students in elementary school and for Asian/Pacific Islander students in the middle/high school level. This research, though specific to Florida, provides a strong argument for the impact teachers of color can have on a student's achievement and how increasing teachers of color in the field is an important goal. Some studies that have found an impact on the achievement of students of color based on the race of their teacher caution that the research is only correlational, not causal, and these studies recommend future research be conducted to both replicate results and test different populations (Egalite, et al., 2015; Dee, 2001). While not related specifically to achievement, a study in North Carolina by Holt & Gershenson (2015) found "strong evidence of a causal relationship between student-teacher racial mismatch and student absenteeism and suspension" (p. 27).

While one teacher of color could have an impact on students of color, it could be argued that having more teachers of color could impact more students of color. The number of students of color placed in gifted education was positively impacted when 20%-30% of the staff at a school were teachers of color (Grissom, Rodriguez, & Kern. 2017). Grissom, et al. (2017) found

that it was important that the race of the teacher matched the race of the students. For instance, if

30% of the teachers in a building were Black, then it was more likely that Black students would

be in gifted education. However, this did not carry over for Hispanic students.[1] This provides a

strong argument for racial matching between teachers and students. These findings would be

consistent with previous research about teacher beliefs about students of color (Beady et al.,

1981). If school systems know that teachers of color would help students enter gifted education

programs at higher rates, then those systems can intentionally recruit more teachers of color to

support students of color.

The association between the presence of teachers of color in schools and increased

academic achievement of students of color offers a clear rationale for increasing the number of

teachers of color. By examining this research, school districts can make hiring decisions which

will positively impact students of color in their schools.

Limitations

I have briefly covered why it is important for teachers of color to be in the field. While

this is important as an entry point for the conversation to come, the goal of this dissertation is not

to convince the reader that teachers of color should be in the field. Instead, the goal, as

previously stated, is to learn about teacher of color retention and provide recommendations for

how to improve teacher of color retention based on the narratives of participants. My own

positionality as a White male has provided me with a different worldview than that of the study

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[1] "Hispanic" continues to be a term used by some authors and is also currently a term used by the state of Minnesota
to group all students whose origin is Mexico, Central America, or South America. This term is sometimes used
interchangeably with "Latino" or "Latinx" (gender neutral). I use the term "Hispanic" here to more accurately quote
the reference. Many people from Mexico, Central, and South America prefer to use other identifiable terms- the
most common being "Latinx" due to both the association between the United States government with "Hispanic"
and because "Hispanic" does not fully include all people who might identify as "Latinx." I will use the term
"Latinx" moving forward in the paper unless a participant prefers another racial identifying term.

participants and my own journey through teaching does not provide any information relevant to why a teacher of color might stay in the field. Through hearing the narratives of a number of teachers of color, I have drawn conclusions about what has been important for these teachers of color. This study takes place in a particular moment in time in a particular school district and the results cannot be assumed to speak for all teachers of color everywhere.

Conclusion: From "Why" to "How"

In the previous section, I detailed why it is important to have teachers of color in the workforce. While the goal of this study is not to prove that argument, I believe that this discussion provides critical background as to why it is important to retain teachers of color in the workforce. As such, this study seeks to shed light on what choices and conditions have been successful to keep teachers of color in the field.

As recently as 2008-2009, turnover and attrition of teachers of color was 24% higher than their white colleagues, up from 18% higher in 2004-2005 (Ingersoll & May, 2011). With such a large discrepancy of attrition rates for teachers of color, I have chosen to study the issue of retention as opposed to focusing more on recruitment or simply statistics of teachers of color in the field. As a researcher, my goal is to deepen our understanding and, eventually, to create an argument which will be convincing to both school districts and policy makers to encourage both to ambitiously seek to add teachers of color to the workforce.

I began this study by providing an overview of the problem of a lack of teachers of color and looked into some of the arguments for why it is important to have teachers of color in the workforce. I also provided context for why the retention of teachers of color is an important issue worth considering in more depth. Next, I will provide a deeper review of relevant literature as it relates to the issue of retention with a specific focus on teachers of color.

Chapter 2

The lack of teacher of color representation in the United States educational system is a critical issue. As recently as 2011, students of color made up 40 percent of the school-aged population while teachers of color made up only 17 percent of the teacher workforce nationally (Boser, 2014). Studies have shown that all students perform better when taught by a teacher of color (Dee, 2001). However, studies also show that students of color with higher numbers of teachers of color in their school and district are more likely to go to college (Hess & Leal, 1997). Also, when more teachers of color are in a school, students of color are more likely to take advanced courses (Grissom, Rodriguez, & Kern. 2017). Many programs have been developed at the college, district, and state levels which encourage more people of color to become teachers. Unfortunately, however, these programs do not appear to stop the flood of teachers of color leaving the profession at a rate 24% higher than their White counterparts (Ingersoll & May, 2011).

One additional factor to understand is the history of teachers of color in the United States. While this research is not focused on the history of teachers of color in the United States, a brief example will show how there have been structural forces which have led to the lack of teacher of color representation in the field. Part of the current shortage of teachers of color can be traced back to the 1954 Supreme Court ruling Brown v. Board. Between 1954, when Brown v. Board was decided, and 1965, the number of Black teachers in America dropped from 82,000 to around 44,000 (Hudson & Holmes, 1994). Many of these teachers were forced out of their jobs once desegregation laws were enacted and White families did not want Black teachers teaching their White children (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). This trend of being pushed out of their jobs continues for teachers of color, intentionally or unintentionally, when they do not feel heard or valued and

therefore decide to search for other employment opportunities (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). As was previously stated, part of the purpose of this study is to provide information to states and school districts so they can make decisions which will positively impact teacher of color retention. The purpose of this literature review is to examine what scholars have written about teacher retention with specific emphasis on teachers of color. This review will focus on the internal, interpersonal, and external aspects of teacher retention. Topics reviewed include the impact of school cultures and systems, factors related to teacher attrition, the impact of teacher compensation, and other job benefits. Where research exists, topics will be focused around the narratives of teachers of color.

Understanding Teacher Attrition and Retention Broadly

In their meta-analysis on teacher attrition, Borman & Dowling (2008) identified literature which broadly looked at teacher retention based on a) teacher demographic characteristics such as gender, race, age, marital status, whether or not the individual was having a child, and number of children and b) teacher qualification characteristics such as teacher training, experience, teacher ability or achievement, and teaching specialty area. While all of these characteristics could lead to an impactful study, this study focuses on the demographic characteristic of race and looks to draw connections between participants as revealed through their narratives. As previously noted, this study focuses on issues of teacher of color retention as opposed to issues of recruitment.

Teacher attrition and retention is an issue that is referenced in education and, as in other job sectors, can have both positive and negative connotations. On the positive side, when low-performing staff leave the education field, it paves the way for new staff to take their positions. These new staff may end up as high performing teachers. On the negative side, having frequent

retention issues could be the symptom of a larger issue related to teacher morale, compensation, working conditions, etc. The cost of teacher attrition in dollars is significant. Estimating that the cost to recruit, hire, and train a new teacher is equivalent to about one third of their salary. Each teacher who leaves the field costs between $12,500 to $50,000 in terms of the amount spent in onboarding and hiring procedures, costing the nation upwards of $2.6 Billion each year (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005).

As discussed previously, teaching is not a profession one can easily 'fall into' as one might land a job at a bank, at a big-box store, or at a corporation. Because of the barriers of entry to the teaching field such as the requirement of a professional license, teachers must make a conscious choice over a number of years to gain employment. Due to this long process, many teachers have spent hundreds of hours contemplating a career in education and are already intrinsically motivated when entering the field. Once in the field, teachers commonly cite "the students" as a primary reason for staying in the field (He, Cooper, & Tangredi, 2015).

Many internal and external variables can be related to teacher job satisfaction. External variables such as salary and student behavior have been found to lead to teachers feeling dissatisfied with their job, and therefore desiring to leave the field (Perrachione, Petersen, & Rosser, 2008). Internal variables related to retention and attrition can be challenging to measure and are often related to external variables such as administrative support or school environment (Craig, 2014). Teachers of color often face the further challenge of being racially isolated as they strive to stay within the field. (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). Due to the impact which external factors can have on teachers externally and internally, much of my discussion of literature will focus on the external factors which affect teachers in their decisions to remain in or leave the field. Additionally, external factors are most easily controlled by a school district or

administration and, therefore, could lead to supporting the retention of a greater number of teachers.

In the discussion that follows, specific trends in teacher retention and attrition will be explored. Many of the factors which affect the general retention of all teachers also affect the retention of teachers of color (Achinstein, B., Ogawa, R. T., Sexton, D., & Freitas, C., 2010). Wherever possible, literature will intentionally focus on teachers of color. As will be noted later in the review, there is currently limited scholarly research which focuses specifically on the retention of teachers of color. When factors associated with why teachers stay instead of why they leave are understood, conditions can be created at a school and district level which will encourage more teachers to stay in the profession.

Literature Focused on Internal Factors for Teacher of Color Retention

As previously noted, teachers who enter the field are generally internally motivated to be a teacher as is evidenced by the fact that teaching requires the teacher to receive a four-year degree as well as earn a teaching license. Teachers of color are no different in this regard. This section will discuss literature related to the humanistic commitments and racial role modeling that teachers of color have expressed as important in previous studies.

Humanistic commitments.

Teachers of color have noted "humanistic commitments" and "giving back" as important reasons for their decision to enter and stay in the field of education (Achinstein et al., 2010). These internally motivated factors are echoed by other teachers of color who mention "the students" are a primary factor for their interest in the field. (He, Cooper, & Tangredi, 2015; Nieto, 2003). Additionally, teachers of color express their hope and belief that their students could achieve at high levels (Nieto, 2003). These internal motivations show that teachers of color

believe that their work with students matters, regardless of what external factors might cause them to want to leave the field.

A recent survey of Black teachers found that they stay in the profession because they "love their students, their work, and want to be able to fully contribute to the educational success of their kids" (Griffin & Tackie, 2016, p. 2). It is important to note how these espoused beliefs are internally motivated and exist alongside of other interpersonal and external factors for remaining in the field. Another study, which focused on principals of color, cited faith and spirituality and self-silencing as ways to sustain their work in the field (Krull & Robicheau, 2019). While faith and spirituality could be considered a positive way to sustain a presence in the field, it is difficult to believe that self-silencing can lead to a positive feeling about the field of education. That being said, if the results of this survey are applied to a wider range of teachers of color, it could be predicted that many teachers self-silence as a way to keep their focus on their internal desire to remain in the field.

Racial role model.

Many teachers of color are passionate about social and racial justice and are passionate about providing students a like-raced teacher to emulate (Achinstein et al., 2010; Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). A previously mentioned study found a correlation between greater numbers of teachers of color and college attendance rate for students of color (Hess & Leal, 1997). This finding would support the internal desire for teachers of color to be racial role models for students of color. Students of color, in particular, enjoy interacting with a teacher who is racially and/or culturally congruent, which is shown in affection/affinity towards similar customs and languages (Aujla-Buliar, 2018; Ellison, 2011). While understanding the internal motivation of teachers of color to stay in the field is important, it is not the only factor which contributes to

teacher of color retention. Next, interpersonal factors for teacher of color retention will be discussed.

Literature Focused on Interpersonal Factors for Teacher of Color Retention

In addition to internal factors which attract and retain teachers of color in the field of education, there are interpersonal relationships which support retention. This section will discuss mentoring as an important interpersonal factor of retention. After that, a review of relevant literature will be discussed focusing on the challenges of interpersonal relationships for teachers of color with a specific focus on the impact of race on these relationships.

Mentoring.

In their time on the job, teachers are expected to address the following: manage the learning and behavior of students, address parental concerns regarding their child's performance, live up to the expectations of administrators, help students perform well on standardized tests, and keep themselves prepared for the unexpected. Teachers of color face all of these challenges and the added challenge of being a minority in a system staffed mainly with White teachers and administrators. As they begin their career, teachers of color should be prepared by their undergraduate education, have access to support as they develop their teaching skill, and have the opportunity to take on leadership roles (Partee, 2014). These factors will support a teacher of color in their first few years of teaching and can impact their retention in the field. Unfortunately, urban schools where teachers of color are statistically more likely to teach, often do not provide extensive mentorship opportunities for teachers of color (Achinstein, B., Ogawa, R. T., Sexton, D., & Freitas, C., 2010).

Opportunities to receive mentorship before job placement and during their initial years teaching provide teachers of color with a way to gain skill at navigating the complex world of

education. Moreover, they gain skills which may have been missed in a teacher preparation program (Achinstein et al. 2010). Mentorship can be as specific as having weekly or monthly meetings with an agenda and focus or as broad as meeting with a group of early career educators to network about the challenges faced in teaching. In either instance, the interpersonal relationship is crucial.

Geiger & Pivovarova (2018) found that teacher retention was greater for all teachers when teachers had compelling relationships with their mentors. Ideally, these relationships will continue beyond when the formal mentorship process is complete. Mentorship can begin as early as student teaching when teachers have their first time working in the field. When specifically considering teachers of color, Carver-Thomas (2017) found that teachers of color who went through a teacher residency program which provided a longer student teaching experience were more likely to stay in the field. Additionally, when these programs provide financial benefits to the student teacher, they were also more likely to stay in the field (Carver-Thomas, 2017). Programs such as the "Call me MISTER" program out of Clemson University show the strong retention potential in mentorship programs. This program starts mentoring Black male pre-service teachers and continues to support them once they are in the teaching profession. They report that 100 percent of participants of the program between 2004-2016 are still teaching (Cary, 2016). This suggests that formal and informal mentorship supports newer teachers of color as they gain competency in their first few years of teaching.

Interpersonal challenges facing teachers of color.

While positive mentorship opportunities are likely to be a strong interpersonal reason that many teachers of color stay in the field, there are also interpersonal challenges that many teachers of color face. Some of these challenges are challenges that teachers of color face that do

not apply to White teachers. Racism has been a reality in the United States long before the public education system was created and racism certainly has been a part of public education in implicit and explicit ways. While not all teachers of color end up leaving their teaching positions due to racism at the workplace, many report challenging racial conditions. Griffin & Tackie (2016) found that Black teachers spoke about feelings of being "othered" in the school environment and were often singled out for one aspect of their teaching, such as being a disciplinarian. This racism is experienced as an interpersonal challenge which gets in the way of teachers of color performing their best and remaining in the field.

Teachers of color are often viewed as representatives of their race and are given questions and tasks which call for them to either speak for their race/culture or risk causing problems amongst a largely White staff (Aujla-Buliar, 2018). Further, some Black teachers expressed feeling that they needed to take on additional responsibilities at the school and with students just to meet expectations of their peers and administrators (Griffin & Tackie, 2016). The challenge of being a teacher of color is sometimes amplified when teachers of color are under-represented on the faculty. Bristol (2018) found that Black male teachers who were the only Black male teacher in their school were more likely to report there was racial tension in their school and were more likely to report wanting to leave their school and/or profession when compared with Black male teachers who taught in schools with other Black male teachers.

The way in which interpersonal and systemic racial challenges present themselves to teachers of color and their corresponding mental, emotional, and physical response to these challenges has come to be known by some scholars as Racial Battle Fatigue. Coined by Smith (2004), the term Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF), is defined as:

> a response to the distressing mental/emotional conditions that result from
> facing racism daily (e.g., racial slights, recurrent indignities and irritations,

> unfair treatments, including contentious classrooms, and potential threats
> or dangers under tough to violent and even life-threatening conditions).
> (p. 180)

Pizarro & Kohli (2018) collected counter-narrative stories about teachers of color and their resiliency in the field as they dealt with the effects of RBF. These narratives document some of the physical trauma that some teachers of color experience in their bodies in response to dealing with the challenges of RBF. One teacher of color they interviewed ended up in the hospital due to the emotional and physical toll of his teaching position. The mental and physical challenges teachers of color face lead to many leaving the field prematurely to find employment in areas which do not feel as mentally or emotionally draining (Carrillo, 2010). In their case studies, Gu & Day (2007) found that teacher resiliency was the factor which allowed teachers to turn the challenges of the profession into learning opportunities which helped them thrive and remain in the profession. For some teachers, interpersonal connections help add to their own resiliency as they are faced with frequent racialized challenges.

As teachers develop "enhanced racial literacy," they are able to better explain and counteract the challenges they faced due to RBF (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018, p.19). Some teachers of color are able to connect with groups, inside or outside of the school system, which support them in building the resilience needed to counteract RBF and remain positive in the teaching profession (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). These interpersonal connections represent an important addition to teacher of color retention. A recent study added to our knowledge of the importance of interpersonal connections when it found that Black principals valued being in spaces of racial affinity as a way to sustain their work in the field (Krull & Robicheau, 2019). Racial affinity provides an important interpersonal connection which allows teachers and administrators of color the opportunity to counteract some of the effects of RBF.

Literature Focused on External Factors for Teacher of Color Retention

Grouping all persons with the title of "teacher" often seems like an easy way to think of the profession, but it does not allow space for the great diversity of jobs done by the people with the title of "teacher." The experiences of teachers differ based on the school system, age of students, location of the school such as urban or rural, student demographic makeup such as race, socio-economic status, or home language, site administration, etc. Thus, when discussing external factors related to teacher retention, one broad area of focus will be the kinds of school structures which are conducive to better retention, especially for teachers of color.

Many of the external factors leading to better teacher of color retention can come at no monetary cost to a school district. By exploring some of these "free" factors in teacher retention, my intention is not only to draw connections with participants in my study, but also lay the groundwork for practical implementations which could help current school leaders make changes to school culture and structure. The external factors which will be reviewed in their relation to teacher of color retention are teacher preparation, administrator support, school demographics, and job compensation & benefits.

Teacher preparation.

One way to improve teacher retention is to improve the way in which teachers are recruited and/or trained. Before finding a job as a teacher, a potential applicant must receive a teaching license, either through a "traditional" four-year college program or through an alternative licensing program. Some alternative pathways do not require time teaching under the supervision of a classroom teacher and teachers who enter the field through an alternative pathway are two to three times as likely to leave the field as those who had a comprehensive preparation (Carver-Thomas, 2017; Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012). Therefore, some retention

issues can be addressed by encouraging more potential teachers to participate in a traditional licensure program. Unfortunately, teachers of color are twice as likely to enter the field through an alternative licensure pathway as White teachers, putting them at a statistical retention disadvantage even before they begin their career (Carver-Thomas, 2017; Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012).

One way to support candidates of color entering a traditional teacher preparation program is to provide financial incentives with the intent to offset the high cost of college. When money is allocated in the form of tuition assistance to support pre-service teachers of color in completing a comprehensive undergraduate teacher training program, it is more likely that those teachers will remain in the field (Carver-Thomas, 2017). Teacher "grow your own" programs, such as those discussed by Carver-Thomas (2017) in South Carolina, Colorado, and Oklahoma encourage and support high school students and education paraprofessionals in working towards earning a teaching credential. Additionally, these programs frequently have a more diverse pool of teacher candidates than traditional four-year colleges (Carver-Thomas, 2017).

Administrator support.

Administrative support and competency has been found to be positively associated with teacher retention for teachers of all races. In fact, nearly 40% of teachers recently surveyed cited support from their immediate supervisor as a driving factor in why they stayed in their position (Williams, 2017). Williams' (2017) research is supported by other research that found that teacher attrition could be predicted by an "administrator's ability to encourage and acknowledge staff, communicate a clear vision, and generally run a school well" (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. 29). Bryan (2018) found that teacher retention is higher when school administration holds high expectations for staff and students.

Support from administration is crucial for teachers of color who face the added pressure of navigating complex racial relationships and conversations with their supervisor. Similarly, administrators of color have expressed a lack of trust in the educational system when it comes to hiring and retaining school leaders of color (Robicheau & Krull 2016). Certainly, White teachers also want to feel support from administration, but White teachers have not reported experiencing the same kind of challenging racial work environment which is reported by many teachers of color. Some teachers of color reported challenges in balancing their need to please administrators, who are often White, with supporting students in what they believed to be a culturally responsive way (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). When districts offer cultural competency training and other training which supports administrators in navigating racialized conversations more effectively, they can help create a working environment more conducive to retaining teachers of color (Carver-Thomas, 2017). Unfortunately, many teachers of all ethnicities do not receive a collegiate education which requires them to reflect on, or think deeply about, issues of race or discrimination in the classroom (Aujla-Buliar, 2018). This makes it even more important for administrators to support teachers in learning about issues pertaining to race.

School demographics.

School student populations and school locations are as diverse as the country. Some schools serve wealthy students, some serve rural students, while some serve primarily students of color. Unfortunately, the teacher attrition rate for all teachers from schools serving mostly minority students is much higher than in schools serving mostly White students (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Further, Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond (2017) also found that schools that serve higher proportions of minority students tend to be schools that are staffed with a higher percentage of teachers of color. When comparing retention rates of White teachers

and teachers of color at schools which have similar racial demographics, the difference in retention is not statistically significant. Thus, one large part of the retention gap between teachers of color and White teachers can be explained by the student demographics at the schools in which these teachers are most likely to teach.

Ingersoll & May (2011) found, similarly, that teacher of color turnover is less affected by school student demographics such as race or socioeconomic status than for White teacher turnover. Teacher of color turnover is likely affected, however, by schools with worse organizational conditions such as discipline, leadership, and resources than it is for White teachers. Research suggests that these conditions tend to be more common in schools serving higher proportions of students of color and students living in poverty (Ingersoll & May, 2011).

As the country diversifies racially and more students are living in poverty, schools will have to find ways to support teachers who are teaching students whose current racial demographics or socio-economic status are different than their own. Whipp & Geronime (2017) found that teachers who grew up in an urban setting and/or attended a high-poverty school were more likely to remain teaching in higher poverty schools when compared with teachers who grew up in a lower-poverty school. Teachers of color are more likely than their White peers to teach in urban schools. Not only do these schools often lack quality facilities, but also urban districts often do not provide an adequate level of professional development or mentorship programming (Achinstein, B., Ogawa, R. T., Sexton, D., & Freitas, C., 2010). The fact that the schools where teachers of color are most likely to teach are also most likely to have the least adequate facilities could be used to inform future studies.

Job compensation and benefits.

In the United States, teaching is often talked about as an underpaid profession. While it might seem easy to point to financial compensation as a reason teachers might leave the field, the issue is more complicated. Primary compensation, defined as the "core salary" as opposed to other fringe benefits, such as incentive pay or healthcare spending, is a challenging metric to use when gauging the impact that pay has on the retention of teachers. Teachers do not always list pay as a high priority area when considering the reasons that they took their current job but they do list it as a primary issue when asked how a district might retain them as a teacher (Williams, 2017; Gritz & Theobald, 1996).

In their meta-analysis of the literature, Achinistein et al. (2010) noted that teacher compensation was related to teacher attrition- both in that the salaries themselves mattered and that salary is sometimes noted as a reason for general dissatisfaction. One study showed that aligning part of a teacher's compensation to their performance was a way to successfully retain a higher percentage of teachers (Morice & Murray, 2003) while another showed that performance pay has no effect on teacher retention or student success (Shifrer, Turley, & Heard, 2017). In addition to salary, other factors contribute to the compensation and benefits package offered by employers. Williams (2017) found that additional training opportunities, extended preparation time, and access to money for additional educational opportunities were cited as important by teachers when deciding to stay or leave education.

Unfortunately, in terms of teachers of color retention, there is a lack of literature which addresses the issue of salary specifically in terms of teachers of color retention. However, one study did note that many potential teachers of color are dissuaded from entering the field due to the high costs of college (Carver-Thomas, 2017). This does not specifically address salary effects

once they are in the field but if people of color are concerned about finances going into college, then there certainly could be concerns about low salaries once entering the field. This is a gap in the literature which I recommend future researchers look at closely.

Gaps in Literature

Gaps in literature exist in the specific ways in which teachers of color are retained. Specifically, there appears to be limited research which examines the impact of teachers of color and their commitment to serving students of color, whether or not schools value multicultural capital or only resources of the dominant community, and the impact of teacher preparation programs designed to support teachers of color (Achinstein, B., Ogawa, R. T., Sexton, D., & Freitas, C., 2010). Many studies look at retention of teachers as a whole (Williams, 2017; Morice & Murray, 2003) but there is a need to have more studies which look at issues of the retention of teachers of color. Also, of note is the relative lack of research which focuses on the positive rewards teachers of color find in the profession. There are many studies which focus on the challenges faced by teachers of color, but many fewer which focus on the positive example of teachers of color who are supported in their positions and profession.

This Study Within the Field of Literature

I have explored themes in the field of literature relating to teacher retention and have focused specifically on studies which included teachers of color. This study will add to the growing, but insubstantial, literature which looks into why teachers of color are staying in the field and what works for them. The study and results I present in the following chapters will add to the field of literature by bringing specific narratives of teachers of color to the forefront to understand how issues of teacher retention specifically affect teachers of color.

Chapter 3

Positionality

I grew up in Littleton, Colorado and attended k-12 schools in primarily White, middle class neighborhoods. When I think back to my early memories of race, I can remember the names of the few students of color who stood out against a backdrop of White classmates. I didn't have the words to name it, but race was already a part of my life. As I got to high school, I was confused when a teacher continued to call our city "Vanilla-ton" instead of "Little-ton." He briefly mentioned how little diversity we were exposed to but I had no words or concepts to help me understand what he meant. I didn't realize at this time that not only were most of my classmates White, but every teacher I had ever had was also White, which continued until I had nearly completed my principal licensure program- equivalent to my second Master's degree. In high school, a few of my close friends were people of color and through sleepovers at their houses and mine, I had a brief glimpse into the external lives (foods, religion, etc.) of non-White Americans - even if we never talked about what it meant to live as White or Asian or Black.

In college, I went to Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota which was even more White than my high school. I can count on one hand the number of students of color I interacted with and can count just as many experiences when those same students were trivialized as being the "only" person of their race. My first few years of teaching continued this trend and I felt accomplished when I found easy success both in the classroom and as a young professional connecting with other successful teachers.

In my fourth year of teaching, I took a new position at a racially diverse school with nearly 50% students of color and realized the lack of skill I possessed in culturally responsive

teaching. I was fortunate to land in a district which was intentionally investing in supporting its

teachers to grow in racial consciousness. With support, I began to see myself as having race,

White, and began to unlearn the color-blindness with which I had been raised and had thus far

professed through life. I began to understand the complex racial and cultural backgrounds which

my students brought with them to class every day and how I had unintentionally been causing

harm to students along the way.

As I became more competent as a racially-conscious teacher (but with still a long way to

go towards true proficiency), I became interested in pursuing school administration as a way to

support students from a broader perspective. I was also interested in supporting teachers as they

sought to understand themselves as racial beings. This would help them to serve their racially

diverse students more effectively. Before becoming an administrator, I served as a racial equity

coach for a year. This position provided me with more training and the opportunity to grow with

many site- and district- level teams. I was also able to view school systems as larger entities that

support teachers instead of just thinking from a classroom or site point of view. It was during

this time that I became aware of the incredible lack of teachers of color in the classroom and

became interested in understanding how to have an impact on this issue.

As a current administrator, I realize how complex the process of recruitment and

retention can be. I have faced challenges navigating teacher tenure and trying to understand

which teacher gets cut if enrollment drops, regardless of the qualifications of the teacher. I have

come to understand that an administrator does not always get to see every possible candidate

because the pipeline of teacher candidates might be reduced at a district office level before a site

administrator sees all candidates. I also have seen how little time an administrator can directly

provide to support teachers of color once they enter the workforce due to the many demands

daily on the administrator. I have also learned how difficult it is to get honest feedback from teachers once I became an administrator. As a "boss" in a building, it is much harder to hear someone's true experience than it was when I was a "colleague." This added complexity makes it challenging to know when I am hitting or missing the mark as a trusted and culturally competent administrator.

While I have spent a lot of time trying to understand how I live as a racial being and how that impacts every aspect of my life, I will never have the experience of a person of color. I will never be able to personally bring the perspective of a person of color to the classroom, nor will this ever be a goal of mine. Instead, I hope to continue in education and work to see a time when the number of teachers of color is reflective of the number of students of color. I believe that our future as a country, and world, depends on us being able to support our young learners and that one of the best ways to do this is by providing them with racially and culturally congruent "mirrors" in which they can see themselves.

This study represents for me not an "end" but a "beginning" (or at least a "to be continued") in my path of understanding the complexity of race in one small corner of my life-that of the retention of teachers of color. As was written by Paulo Friere (2000), "How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own?" (p. 90). My hope is to gain an understanding (and convey that understanding to the reader) of the life stories of a small number of teachers of color with the hope that their stories might help shift the paradigm of public education as we move deeper into the 21st Century.

Introduction to Methodology

Having previously discussed the importance of teachers of color in the field of education and having provided a broad review of previous literature related to teacher of color retention, I

will now discuss how I conducted the present study. Previous researchers have used narratives as a way of providing information about the experiences of people of color within the education system in the United States (Pour-Khorshid, 2016; Krull & Robicheau, 2019; Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). I continued in this tradition of collecting narratives to inform the field about teacher of color retention. Below I will detail the process I used to recruit and interview participants.

Narratives

Previous scholars have gathered the narratives of teachers of color as a way to understand their experiences (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Aujla-Buliar, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2016). In addition to presenting a clear picture of the experiences of teachers of color, narrative sharing has been seen as a way of healing and connecting among teachers of color. "Storytelling is a mode of communication that helps people to access experiences and thoughts hidden deep within their identities" (Kambutu, Rios, & Castaneda, 2009, 107). Through sharing stories of being in the public education system, both as students and as teachers, people of color add to a deeper understanding of challenges that are faced in a system which often rewards Whiteness (Pour-Khorshid, 2016; Krull & Robicheau, 2019). "Testimonio" allow teachers to share their narratives and serve as a way for teachers of color to support one another in a system and society seen as oppressive to those who do not fit a Eurocentric model of how to look or act (Pour-Khorshid, 2016).

This study draws on this tradition of gathering narratives. When framing this study, I have been guided by the work of Clandinin & Connelly (2000) who understand narrative inquiry as "both phenomena under study *and* method of study" (p. 4). As such, I will focus on situating the lives of participants within a specific time and space which will add to the understanding of their narratives. Through providing an understanding of my own positionality and the lens

through which I view the world, the reader will have a better understanding of why I interpreted participant narratives in the way that I did. In this way, I hope to be in collaboration with participants and act as part of the social milieu referenced by Clandinin & Connelly (2000): "Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between research and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus...narrative inquiry is stories lived and told" (p. 20).

Research Method

For this study, I primarily used an inductive interview method which allowed me to be open to the narratives of teachers of color before attempting to draw any conclusions based on their narratives. I am grounded in the epistemological view of knowledge as being socially constructed meaning that I did not come to the interviews with specific ideas or concepts which I wanted to arise from the participants. As an interviewer, I saw myself as the metaphor of a traveler as discussed by Kvale & Brinkman (2009) - as one who is looking to construct knowledge through a journey to many perspectives of participant interviews.

The general qualitative inquiry I used is both phenomenologically and ethnographically informed. As the participants are all experiencing a similar phenomenon, that of being a teacher of color in Minnesota, a state in which the vast majority of teachers are White, my method has been influenced by a phenomenological methodology using single or multiple interviews with participants (Creswell & Poth, 2007). Phenomenology "points to an interest in understanding social phenomena from the actors' own perspectives and describing the world as experienced by the subjects, with the assumption that the important reality is what people perceive it to be" (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p.26).

This study is also grounded in an ethnographic methodology. The purpose of this methodology is to investigate the perceived experiences of teachers of color, a group that is not demographically well-represented among the entire teaching population. This kind of separation from the "mainstream" creates a space to enlighten the reader as to the experiences of teachers of color from an ethnographic perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2007).

Retention District 101

I chose to situate this study in Retention District 101, a suburb of the Twin Cities, Minnesota. Through focusing on a single school district, I was able to find participants who have a similar experience of working in the same part of the city with the same district framework. Retention District 101 has a teacher of color affinity group from which participants were drawn. The teacher of color affinity group is a union-sponsored program which also receives the support of the school district to provide teachers of color with a time and space to be in affinity without White staff in the room. Teachers of color set the agenda for the meetings where there is a combination of general networking time and professional development relevant to teachers of color. Additionally, teachers who are new to the field have the option of being paired with a mentor teacher of color who is a more experienced teacher. This mentor is in addition to any building-level mentor a new teacher might have, and the goal is to help the new teacher navigate racial questions and challenges as they arrive.

Participants, Sampling, and Selection

I entered this study with a belief in the importance of having teachers of color in the workforce- both in Minnesota and in the United States. I was and am aware of how many people who share my White skin color have made decisions, both intentional and unintentional, which have contributed to the issue of the lack of retention of teachers of color in the workforce. One of

my goals was to approach this process collaboratively to ensure participants that I am doing research *with* participants to uncover patterns of their life histories as opposed to doing research *on* participants as a researcher. During each phase of the study, I attempted to reflect on my own privileges as well as be open to thoughts and criticism from participants.

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants. This sampling was purposeful as participants were drawn from teachers in Retention District 101 who are part of the teachers of color affinity group. Some of the participants are either mentors or mentees while some are neither but attend the group meetings. The selection of participants was not based on number of years teacher in order to keep the study open to a diverse group of participants.

The pool of potential participants that I interviewed was drawn from the teacher of color affinity group in Retention District 101. I made contact with the coordinator of this group to understand how I might best be in touch with possible participants. After it was determined that a face to face introduction was appropriate, I was introduced in person to the teachers of color affinity group where I had the opportunity to introduce the topic for this study. Next, an email that I drafted was sent by the coordinator to members of the group to allow for potential interested participants to share their contact information directly with me before signing up for an interview time for the study (See Appendix B). Participants were offered a $25 gift card for participating in the interview process as an acknowledgement of the time participants were spending outside of their normal routine.

I intentionally chose to keep the participant pool racially broad ("teacher of color") as opposed to racially specific ("Black teachers") for two reasons: one- through inductive inquiry, I was open to the possibility that there will be similarities and differences in the narratives of teachers of different races, two- the number of teachers of color who teach in the suburbs is small

and finding enough participants of one race could have proven problematic to achieving research saturation.

Furthermore, I decided to focus intentionally on teachers who are employed on a teacher contract and who have a valid teaching license. This ensured that all participants have, at some point, taken classes to receive a teaching license. It also ensured that none of the participants currently serve as administrators, paraprofessionals, secretaries, or other education-related positions which are not designated as being a "teacher."

This search process aimed to find participants who were willing to share their stories with me in a structured interview setting. An introductory email was sent out to the entire teacher of color affinity group asking for potential participants to fill out a survey to provide me with their email and phone number for future contact. From this list, I sent out another email to schedule interview times with the online scheduler, Doodle. Once participants were signed up for an interview time, I sent a reminder email seven to ten days before the interview with the interview questions and further details about the interview itself. Through this process, eight participants took part in this study.

Teacher Participants

The following table shows the participants who participated in this study along with their gender, self-identified race and cultural identity as well as the number of years they have been teaching. Participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their anonymity. All teachers are currently in positions which required a teaching license. Teachers ranged from working with students in Kindergarten to 12th grade. Some were homeroom teachers, some taught students in a smaller case load such as English Language teacher or Special Education teacher, and some

were district-level coaches. I have intentionally not included the specific positions each teacher

was in to maintain anonymity of participants.

Table. 1

Participant Pseudonyms and other identifiers

Pseudonym	Gender	Self-Identified Race/Cultural Identity.	Years Teaching
Paula	Female	Biracial. Half White, Half Latina with strong ties to Guatemalan family.	7
Lucia	Female	Biracial. Half White, Half Latina with strong ties to Guatemalan family.	8
Sarah	Female	Asian American. Adopted and Raised by White Parents.	2
Maya	Female	Mixed, Multiracial. Ethnically identify as Chicana. Can be perceived as White Passing.	6
Jamya	Female	African American	2
Grace	Female	Asian Caucasian. Identifies as Vietnamese when talking with other Asian staff.	22
Mai	Female	Hmong American. Was a student in EL program growing up.	22
Michael	Male	Black. Half White, Half Black.	3

Interview Process

For this study, I used a standardized, open-ended interview format which provided all participants with the same questions but allowed participants to contribute as much detail as they wanted (Turner, 2010). I sent the interview questions to each participant via email seven to ten days before our interview so they had an opportunity to read over the questions before we met. This semi-structured interview process had the goal of "obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 3). Interview questions were guided by my larger research questions and delivered through an interview guide which listed possible broad topics of conversation as well as more specific questions which provided structure to the interview process for both the participant and the researcher (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

Open-ended questions were followed by un-structured follow-up questions to better understand participant perspectives on my initial research questions. This kind of interviewing provided many perspectives and stories from which conclusions have been drawn, but it also led to a slow and cumbersome coding process as participants provided significant amounts of detail (Turner, 2010). My epistemology has been guided by the work of Sandy & Dumay (2011), in which the interview is seen through localist perspective- a perspective which views the participant as living within a societal space which must be uncovered and interpreted by the participant through the interview process.

My initial questions included topic areas which arose in the review of literature and pilot interview including the impact of race, job conditions, administrative support, and connections with students and mentors. These questions were validated by field experts and field tested in a pilot interview.

Data Analysis

To support my general research questions, I focused on drawing meaning from the narratives of participants. My analysis, therefore, focused on drawing meaning from the interview transcripts as opposed to analyzing language patterns used by participants (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). After conducting interviews with participants, I organized the data by creating transcripts of the interviews, reduced the data into themes through coding, and then represented the data in discussion and quotations as appropriate (Creswell & Poth, 2007). Throughout the process, I kept an open mind when making decisions about which themes were important as I remembered that "events which might have appeared insignificant at the time may turn out to have been a crucial occurrence affecting the outcome" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 8)

The data in this study consists of interview transcripts from the interviews. These transcripts were transcribed from audio recordings of the interviews - first by a computer program and then were "cleaned up" through listening to the recording and editing the transcript. Data files were stored as password-protected documents on a personal computer. All paper copies of participant signatures and notes taken at the interviews were secured until the dissertation was accepted at which point the paper copies were shredded via a professional shredding agency. Data was initially be organized by participant name and date of interview with pseudonyms selected later to mask the identity of the participants and ensure confidentiality.

After transcripts were completed, the data from the transcripts was organized using a coding system to uncover themes using an inductive coding method which allowed me to draw out themes from the interview transcripts. I used coding to organize data based on patterns that I found into "buckets" of thought which helped to organize the conclusions of the study (Galman, 2013). This process included multiple read-throughs of the interview transcripts. As the final

buckets emerged, they represented a reduction of the combined transcripts and provided meaningful ideas which are explored in the discussion section of the dissertation.

Member Checking

Once my analysis of participant narratives was complete, I used member checking to take my analysis and interpretations back to participants so they could "judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (Cresswell & Poth, 2007, p. 208). This process allowed participants to validate results by providing an opportunity to clarify their own narratives. (Birt, et al., 2016). This process of member checking supported the validity of the study and the ability for others to use this study to inform future decision making. As recommended by Carlson (2010), I provided participants with a clear explanation and timeline of the member checking process before the study began so they understood the goals of the study and the member checking process.

As discussed by Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter (2016) when talking about member checking, "It is essential that researchers are transparent about what they hope to achieve with the method and how their claims about credibility and validity fit with their epistemological stance" (p.6). My aim is to provide a synopsis of the narratives of study participants which are true to their own intentions for how their stories are told. Influenced by the work and process of Doyle (2007) which focuses on "empowerment and participation" of participants, I provided participants with the option of responding via written communication once they read the synthesis of the data (p. 894). Once participants responded to my analysis, I adjusted the writing where necessary to ensure that participant narratives were portrayed accurately per participant request.

Ethics

The ethical concerns of my research are challenging and are not clear cut. As a White male studying life narratives of people of color, I have tried to be aware of my own biases as well as my own privileges and power in the situation. I am also in an administrative work position which provides me with a title which includes with it positional power. Although I was a supervisor of any of the participants of the study, I tried to be aware of the challenge that some of these power dynamics (both positional and racial) might play in the research.

As one of the goals of this study is to support learning which could be used to improve work environments for teachers of color, my hope is that participants have seen the study as a process of working together towards a common goal. As I recruited participants, I shared goals of the study with participants so they could decide if there were interested in participating towards that goal. As part of the consent process, I tried to be transparent about the goals of the study, the process I used (interviewing), the possibility of needing multiple interviews, and the member checking process. By allowing participants to understand the nature of the study, I hoped to find collaborators in the research process as opposed to "subjects" who are passively studied.

As I began the interview process, I tried to be conscious of the power dynamics described by Kvale (2006): "the qualitative research interview entails a hierarchical relationship with an asymmetrical power distribution of interviewer and interviewee" (p. 484). I used member checking as a way to provide participants an opportunity to respond to or correct the interpretations taken from their interview. Through this process, however, I realize that some participants may have felt uncomfortable providing their true opinions due again to the asymmetrical power dynamic of the interview (Kvale, 2006).

Assumptions, limitations, and delimitations

As this study is situated in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, it cannot be assumed that the narratives which will be reviewed will be reflective of situations of other individuals in other districts in other parts of the country. The themes which come out of participant narratives, however, can certainly be used to guide future studies and possibly broad policy implementation.

Conclusion

Through using a qualitative interview process, I will gather participant narratives with the goal of shedding light on my broad research questions. I have now provided context for why it is important to retain teachers of color, reviewed literature from previous research on this topic, and outlined my own research method and how it has been influenced by scholars in the field. Next, I will share data gathered in the interview process as well as my analysis.

Chapter 4

Finding ways to improve retention for teachers of color retention is important not just for the field of education, but also personally important for the participants in the present study. As data were collected, it became clear that there were a myriad of internal, interpersonal, and external factors influencing the retention of teachers of color. Some participants expressed general satisfaction with their teaching career thus far while others had shared stories of how they had contemplated leaving the field or were frustrated with the way themselves or others have been treated. Yet even with the diversity of opinion and narratives, there were a number of themes which emerged from many of the participants which provide insight into trends of retention for teachers of color.

In the chapter that follows, I examine these themes in depth. I have chosen to use the words of participants as much as possible so that their experiences and perspectives may take center stage. Additionally, instead of writing individual narratives of each participant, I have grouped shared perspectives together thematically so as to examine salient themes which multiple participants brought forward. Through presenting my analysis in this way, my intention is to discuss data by larger theme instead of examining, one at a time, single stories of each teacher of color. Throughout this chapter, I will return to the study's research questions by providing a summary and analysis of the perceived internal, interpersonal, and external factors which have influenced participants in an attempt to place the current results within the existing field of research. Also, recommendations from teachers of color to help retain more teachers of color will be presented in each section.

Finally, before moving to the analysis of research data, it is important to note the challenge of declaring which factors are truly the most important factors for teacher of color

retention based on the survey data from this study. The only true data point which differentiates a teacher of color who is in the field from a teacher of color who is not in the field is the fact that the teacher of color in the field still has a job in education. It is hard to point to a specific story or moment in time when a teacher of color decided to stay in the field of teaching, just like it is hard to know if that teacher will remain in teaching next year. Due to this challenge, the data presented below is grounded on both perceptions of participants for which factors have been important to their retention in the field as well as topics which were most frequently discussed when talking about general satisfaction in the field of education.

Internal Factors for Teacher of Color Retention

One aspect of the research questions for this study addressed narratives which spoke to their intrinsic motivations for staying in the field of education. Significant job satisfaction was also related to many of the internal factors discussed by participants. This section will summarize participants' narratives about how important it is for them to make a difference for students as well as match racially with students who they serve.

      Making a difference for students.

"I feel like I need to be there because the kids need me." - Mai

The participants in the current study showed a strong desire to support children in learning. While the desire to make a difference in the lives of children was not always related to race in participants' discussions, this motivation mirrors previous studies of teacher recruitment and retention which found that teachers frequently want to make a difference for students (He, Cooper, & Tangredi, 2015; Nieto, 2003). Although these results were expected, they are worth noting because at the core of teaching is the need to make a difference and the participants in this study showed similar desires. For example, even from a young age, Mai recalled wanting to

make an important impact on students when she said "I think all along when I was growing up, I knew I wanted to help people and help influence, inspire whoever I worked with."

A few participants shared their desire to improve their own teaching craft to make an even greater difference in the lives of their students. Sarah summed this up when she said "I really want to get better. I want to feel very confident in every lesson I go into... I can do better in each lesson." Jamya shared similar views to previous studies (Griffin & Tackie, 2016) in which she wanted to positively contribute to the educational success of students when she said "The one thing that's appealing to me is that I get to change or help and be a hand in the next generation. That's very important." Many participants expressed an interest in supporting current students having the opportunity for strong academic outcomes due to their teaching. Sarah was similarly satisfied with the profession due to the difference she was making in the lives of students: "That's one of the reasons I guess I just really enjoy it. The students are great and it's always an exciting day."

Two participants felt added pressure to remain in the field because they felt that if they weren't teaching supporting students, there might not be anyone else who would. Speaking of a program she helped start, Mai noted "I feel like if I left, the program would fall apart without someone who is dedicated and supportive and... has a lot of connections and resources." Maya's comments revealed her own struggle with wanting to leave the profession due to challenges yet staying due to wanting to support students: "I think that that's what continues to pull me back in is, maybe on the negative side, the guilt. And on the positive side, the fact that I feel like I can make some type of difference." While not talking about guilt, Mai also noted the pressure she feels to work hard for students while teaching: "I feel like when I go above and beyond, I'm just kind of like meeting the status quo of a good teacher."

Some teachers expressed a general desire to create a difference for students while some noted the importance of supporting students of color more specifically. Lucia's narrative was an example of this when she talked about the differences between her previous job working with primarily middle-class White students and her current job, where she worked with students of color who were recent immigrants, she noted: "It just felt so much more fulfilling...you're making a difference." Lucia's story, along with the comments of other participants, aligned with previous research which found that teachers of color want to improve outcomes for their students (Griffin & Tackie, 2016). This idea of job satisfaction being related to not just making a difference but also working with students of color will be discussed in depth in the next section.

Shared experience with students.

In addition to wanting to make a difference for students generally, each participant talked about serving students with whom they shared a similar experience. Previous studies have looked at the impact of student demographics and teacher retention. Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond (2017) found that all staff are more likely to leave the field when teaching in a school with a high percentage of teachers of color. Ingersoll & May (2011) found that teachers of color are more likely to teach at schools with more students of color and that organizational issues in these schools are more likely to lead to teacher of color attrition. Participants in the current study shared narratives which suggest that teachers of color would prefer to teach in a school with more students of color. This point does not necessarily go against the prior research, but it is worth noting as an area where future research might be beneficial. This section will discuss themes which emerged of sharing a similar lived experience including culture and language as well as racially matching with students.

Similar lived experience.

"I get the ability to say: I've been there and I know what you're going through, what you're going

to come up against, how can we best move through it?...I hope it's really nice for them to have

somebody that has their point of view. " - Michael

Participants consistently mentioned the importance of working with students who had a

similar lived experience either because of sharing the same racial identity or having similar

cultural practices even if their races were not similar. Congruent with previous research,

participants stated an interest in sharing their lived experiences with students who matched their

own race (Achinstein et al., 2010; Burciaga & Kohli, 2018).

Paula, Mai, and Lucia shared many ways in which they worked with students who were

navigating two languages and/or cultures and how their student's lives mirrored their own

experiences as students. Lucia spoke to the importance of being an adult in the building who

shared language and family experiences with students: "just being somebody in the school that

looks like them, that speaks the language that they speak...that has a similar family experience."

Similarly, as a bi-racial, Spanish speaking teacher Paula noted the importance of a shared

experience with students: "There's this immediate connection that they just latch on to." This was

evident not only in her relationships with Latinx students, but also with Asian students whose

primary language was not English. As Mai reflected on her journey as compared with her

students currently learning two languages, she spoke of the challenges she still faces:

> I think as teachers of color and especially if English isn't our first language, there's a lot
> of struggle with us just besides learning how to teach and preparing lessons. But we also
> have to deal with the language piece. Are we proficient enough in English?...So that's an
> obstacle that I think myself along with many other teachers who are English learners, we
> had to struggle with and had to get through in order to become a teacher.

Mai feels satisfied when students are able to see her and understand the similar experiences they are having as they learn their native language and English simultaneously.

Lucia noted the similarity of her own bi-cultural upbringing with some of the experiences her students shared about navigating their school and home lives: "When they go home they still have whatever that home culture is. And so that really for me resonated with how we grew up… aware culturally of Guatemala and what that meant. And we spoke Spanish." Lucia often makes connections with the customs and cultures students share from their homes. "There's certain cultural pieces where even if it's Hmong people talking about customs and cultures, even though we're not Hmong… it's not the same exact same traditions but a lot of it's very similar."

Jamya, too, made a connection between her knowledge of student culture and her connection with students: "I'm like a unicorn to them in a sense of that representation. Like, 'Oh my God! She talks like us. Like she knows our lingo, she knows our dances. Like, Oh! You Ms. Jamya. You lit!'" Similarly, Michael noted that "being a teacher of color is kind of nice because I know I can relate a lot more to my students than some of the other (White) teachers can." Sarah connected her lived racial experiences to the classroom and noted how she could improve educational outcomes for students: "I feel that I have a lot to offer, just with some of my experiences and also some of the resources I have." These similar experiences between students and teachers show the importance to participants of working with students whom they can be a role model for. In the next section, specific racial matching will be discussed based on the importance given to this by participants.

Racial matching.

"I looked across the hall and (saw) someone who looked just like my Mom and I realized

in that moment, they let us teach!" - Grace

Seven of the eight participants spoke specifically about their desire to be a racial match for students in their classrooms. The sentiment mentioned by Jamya that her "black girls are seeing a black woman" was similar to the values of many of the participants in this study and also mirrors previous research (Achinstein et al., 2010; Burciaga & Kohli, 2018).

Many teachers expressed their motivation for going into the field of teaching in the first place started with seeing a racially-similar teacher when they themselves were students. As Grace noted when she saw the first Asian teacher in her school: "I looked across the hall and (saw) someone who looked just like my Mom and I realized in that moment, they let us teach!... I don't want anyone to go to school anymore and feel like I did." Similarly, Mai remembered "I think one of the reasons I went into teaching was, there was a lack of teachers of color. I had one teacher of color in second grade that I could remember." Michael shared how much of his current motivation for teaching is still based on his experiences as a child: "I think it's the fact that I did not have any teachers of color and I don't want more generations of kids to go through without seeing at least one teacher of color."

Once in the field, this desire for racial matching is still a strong reason for why participants value teaching. As Grace mentioned, "I wanted to be somewhere where I might inspire a student of color coming off the bus." Sarah also appreciated seeing students who looked like her: "Especially seeing a lot of students that look like me, it's been great...there's definitely been a connection!" Similarly, when teaching a lesson during his interview process, Michael

appreciated matching racially with the students. "I had to teach a lesson to 15 kids and all of them were black! So that was really refreshing to see."

Three participants made connections outside of their present classrooms. Mai looked towards future educators of color when she mentioned "I always inspire my kids to become teachers in my classroom." In addition to wanting to match racially with her students, Jamya mentioned "being a Black woman, the representation is important for my Black students to see, but also other students of color and even the white kids to see a person of color in a positive light." Michael made the connection to his principal and president who also were black leaders:

> I think that aspect of being able to give kids just a glimpse of what could be. I will full blown admit I didn't think being a Black principal was possible until I saw my Black principal currently. I just thought it would never happen. There's going to be somebody that would stand in the way. There would be something that wouldn't let it happen. And then I walked in and it was the coolest realization to me. I know we've had a black president… but there is still some things where I go, 'we can't do that.' And to see that avenue just opened up, it was very cool.

The impact of racial matching is clear as Michael shared how important it was for his own life.

Michael also made a connection between his personal desire to racially match with his students and the importance of students of color feeling successful in school and in life:

> I think having teachers of color is probably one of the most important ways we could help schools be more successful. I think that's because we have such a wide range of students (with) varying cultures, varying abilities, varying all of these things. If they don't see themselves in the people that are teaching them, they're not going to be able to relate to the content...I think it's a great parallel that last year Black Panther came out and I saw tons of Black kids finally be able to get to see a superhero look like them on the big screen. But then they go look at their everyday life and they don't see somebody who's doing great things and trying to teach them how to be great on a daily basis other than their family members, other than their parents.

The findings of this section have a connection to previous research by Ingersoll & May, (2011) who found that all teachers, including teachers of color, are more likely to leave the field when working in an environment serving more students of color. The study by Ingersoll & May

(2011) found that school conditions are typically worse in schools which serve a high number of students of color due to lack of funding and district support issues. Participants in the present study, however, clearly are interested in teaching in spaces where they are likely to have an impact on students of color.

Interpersonal Factors for Teacher of Color Retention

Another aspect of the research questions for this study addressed narratives which spoke to the important interpersonal connections that sustained them as they chose to stay in the field of education. In addition to being intrinsically motivated as has previously been discussed, participants shared reasons for job satisfaction and retention based on interpersonal relationships and how they have played out for them as a teacher. Participants shared about the importance of forming quality relationships with students and families as those families navigated the education system. Additionally, participants shared about how important it was for them to have a space where they could talk with other teachers of color in affinity.

Relationships with students and families.

"I decided to become a teacher because I love kids and I think I am natural at it... I think that building relationships with children and their families just feels really natural for me." - Maya

As is congruent with previous studies, a commitment to students is strongly correlated with teachers remaining in the field (He, Cooper, & Tangredi, 2015; Nieto, 2003). This section will explore not only a commitment to students, but also their families. Participants spoke about creating positive relationships with students and families and how important it was to them.

Both Maya and Michael spoke to the importance of having positive relationships with students to help improve academic outcomes. When speaking of the lack of schools being able to provide an equitable education for students who look like her, Maya discussed "feeling the

urgency to be at least one counter narrative for kids and their families and to be a person in the room that's able to have a voice." Similarly, Michael expressed the desire to make sure he was expecting a lot of his students to change narratives for students of color in a largely White district:

> I think that I'm a little bit harder on students than some other teachers just because...I don't want the white teachers, the White school district, to see them as kids that just run around and do nothing...we've built that relationship to where I'm going to be hard on them and they understand why I'm hard on them.

Michael leveraged his strong relationships with students to help them work even harder in school.

In addition to building strong relationships with students, four participants expressed a strong desire to build relationships with families. As Jamya mentioned: "I always communicate with my families. 'We are a team for your child. You are their first teacher. I'm their teacher now, but we all like doing something for the betterment of them.' This is not one sided." Paula noted how close she is with families of her students, even closer than White colleagues appear to be. "I give up my home phone number a lot… the Latino families latch on, but so do the Asian families." Similarly, Mai values close relationships with families: "I guess because they're Hmong and I'm Hmong, I give them my cell phone (number). They could call me night and day." When speaking of his relationships with families, Michael also noted how racially matching with a family sometimes supported a positive relationship with that family: "we have fairly good relationships... she (a parent) said I was the first teacher of color that her daughter's ever had. It's been pointed out before and I think it was really nice."

Participants in this study spoke about important relationships with students and families. Previous research has not shown a large correlation between teacher retention and the connection

a teacher has with families. Future research is recommended which looks at the connection

between teacher retention and the relationships that teachers are able to have with families.

Teacher of color affinity.

The previous section discussed the importance of participants' interpersonal relationships

with students and families. This section will focus on the importance of interpersonal

relationships built in a teacher of color affinity space- time spent with only other teachers of

color. As was mentioned in Chapter Three, the participants from this study were drawn from a

teacher of color affinity program which provided time and space for teachers of color to be in

both formal and informal community without White educators in the room. Having a teacher of

color affinity space is not currently a practice in every school district, but the importance of this

program or other similar interpersonal supports was discussed by six of the participants in this

study. This section will discuss aspects of teacher of color affinity which were deemed important

by participants and will be organized by guidance/mentorship and affinity.

Guidance and mentorship.

"The teacher of color program... just started last year when I started (with) the district and they

gave me support. I had a mentor and I still have her, she comes and observes my classroom,

prepared me for what the route would be for observations, giving me information... They were

my major emotional, mental and professional support." - Jamya

Previous studies have documented the importance of strong mentorship programs,

especially for teachers of color (Carver-Thomas, 2017; Cary, 2016). Five participants in the

current study spoke to the importance of receiving mentorship or guidance from another teacher

of color. Both Michael and Jamya valued having another teacher of color to work with as their

mentor because they felt that they were better supported and understood by another teacher of

color. Jamya mentioned "The teacher of color program that's sponsored by the union is very important because it's run by people of color and is only for people of color." Similarly, Michael appreciated the support that his style of teaching is valued. Speaking of teacher of color mentors, he said "they understand that not all teachers need to fit one mold to help our students. They understand that there's things I can bring to teaching and to this school that they have yet to have."

In addition to feeling supported, younger teachers value having someone to help them grow in the profession. Sarah noted the importance of mentorship for her growth: "Having the teacher mentorship program… that are not just in my building has been really great... having more people that I can communicate with and ask questions to and have these conversations, the more the better." Similarly, Michael appreciated the support that he has received at his new school because he lacked mentorship at his previous school district: "I didn't get much support in my first two years of teaching. But now at this school, I have the teachers of colors program for support."

As a more experienced teacher, Grace is a mentor to other teachers of color: "I'm a staff of color mentor. I just was assigned a few weeks ago a mentee and she is a Hmong teacher in her third year at another building...She just needs someone to talk to." Grace's understanding of needing someone to talk to show her experience of having gone through the same position and seeking out other teachers of color herself. Now, as a mentor, Grace realizes the importance of retention for her mentee: "I want her to keep her job, to keep teaching, because the school she's at has a lot of Asian (Hmong) students and she speaks the language."

Although many of the stories from participants were about the specific support they currently receive from the school district, Michael shared an important experience from his

undergraduate years which further emphasizes the need for teachers of color to have support

from other people of color.

> I had a class with my first black professor...first black teacher ever... He looked at me and said, 'You're one of the first black students I've had in education, (for) I'd say, probably 10 years...This is a big deal because from this point on, all of your teachers and all of your students with you are going to look to you as the black voice in classes.' And sure enough, that's exactly what happened. But he helped me navigate college cause it wasn't the easiest thing to do.

The reflections of Michael, Grace, Jamya, and Sarah show the importance of having a

teacher of color mentor to learn from and connect with to support growth and retention in the

field. The next section will speak more generally to the experiences participants shared about

connecting with other teachers of color within the mentorship program.

Affinity.

"I think how to retain teachers of color is you need to have a place where they can come together

to have conversation and it could be as simple as gathering… and have some fellowship and

have a meal together and talk about how things are going. Those kinds of things (build)

relationships and community. And then you feel like you're not alone." - Grace

When speaking of meeting with the teacher of color affinity group, Lucia, Sarah, and

Maya mentioned the importance of large group meetings. Lucia said "I think just giving people

the time to actually get together and talk with other people... to get to know each other so they

know somebody else in the district that maybe later they can talk to." Similar, Sarah spoke of the

value of meeting with the larger group because a specific mentor might not always work out

well: "I knew I had a mentor that I could go to if I had questions. I met her once… The advice

that she would give me I don't think necessarily would have fit for our students at my school."

Maya spoke in more certain terms of the importance of the program when she said "I'm not

getting anything (in terms of compensation) for going to this mentorship program...I'm going to it because it's a lifeline for me."

Three participants mentioned the importance of having conversations about race in a protected space with only teachers of color. Maya mentioned how she seeks out this kind of space whether or not it is provided by the district: "We always find those spaces, right?...there can be spaces that have more people, a part of your network or your oasis." Similarly, Sarah mentioned finding teachers of color with similar experiences: "I've connected with a couple of other adoptees within the school district too... So it's been really helpful meeting others that have similar stories to me." Grace appreciated the opportunity to talk about challenges teachers of color face in a safe space. "We just had a meeting last week and it was about microaggressions... And I'm like, Oh my God, I get asked that all the time."

Maya shared how the lack of judgement in a teacher of color affinity space gives her the opportunity to show up as herself without worrying about what she says. Her reflection provides an example of the comfort of being in racial affinity, where she can work through challenging racial situations she has encountered:

> I would go and it feels like this big like sigh of relief. It's like when you walk in your door at the end of the day and you can like kick off your shoes and put on your sweatpants… I'm finally with my people where I can say like, 'this shit happened.' And it just is that shit. It's not like, you know, analyze, 'well you sure? Maybe that person wasn't having a hard day. You sure, that was their intention. Like it probably wasn't there.' It would be a space where I could just be myself and be like, 'Yeah, this shit happened.'

Maya's reflection speaks to the importance of the interpersonal connections when looking broadly at teacher of color retention.

Participants in this study spoke to the importance of interpersonal connections with other teachers of color through mentorship or general networking opportunities. Previous studies have documented the importance of mentorship when compelling relationships are present

(Achinstein, B., Ogawa, R. T., Sexton, D., & Freitas, C., 2010; Achinstein et al. 2010; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). This study expands that knowledge by adding in the importance of networking and affinity groups which do not contain a specific mentoring component. Future research is recommended which attempts to understand the connection between teacher of color networking and retention. The next section will discuss external factors for teacher of color retention.

External Factors for Teacher of Color Retention

The final aspect of the research questions for this study addressed narratives which spoke to external factors which they did not control which supported them as they chose to stay in the field of education. In addition to the internal and interpersonal reasons already discussed, participants talked extensively about external supports they received once in their current positions. This section will explore the primary supports participants mentioned in the study: support from school administration and district focus on building the racial consciousness of all teachers.

   Site-level administrator support.

"To keep a teacher of color happy like me, I would say, 'Administration.' We've got to get

support from administration." - Mai

Every participant spoke about the importance of administrator support to their job satisfaction and retention in the field. This administrative sometimes meant that their position remained full-time, sometimes it meant providing support with additional staffing in a program or money for professional development, and sometimes it meant providing support and reassurance when race-related challenges entered the school. The amount of attention paid to administration by participants in this study is consistent with previous studies which show the

importance of strong administration on teacher retention (Bryan, 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Williams, 2017).

Five participants spoke about the importance of administrative support in general terms. This support took on many different forms. Michael felt supported when his voice was valued: "This administration is very reasonable and supportive that if I have a suggestion or have a comment to make that it's for a good reason and for a purpose. So that's really nice to have to go back to." Speaking fondly of a previous principal, Maya remembered support not only for her but also for the students in the building: "I think that she (the principal) really went to bat for our kids in a different way, and she was willing to support me in and anything and everything." Sarah mentioned the importance of providing additional staff for her classroom: "I really like my administration. I'm very thankful. I have a principal that's very supportive of my work, he really advocates for support staff… because he knows the importance that I need to be teaching lessons."

Jamya noted that many teachers and administrators have left the field due to the lack of feeling supported: "So we lost so many great admin and teachers because they did not feel supported. So it all comes down to support and respect." Jamya went on to say "I feel like our admin don't have that much support in the district either. Because they're coming into buildings where these teachers rally together and they use the union as a weapon." Grace talked about support in terms of administrators respecting different styles of teaching:

> I want to talk about administration understanding that the way this teacher teaches doesn't mean this teacher is better or worse than this person over here that's been teaching for 35 years. They might want all their kids in a row sitting perfectly still (but) it's not what this teacher over here is doing. That doesn't mean they're doing things wrong.

This reflection connected to how Grace spoke about mentoring younger teachers of color and how she wants to support them staying in the field.

While some of the stories about administration support was general, much more of the sharing had to do specifically with race. Participants shared that they appreciated when administrators supported conversations about race and built a school culture which did not tolerate racial harassment. When speaking of a strong principal she worked with, Lucia noted the importance of supporting racial equity work in the building: "He really pushed it (conversations about race) and had us come back to the building and really try and push that forward as well. So he was really big into that stuff… it did make a big difference." Grace was appreciative of an administrator who created space for teachers to talk about race, leading to her own learning. As she grew in her own racial consciousness, the opportunity to speak with another biracial staff member provided her a partner to reflect with and grow with moving forward: "(The principal) provided me the opportunity to talk to another biracial staff member for us to connect and go, 'it's okay that we didn't know, but… what are we going to do now?'" When talking about racial equity work at a school, Maya mentioned how important it is to see an administrator leading the work: "It's going to take a long time for the ship to turn if it ever turns. But...we have to actually be moving the wheel, the steering wheel. So I appreciate when I see that happening." While not struggling specifically with racial issues, Paula noted how growing up in a White culture has helped her get along with her administration: "as far as admin goes, like it's been pretty good, but I think it's also very easy for me to just be able to navigate White admin because we grew up in a White culture." Her experience was not shared by all participants.

Three participants mentioned how important it was for them to feel supported when they brought up a challenging racial topic. When Sarah went to the principal with some other teachers of color to talk about her discomfort with sharing her experience as a person of color publicly, she appreciated the support her principal provided when he decided not to make them share their

story. "He really respected us. He said, yeah, as the only black male in the building, I can, and I have similar feelings as you." Similarly, Jamya mentioned how important it was to have strong administration when issues of racial harassment and microaggressions came into the workplace: "That's very important because when staff is doing all this (racial) stuff, you need a strong administration that's gonna say, 'No, I do not appreciate that. No, that is not acceptable in this workspace.'" Michael mentioned the comfort he felt when seeing a Black principal during the hiring process and how this made him feel more supported racially: "If there's a principal of color, then clearly there hasn't been as much of the issues that I've gone through...up here. So it was really kind of relaxing to walk into an interview with her."

When reflecting on the bigger picture of how administration can support teacher retention, Maya mentioned a long list of supports which can be in place to help teachers:

> Retention is more than just me saying yes. I want to say it's also my administrator saying, 'yes, I want to keep her and I'm going to give the necessary supports to help her better herself.' And that's where I feel like we're really lacking is that teachers of color might end up getting pushed out for a variety of reasons...Maybe they aren't a good teacher. And then what supports did you provide them to help them get better in their practice? Maybe they were a good teacher, but your school community is shit. And so now they're not a good teacher because their mental health is a wreck and they can't collaborate effectively with their teammates cause their teammates are racist… there's a long list of reasons why someone might not be performing at the level that you might like them to.

Maya's reflection provides a strong summary to the ways in which administration can affect the retention of teachers both in their building and in the profession. Participant narratives from this study echoed sentiments shared from previous studies which spoke to the importance of administration in teacher retention (Williams, 2017; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Additionally, participants from this study spoke to the importance of the racial consciousness of their administrators as well as challenges working with White administrators who are not racially consciousness. This finding mirrored previous research which found that

teachers of color have to please White administration when trying to implement culturally responsive teaching practices (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). The next section will focus on how the culture of a school district plays a part in supporting teacher of color retention.

District racial consciousness support.

"So then we've become so accustomed to it (talking about race)... it's sinking in and I'm starting to demand more and want more, which I'm really grateful for… this is what our country needs!" - Paula

Public schools are governed by a publicly-elected school board, meaning the initiatives which are practiced, from costs for sporting events to curriculum in middle-school social studies, are passed and approved through a public process. While many topics do not bring about controversy on a district and local level, conversations about race can be highly charged. Retention District 101 has taken a multi-year approach to racial equity work which includes hiring an outside consultant to lead conversations about race at a district level. Additionally, each school is required by the superintendent to have an equity team which receives additional training and leads building-level conversations on race and the impact of race on staff and student outcomes. This external support was frequently mentioned by participants in this study as a positive reason for job satisfaction and retention.

Five participants spoke to the importance of talking about race and identity and the impact it has on their job satisfaction. Grace's sentiment was echoed by others when she said "I think it's just knowing that you can talk about your color. You can talk about how you identify." The support provided by Retention District 101 through external consultants and internal racial equity coaches allowed many teachers of color as well as White teachers to understand themselves better. Even as a person of color who went through school as and English Learner,

Mai still found tremendous value in racialized conversation through the district: "that passion (for teaching) came in when I did all the equity, the racial equity work, and unpacked all the things that were inside of me and start finding my voice."

Even though many stories which were shared speak to the positives of conversations about race, participants noted there was still push-back by many White staff and it was, therefore, important that administration continue to push the conversations forward with staff. Paula remembers the challenge in getting many White staff to accept the initial training about race but believes the training is critical: "There was a lot of backlash but I think that's a conversation that needs to happen in the country." Paula also shared the challenge of working with a principal who would sometimes make sure staff were talking about race, but at other times would work with staff on restorative practices, a behavior mindset, instead. Paula mentioned her principal "wanted to, just really slowly push us along" which was frustrating for her as she reflected "our kids can't wait for you to go on your racial journey and be finally ready because they're being treated like crap and they're having these horrible educational outcomes." On the contrary, when speaking of her district program coordinator Sarah appreciated that the push for thinking about race in the classroom does not just come from a building level: "a lot of our discussions revolve around how can we provide windows and mirrors for our students in our district. So I really appreciate that work that we do in those meetings." In both Paula's and Sarah's experience, there was an expectation by Retention District 101 that conversations about race continue occurring at the building level.

Although often frustrated at the lack of progress that Retention District 101 is showing in terms of racial equity, Maya did appreciate that the district is putting money and time into building racial consciousness across the district: "They're saying that it's important enough that

we hire and pay 15 or 17 people. It's important enough that we put it in our priority goals that we require something about it within the SIP (School Improvement Plan)." Even with this spending, Maya points out the clear inequities: "We...scratch our heads on why our Black and Brown kids and Indigenous students are falling through the cracks. It's very clear, but it takes money and time and effort and actual accountability."

While sharing different perspectives about the effectiveness of Retention District 101's practices, the participants of this study all strongly spoke of the importance of continued conversations about race within the district. Much of the frustration expressed had to do with conversations not moving fast enough, especially when administration did not push the conversation. Yet even when the conversations were slower than participants wanted, there was still a general sense among participants that the work being done in Retention District 101 to improve racial consciousness is better than the work being done in other districts.

District racial equity support is a topic which has not been widely studied in connection with teacher of color retention. Previous studies have looked at how providing principals with cultural competency training positive impacts teacher of color retention (Carver-Thomas, 2017), but a district framework for racialized conversations has not been discussed extensively studied. The amount of time spent by participants in this study about the importance of district-supported conversations about race provides insight into this important factor when considering teacher of color retention. More research is recommended into the connection between district-supported conversations about race and teacher of color retention.

Challenges in the Field

Even within a study which focuses on the positive retention of teachers of color, it is important to note that not every narrative was a positive reflection on the field of education. This

section will focus on the narratives of Maya and Jamya and how, despite their current position in the field, their experiences still show many of the challenges facing teachers of color. First, a deeper discussion of Maya's narrative will explore her thoughts of leaving the field. Then, Jamya's narrative will be placed in context with a larger conversation of colorism in this study.

Thoughts of leaving the field.

"The collateral is kids always, and the kids are me." - Maya

This section will focus solely on Maya, who has taught for a number of years and has frequently considered leaving the field. Her narrative was often one of frustration and desperation as opposed to one of satisfaction. Maya's narrative is representative of many of the continued struggles facing teachers of color in the field, some of which have been documented in previous research (Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Aujla-Buliar, 2018; Smith, 2004; Pizarro & Kohli, 2018).

Having taught in multiple different schools, Maya has not found a school which she is completely comfortable with in terms of how students and staff of color are taught and treated. Remembering back to her time as a student in school, she noted: "I think a huge part of all of this is that my experience as a teacher has mimicked my experience as a student. And so it's retraumatizing. Just like how microaggressions exist on top of each other." She has worked to improve educational outcomes for students of color in her classroom but has struggled to see any real change on a macro school or district level. When noting the slow speed of change towards equitable student outcomes Maya noted the connection to her own school experience is "still agonizing to see it be so slow because... the collateral is kids always, and the kids are me."

Maya still sees the way in which school districts hire staff as a barrier to getting representation of teachers of color in a major way. "Really it's about what type of person of color

districts want to hire. They want to hire people of color that exist within White supremacy fluidly and comfortably. If you speak up too much, or you resist that whiteness, then it's a problem." Maya has stayed in education for the current year, but feels that it is likely that she will not remain in education in the long-term unless she finds a position which is more supportive of her. Her story is representative of far too many other stories of teachers of color who are pushed out of the field.

Colorism.

I know that the way they feel about the kids, that's the reason why they were projecting it to me because everything they thought and the way they treat our black children and even students of color, me being an adult, they treated me the same way. - Jamya

In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois expressed his concern as "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line - the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (p. 19). This study has been guided by the understanding that a discriminatory color line still exists in the United States, and one of the ways in which this presents itself in a lack of retention of teachers of color. Additionally, participant narratives illuminated the existence of *colorism,* which differentially affected teachers of color in this study. Alice Walker (1983) first coined the term "colorism," which she defined in the following way: "the question of Colorism– in my definition, (is) prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color" (p. 291). Colorism refers to the preferential treatment given to people with lighter skin, regardless of their ethnicity, while those with darker skin are given more prejudicial treatment. In this study, colorism manifested itself as participants with darker skin and African ancestry more frequently shared challenging racialized stories than those participants, of any ancestry, with lighter skin. This is not to say that

participants with lighter skin never experienced challenges due to their race or ethnicity, only that in this study, those participants with darker skin shared stories of more direct racial challenges.

Jamya's narrative is representative of colorism as her sharing included many stories about harassment and microaggressions which she faced in her first year of teaching. As the only participant in this study with two Black parents, Jamya's narrative included many more challenges when compared to other participants, all of whom had lighter skin and many of whom were biracial and/or were raised by White parents. Jamya shared:

> I was the only Black teacher in the building at my previous building. I was isolated, I was discriminated, I was harassed. My students were harassed. We were labeled as being loud, too loud, which is a stereotype for Black people.

Michael shared similar insights about challenges he had in a previous district in which he was treated unfairly and eventually made the decision to leave. "Being a black man in education has shaped my whole teaching career and essentially my whole life because I've had some really bad experiences in my first two schools that I worked at." Paula shared a memory which echoes the experiences of Jamya and Michael from the perspective of a bi-racial teacher. When talking about being at the teacher of color affinity space together without dealing with similar levels of racial discrimination, Paula reflected, "The Black women were just sitting there looking at us because we don't have just straight up discrimination and racism that they're facing."

Jamya has had a difficult time working with staff in her building as she has lived through race-based discrimination and harassment. On the topic of skin color and schools, she states:

> Skin color does matter too. He's (another teacher) fair skinned. So, he looks white passing but he is black and so he gets a pass. But because I am on the darker spectrum and I am this, this darkness, darker skin tones are seen as bad, ugly, dangerous. So when they see me, those are their biases. Those are the lenses they see over their eyes. And then when you see that I do speak out on injustice, I will tell you that you're wrong. I will say, 'You will not treat me that way.' Then it's, 'She's angry.'

In contrast to these narratives describing struggles, the challenges at the other end of this continuum of color appear different in this study. Sarah, whose skin is lighter and who has Asian ancestry, shares about how she is frustrated when other staff view her as a 'textbook' for learning, but at the same time she acknowledges that White staff mean well.

> It doesn't always feel like a relationship and a connection (with White staff)... It feels more like, let me learn, like you're a textbook... it doesn't come across the way it should. And we know that they have good hearts, but it's figuring out how to ask those questions or how to make it feel comfortable that we just speak instead of what would you like to say on this issue.

While Sarah still experiences difficulty showing up in a way that feels authentic, her experience is a contrast to the discrimination and frustration expressed by Maya, Jamya, and Michael. Through narratives like Jamya's, as well as an examination of colorism within the current study, it is important to realize the diversity of experiences for teachers of color, and that remaining in the field does not necessarily mean teachers are content with the way things are.

Other Research Findings and the Current Study

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, teacher of color retention is a challenging topic to be specific about in terms of why teachers remain in the field. Three areas of research were discussed in the literature review but did not show up as significant topics in this study. This section will briefly address each of those topics: Teacher Preparation, School Demographics, and Job Compensation and Benefits.

Previous studies have found that teachers who did not earn their license through a "traditional" licensure program are more likely to leave the field of teaching (Carver-Thomas, 2017; Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012). This study did not include any participants who came into the field through an alternate pathway, so I have chosen not to discuss licensure in this chapter. Future research is recommended which is focused solely on teachers of color who

entered the field through an alternative pathway to understand how this pathway affects the retention of those teachers.

Finally, although teacher compensation and benefits were listed in the literature review as a reason for teacher attrition, participants in this study did not find low compensation to be a compelling reason to leave the field. A few participants casually brought up the idea that it would be nice to be paid more, but no participants looked to compensation as a serious reason for why they might leave the field.

Conclusion

This chapter has taken a broad look at the data associated with participant narratives in relation to teacher of color retention. Through discussing retention factors based on internal, interpersonal, and external factors, patterns emerge which offer a path forward for school districts wishing to create or re-create conditions suitable for teacher of color retention. The next chapter will take a broader view of this study and provide recommendations for current practice and future studies.

Chapter 5

This study of teacher of color retention involved interviewing eight teachers of color to find out about their experiences in public education in the hopes that their experiences may be instructive to educational leaders, policy makers, educational practitioners, researchers, and those interested in diversifying the educator workforce. As I conclude this work, I begin by honoring and thanking the eight participants who have shared so much of themselves throughout the process. Their insights and generosity have encouraged my own growth and development as an educator and administrator and I hope, through this writing, that their narratives will shape the thoughts of other educational leaders as well.

This dissertation has been guided by the following three purposes:

- Reveal positive narratives and "Stories of Staying" of teachers of color who have achieved teacher tenure in the State of Minnesota

- Provide information to school districts and administration so that these systems can be more responsive to the needs of teachers of color

- Work towards a goal of increasing equity of representation of teachers of color in public schools.

While teacher of color recruitment has received significant scholarly attention, less research has examined teacher of color retention. Many studies have been cited in this manuscript which discuss attrition and challenging factors for teachers of color, but few look at reasons for why teachers choose to stay in the field. My goal through this process is to add to the field of knowledge by centering the voices of teachers of color who have chosen to stay in the field. The hope is that their experiences and perspectives may, in turn, provide insight and guidance to educational leaders aiming to serve students through increasing teacher of color retention.

Through this research process, I have attempted to answer my research questions by providing a summary of: 1) the perceptions of teachers of color of their reason for a) entering and b) staying in the field based on internal, interpersonal, and external reasons and 2) the suggestions provided by teachers of color to retain more teachers of color in the field. After meeting with participants through an interview process, I coded the data from interview transcripts and provided a lengthy summary and analysis of participants' narratives. In this chapter, I will provide a summary of the research findings, describe implications from the research, and offer recommendations for future practice based on this research.

Summary of the Current Study

Teacher of color retention is crucial when working towards a more equitable society. This study identified eight teachers of color who desire to remain in the field of education and who have taught for anywhere between 2 and 22 years. These participants shared narratives of their lives and time in education as both students and teachers. Through analyzing transcripts of these interviews, I organized the data into the themes of internal, interpersonal, and external reasons that these teachers of color entered the field and desire to remain in the field.

Participants expressed internal reasons for teaching including a strong desire to make a difference in the lives of students. This finding is similar to previous research studies (He, Cooper, & Tangredi, 2015; Nieto, 2003). Seven of eight participants in this study spoke of their desire to be a racial match for their students. Participants spoke about their own time as a student and how important it was for them to see a teacher of color as well as the pain associated with never having had a teacher who looked like them. Participants spoke with pride about being able to improve educational outcomes for students of color and making sure those students feel

valued. Jamya provided a concise summary of the idea of providing a racial match for students when she talked about how important it is that "black girls are seeing a black woman."

Participants also shared important interpersonal experiences which add to their retention in the field. Six participants expressed strong relationships with students and families as an important part of their calling in the field of education. These relationships were often described as 'natural,' especially when the participant matched racially or culturally with the student or family. Participants also spoke emphatically about the importance of having an affinity space with other teachers of color as either an important place for receiving guidance or mentorship or a place to receive healing and support. Grace spoke to this idea when she said "I think how to retain teachers of color is you need to have a place where they can come together to have conversation and it could be as simple as gathering." For a few participants with more teaching experience, the teacher of color affinity group provided an important way that they could be a mentor and support the next generation of teachers.

Finally, participants spoke about external factors which are critical to their remaining in the field of education. Site-level administrative support was discussed by all participants as crucial to creating a positive working environment. Participants spoke of having an administration that values their thoughts and opinions and provides them with other professional support while striving to keep them in the field of teaching. Maya spoke to this point when she said "Retention is more than just me saying yes. I want to say it's also my administrator saying, 'yes, I want to keep her and I'm going to give the necessary supports to help her better herself.'"

More important than general support, however, was an administrator's dedication to leading conversations about race at the site level. Administrators showed support by working with site-based racial equity teams and also by directly supporting a teacher of color who was

dealing with race-based discrimination. When the site administration was supportive of conversations about race, participants felt more likely to stay teaching in the building.

In addition to site-level administration supporting racialized conversations, participants shared that having a school district support conversations about race was important. Lucia noted this point when she said "He (the principal) really pushed it (conversations about race) and had us come back to the building and really try and push that forward as well. So he was really big into that stuff… it did make a big difference." Retention District 101 provides training to all staff in addition to requiring that each building has a racial equity team. This explicit focus on supporting racial consciousness development is also supported by more than a dozen district-level staff whose job it is to support conversations about race in each district school.

Although not an original goal raised by the purpose of the study, it was important and relevant to identify the challenges still faced by teachers of color which were revealed in participant narratives. Even though this study was focused on teachers of color still in the field, participants expressed dissatisfaction with aspects of the teaching field. It is possible that some of these participants will end up leaving the field due to external factors such as discrimination or a system which moves too slowly when considering the voices and experiences of people of color. Maya expressed this best when she compared talking about race to steering the ship and mentioned "we have to actually be moving the wheel" instead of just standing at the helm.

Finally, the presence of colorism emerged when examining racially challenging experiences insofar as the darker a participant's skin, the more likely it was that they had faced negative racial experiences while employed in public education. These struggles within the field expressed by participants mirrored previous research describing racial battle fatigue and the challenge of being a teacher of color (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018; Carrillo, 2010; Smith,2004).

Recommendations for Professional Practice

As the United States continues to diversify, teacher of color retention will remain an important focus to make sure that the teaching population is reflective of the students who come to school. Previous studies have drawn connections between teacher of color and student of color achievement in school (Klopfenstein, 2005; Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015; Dee, 2001; Grissom, Rodriguez, & Kern. 2017). Student of color achievement will be crucial as the population of the United States becomes more diverse and as the country strives to maintain a competitive advantage with other countries.

The results of the current study provide a framework for thinking about the internal, interpersonal, and external factors which encourage teacher of color retention. The internal factors reported by participants are difficult to replicate through a college class or a district professional development program. Instead, it is likely that internal motivation for future teachers of color will increase as students of color see themselves more represented in their own teachers and believe that education is a field which would be a good fit for their own careers.

Similarly, interpersonal factors rely upon the teacher of color engaging with others when space is made available through structures such as the teacher of color affinity program. Due to the challenge of changing internal or interpersonal factors, I will focus on external factors by providing recommendations for site-level and district-level administrators who are interested in increasing teacher of color retention.

Finally, I will offer a personal reflection and recommendation based on my experience as a White male administrator studying teacher of color retention. As I make these recommendations, my hope is that this study joins the work of other scholars as a jumping off

point for future studies into teacher of color retention, including Achinstein et al. 2010; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Burciaga & Kohli, 2018.

Recommendations for Site-Level Administration

Based on participant narratives, site-level administration is crucial to teacher of color retention. Participants in this study reflected that general administrator support is positive for the purposes of retention. It is important for an administrator to encourage a collaborative school climate and also to respond to the needs of educators of color as often and as thoroughly as possible. Teachers of color should feel supported in the decisions that they make in the classroom. Participants in this study spoke about the positive impact of a supportive principal. Maya said this concisely when she said: "I think that she (the principal) really went to bat for our kids in a different way, And she was willing to support me in and anything and everything." These narratives and recommendations align to previous studies which address general teacher retention (Williams, 2017; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

More important, however, than generalized support is an administrator's intentional racial equity work with the staff. The administrator at the site-level who is interested in retaining teachers of color should ensure that racial equity conversations are happening frequently and effectively at the whole building level through professional development and staff meetings, the team level where race is brought up while looking through test scores and engagement surveys, and the individual level when the administrator talks with staff members about continuous improvement of the teaching craft and the impact of race on classroom outcomes.

As the administrator is creating more space for racialized conversations, other positive administrative actions should also be taken as recommended by study participants. Administrators should respond to issues of race-based discrimination quickly and firmly and take

disciplinary action when necessary to show teachers of color that discrimination will not be tolerated. Administrators could also attempt to provide teachers of color with affinity space during staff meetings if there is a desire for this among the teachers of color. Finally, it is important for an administrator to make sure that people of color are intentionally invited to take leadership positions on school committees without being asked to speak for all people of color. As was also noted in previous research (Carver-Thomas, 2017), principals who have taken cultural competency training to learn how to navigate conversations about race, these principals can help provide a more positive working environment for teachers of color. When a school district does not offer cultural competency training, a principal should seek this training outside of the district.

A site-level administrator is often working within the context of the school district in which they serve. Therefore, it is up to the site-level administrator to understand how to place a context around the racial equity work which takes place in the building. An administrator is responsible for leading district initiatives while not abandoning site-level racial equity work. When a site-level administrator can work within the context of district-level directives, the work environment can be more conducive to teacher of color retention.

Recommendations for District-Level Administration

Though there is an overlap of responsibilities of site-level and district-level administration, it is often the district-level administration which chooses what kind of time, effort, and financial emphasis to place on racial equity work for students and teachers. As was described by participants, a strong district focus on talking about race is crucial for supporting teacher of color retention. This is important for both the explicit work which happens as well as changes that come about in the culture of a district as a result of the explicit work. For instance,

four participants spoke about the importance of their own racial journey as supported by district professional development and how that influenced their own teaching and passion. As Mai said, "that passion (for teaching) came in when I did all the equity, the racial equity work, and unpacked all the things that were inside of me and start finding my voice." This explicit work fostered pride of profession for participants which may not have come about without the training. Additionally, because of the explicit training provided by the district, a culture exists in the buildings of many participants in which race is frequently talked about and which, in turn, allows teachers of color to show up as their full identity instead of trying to blend in with White staff. There is a lack of literature discussing the effects of a district racial consciousness focus on teacher of color retention. Hopefully the results of the current study will inspire specific research addressing this impact.

In addition to professional development sessions, it was clear that participants valued an opportunity to spend time in racial affinity to support one another as teachers. I would recommend that school districts put time and money into this kind of programming. Something as small as hosting a lunch during a professional development day would show teachers of color that the district recognizes the need to support teachers of color with intentional programming. Even better would be a mentorship program as is seen in Retention District 101. The kinds of supports that participants valued are consistent with previous research which documents the impact of ongoing support in the field for teachers of color (Carver-Thomas, 2017; Cary, 2016). Participants valued the time in affinity as well as the connection with a mentor. As Sarah said, "I knew I had a mentor that I could go to if I had questions."

Even as five participants were pleased that Retention District 101 was spending time and money on racial equity programming, one participant did not feel that enough was being done. It

is likely that any extra spending on consultants or internal positions focused on increasing racial equity would increase positive perceptions of the district by teachers of color. Finding a way to increase visibility of racial equity related projects through newsletters, emails, or district documents would be a great way to show support for staff of color who desire this kind of programming and funding allocation.

Recommendations for White educators

As a White male studying teacher of color retention, I have had frequent opportunities to reflect on how I continue to further the problem of teacher of color attrition in unintentional ways. As I listened to participant narratives, I frequently wondered how often I had in the past and present, created barriers for teachers of color who want to remain in education but do not feel supported enough by me. In my own racial journey, I know that I have a long way to go and that I must constantly be wary of being overconfident of my own racial consciousness.

As a starting point, I believe there are a number of places where White people can support positive conditions for teachers of color which will likely increase teacher of color retention. In a profession which is largely White, I believe that these recommendations represent the most important contribution to the field that I can make. These recommendations represent a starting point for White educators attempting to support teacher of color job satisfaction and retention. They are also recommendations which can be used by people of color wishing to continue systems of support for other teachers of color.

1. **<u>Listen to, and ask questions of, teachers of color.</u>** This point seems to be too simple to begin with, but simply being open to hearing the narratives of teachers of color, without judgement, can provide White educators with tools and ideas to support teachers of color.

2. **<u>At the same time, do not assume a teacher of color knows everything about other teachers of color or wants to be viewed as a representative for anyone but themselves</u>**. Similar to the first point, do not assume anything about a teacher of color until you have listened.

3. **<u>Talk about race.</u>** After going through the research to frame this study as well as working through the narratives of participants, I do not believe it is possible to increase teacher of color retention without talking about race at a classroom, school, and district level. Certainly there will be teachers of color who survive in a district where race is not talked about, such educators will be the exception, not the rule. Equipping educators to talk about race creates opportunities for foundational change in the ways that students are racially represented by their teaching staff.

4. **<u>Realize that teacher of color affinity is important and necessary.</u>** One of the best ways White educators can support teachers of color is to support racial affinity spaces which are not structured by the goals of White people. White educators are frequently in affinity with only other White educators in the room- so much so that White affinity space is not a necessary part of the job expectation. Finding ways to create and support racial affinity space and time without asking teachers of colors to show up on a Saturday or other non-contract days is crucial.

5. **<u>Provide teaching support to new teachers of color</u>**. One of the reasons that I believe many participants in the study relied on other teachers of color in their networks, especially early on in their careers, is that they did not have access to a large network of racially-matched peers to provide early and ongoing informal mentorship. White

colleagues and administrators can provide support to early career teachers of color to make sure they feel confident in their craft.

6. **<u>Be aware of, and ready for, the reality of colorism</u>**. Just as I found in this study, colorism continues to exist, which typically creates the most challenging experiences for educators with the darkest skin. Working to understand the impact of race in society and in educational settings is important for White educators in order to understand a larger context for racial relations.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study has focused on teacher of color retention through the narratives of eight participants from a single school district. While some of the themes drawn from these narratives provide insight into current educational practice, more research is needed to improve our understanding of attrition and retention for teachers of color.

The current study has been limited by taking place in a single suburban district with a relatively small number of teachers participating in the interview process. I would recommend future researchers create a case-study or a series of case studies of school districts and/or school sites which defy the data in which teachers of color are retained at a lower rate than their White peers. Such studies may more deeply examine the many factors which have come up in this study - from site and district administrator support to school culture to how teachers of color relate with one another as well as their White peers.

The participants in this study consistently expressed their interest to support students of color and to be a racial match for those students. No participant spoke about wanting to leave their school to teach where there were more White students. Previous research, however, has shown statistics that overall teacher attrition rates are higher where there are more students of

color (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll & May, 2011). I recommend further research into the connection between where teachers of color desire to teach and general data trends of attrition and retention in those schools.

This study grouped all teachers of color into one broad category instead of looking at teachers of color by race and looking for patterns.   Another recommendation for future research would be to look at general retention rates among different races and ethnicities so as to understand patterns among different racialized groups. This study grouped all races and ethnicities together which did not allow for conclusions to be drawn about whether or not teachers differentially benefit from various types of support within a school district.

Finally, this study included new teachers and experienced teachers as well as teachers who were both in and out of the classroom. I recommend that future research focus on late-career teachers to find themes which have served to support the retention of these teachers in the field for a longer time. The current study gained perspectives from teachers with two to twenty-two years of experience. Unfortunately, based on trends found by previous research, it is likely that one or more of the participants in this study will leave the field of teaching either through attrition or through moving into administration. A deeper understanding more about the experiences of teachers of color who have remained teachers for an entire career and what helped them get to where they are is called for.

Closing Thoughts

Teacher of color retention is, and will continue to be, an important goal for school districts across the United States. It is crucial that, as the United States becomes more diverse, we have a teaching population that more closely reflects our student population. The teachers involved in this study are positive role models for students of color and White students alike and

hopefully as students of color see more teachers of color in their classrooms, they will be inspired to go into teaching as well. I also hope that, through this research, more White educators will work to support conditions which are favorable to teacher of color retention in their local schools. I believe that the future success of our nation and world depend on equitable representation in all walks of life- and this begins with how our future generations see themselves reflected in their first educational experiences.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval

Concordia
UNIVERSITY·SAINT PAUL

TO: bearda@csp.edu
CC: Humans Subjects Review Committee File

The IRB Human Subjects Committee reviewed the referenced study under the exempt procedures according to federal guidelines 45 CFR Part 46.104d (2): RESEARCH THAT ONLY INCLUDES INTERACTIONS INVOLVING EDUCATIONAL TESTS (COGNITIVE, DIAGNOSTIC, APTITUDE, ACHIEVEMENT), SURVEY PROCEDURES, INTERVIEW PROCEDURES, OR OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR (INCLUDING VISUAL OR AUDITORY RECORDING).

Study Number: 2019_51
Principal Investigator: Andrew Beard
Title: Teacher of Color Retention

Classification: _**X**_ Exempt   ___Expedited   ___ Full Review

Approved _**X**___

Approved with modifications: ____ [See attached]

Declined ____   [See attached]

Upon receipt of this letter, you may begin your research. Please remember that any changes in your protocol need to be approved through the IRB Committee. When projects are terminated or completed, the IRB Committee should be informed in order to comply with Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Regulations, Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations Part 46 (45 CFR 46). If you have questions, please call the IRB Chair at (651) 641-8723.

Stephen Ross
Signature, Chair Human Subjects Review Committee

May 26, 2019
Date

Concordia University • 1282 Concordia Avenue • St. Paul, Minnesota 55104-5494 • 651-641-8230 • www.csp.edu

Appendix B: Sample of Invitation to Participant to Participate

Greetings,

You are receiving this letter to determine your interest in participating in a research study with the purpose of understanding how to successfully support teachers of color to increase retention. This study is being conducted as part of the doctoral studies of the researcher and results of the study will be presented in a dissertation. The goals of the study are to understand participant perceptions of the internal, interpersonal, and external reasons they have stayed in the teaching field.

Participants who express interest will be selected to be a part of a semi-structured interview with the researcher. Participant identities will be protected via the use of a pseudonym in documents relating to the study and the paper presenting results of the study. Participants who are selected should expect to spend approximately one hour in an interview setting. Participants will also be provided with a copy of the study results and findings before they are finalized and will have an opportunity to respond and/or provide clarification on conclusions drawn from the interviews. Finally, participants selected for an interview will be offered a $25 Visa gift card as compensation for their time.

There are no anticipated risks to participating in this research study. Possible benefits could be providing professionals in the field of education with better knowledge about how to support teacher of color retention in the field.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you about your possible interest in this study.

Sincerely,
Andrew Beard, Researcher
Jerry Robicheau, Dissertation Chair

Appendix C: Reminder of Interview location and questions

Greetings,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study and for choosing a time to meet for an interview! I wanted to confirm your interview time at _____. I have set aside 2 hours for us so we do not feel rushed, but I anticipate the process taking 60-90 minutes depending on what sorts of questions you might have about the process.

I wanted to send you a preview of the questions that we will be working off of as a guide to our conversation. Feel free to look through them if you would like or you are welcome to show up as you are and I will have a copy of the questions when we meet.

Thanks,

Andrew

Questions:

1. How do you identify racially?
    a. How, if at all, has your racial identity played a part in your decision to teach or remain in education?
    b. How do you think your racial identity has shaped your experiences as a teacher?
2. Tell me about being a teacher:
    a. When and why did you decide on this career?
        i. When do you first remember wanting to teach?
        ii. What sort of preparation did you receive prior to entering the field?
        iii. What sort of support did you receive once in the field?
    b. How would you describe your relationships with:
        i. Students
        ii. Staff
        iii. Families
        iv. Administration
    c. Why are you still teaching?
        i. What are your motivations for staying?
        ii. What keeps you in the profession?
        iii. How does your role compare to what you envisioned when you decided to become a teacher?
    d. What about your current position is appealing to you? What, if any, supports do you value in your position?

     i. Possible Ideas: colleagues, school based supports, building based supports, salary, school demographics, any additional external supports.

3. Has there been a time that you have thought about leaving the profession? If so, what were the circumstances?

4. Is there anything else you would like to share about your life or journey in education that may be of value as we think about the larger question of how to better retain teachers of color? Any stories that you'd like to share that could help illustrate some key points for me?

Appendix D: Research Consent Form

Greetings,

My name is Andrew Beard, a doctorate student at Concordia University, St. Paul. I am conducting a study on the retention of teachers of color in the teaching profession. You have been selected to participate in this study. As a participant, you will participate in an interview. The schedule will be set to limit interference with your teaching. Sessions will be audio taped for reliability purposes. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes.

In order to protect the confidentiality of all participants in the study, the following numerical coding procedures will be followed:
- All participants will be assigned a code number.
- Participants' names will not be placed on any assessment materials or audio tapes.
- Only the researcher, advisor, and transcriber will have access to the recordings.
- The key for the coding system and all project materials will be kept under locked storage.
- Upon completion of the project, the key for the codes will be destroyed to prevent any disclosure of identities.

Before publishing, participants will be provided with the results of the study and will have an opportunity to add to or clarify the findings before the paper is published.

A copy of this consent form is provided to each participant. Additional information concerning the procedures of this research project can be obtained by contacting the following individuals

Andrew Beard, Doctoral Candidate
AndrewFischerBeard@gmail.com

Jerry Robicheau, Dissertation Chair and Advisor
Robicheau@csp.edu

Institutional Review Board, Concordia St. Paul
203 Thompson Hall
651-641-8723
irb@csp.edu

I have read the description of the above research study and agree to participate. **I understand that participation is on a voluntary basis and I may withdraw from the project at any time.** I also understand that I will receive a copy of this consent form and may request a copy of the major findings of the study at the conclusion of the project.

    Participants Signature: _____, Date_____