Retaining the Power to Teach and Advocate in the Era of "Reform"

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RETAINING THE POWER TO TEACH AND ADVOCATE
IN THE ERA OF “REFORM”

by

DAVID ARAM WILSON

B.A., Anthropology, University of Michigan, 1982
M.A., Elementary Education, University of New Mexico, 1990

Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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DEDICATIONS

First and foremost, I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Betty and Clyde Wilson. Both have been essential to my intellectual growth throughout my life and, therefore, to the success of the intellectual endeavor manifested in these pages. The love and encouragement they provided have been unconditional and enduring. Moreover, my father’s own doctorate in anthropology and my mother’s juris doctorate have served as indispensable beacons throughout this process. And while my father did not live to see the finished project, he lived long enough to learn I had been admitted to the program. His response, “You’ll cruise through in a couple years.” Oh, the naïveté of old wise men.

I dedicate this dissertation equally to my wife and fellow teacher, Mary Lee Anderson. The patience, understanding, and support she demonstrated for a full decade cannot adequately be described in words. Now that’s love! Perhaps the most meaningful way in which she has honored my work has been to continue to arrive at her own elementary school each morning and apply her knowledge, experience, and talents to the intellectual and emotional lives of her students. She is no stranger to resilience, resistance, and advocacy, of which the students and educators at her school are the privileged beneficiaries.

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Like many other students who pursue a doctorate, I encountered obstacles along the way. Without the expert treatment from the doctors and staff at the University of New Mexico Comprehensive Cancer Center, as well as those in the cardiology department at UNMH, I may not have been able to muster the physical ability or mental will to persevere. Thank you for everything you did to quell my anxieties so I could focus on my work.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative, multi-case study investigates veteran, dual-language teachers in urban elementary schools in the Southwest United States and how these teachers manage to continue teaching despite education “reforms” that have contributed to increased attrition among their peers. Each participant contributed qualitative data through a narrative questionnaire, two interviews, two focus groups., and physical artifacts. Coding and analysis of each case was inductive and involved the identification of patterns and themes that emerged from the data. A cross-case analysis was conducted. Modern Critical Theory served as the theoretical lens.

Teachers as advocates for their students’ cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic well-being emerged as the most salient factor contributing to their resilience. Also important were personal traits, education and professional credentials, dedication to dual-language education, and successful resistance against “reforms.” The findings could be of use to schools, districts, and states interested in retaining veteran teachers in urban contexts where “reforms” are often applied with greater scrutiny and accountability than other contexts.
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Chapter 1
Background and Context

Introduction

It is called the GERM, or the Global Education Reform Movement (Sahlberg, 2012). As the name suggests, the GERM has infected schools around the globe, including U.S. public schools. This infection has resulted in many casualties, not the least of which has been the dramatic increase since 2010 in the number of teachers leaving the profession, many of whom are veteran teachers (Brenneman, 2015; Hui, 2014; Richards, 2014; Riggs, 2014; Santoro, 2011; Sills, 2014; Smith, 2014; Spector, 2014; Swedien, 2014). Veteran teacher attrition, combined with historical high rates of new teacher attrition (Ingersoll, 2003), have caused widespread teacher shortages, including in districts and schools where student populations are already suffering from a multitude of problems that are both chronic and systemic, e.g., high-poverty, urban schools that enroll large numbers of children of color and immigrants for whom English is a second or third language. Some researchers have investigated new and veteran teachers who have resigned or retired prematurely as the GERM has spread to their classrooms (Dunn, 2014; Dunn, Deroo, & VanDerHeide, 2017). Few if any studies, however, have investigated teachers who, when faced with the same GERM, have opted to stay.

The purpose of this qualitative, multi-case study is, therefore, to investigate how four veteran teachers, employed in dual-language programs in low-income, low-performing, urban elementary schools in a district in the American Southwest manage to continue teaching despite recent education “reform” initiatives that have contributed to high rates of attrition among similarly situated peers. (See Appendix A, Glossary, for definitions of dual-
language and other descriptors.) In this chapter, I address the phenomena of teacher attrition and retention that underlie the study, a statement of the problem, the research question and sub-questions, the methodology employed, the researcher’s assumptions and positionality, and the possible significance and implications of the study.

**Teacher Attrition**

In truth, it is teacher retention, not teacher attrition, that lies at the heart of this study. Specifically, my inquiry addresses how and why some teachers manage to continue teaching while their similarly situated peers leave in increasing numbers. To better understand the forces that affect teacher retention, however, it is important to first understand those that affect teacher attrition.

According to *The American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd Edition* (1985), attrition is “a gradual diminution in number or strength due to constant stress [emphasis added]” (p. 140). Similarly, *The New Oxford American Dictionary* (Apple online version, n.d.) defines attrition as “gradually reducing the strength or effectiveness of someone or something through sustained attack or pressure,” as well as “the gradual reduction of a workforce by employees' leaving and not being replaced rather than by their being laid off [emphasis added].”\(^1\) Both definitions aptly describe the increase in teacher attrition in many areas in the United States in recent years, as reported by regional and national media (Brenneman, 2015; Briseño, 2015; Bowie, 2014; Hui, 2014; Huseman, 2015; Morello, 2014; Phillips, 2015; Richards, 2014; Riggs, 2013; Seidel, 2014; Sills, 2014; Smith, 2014; Spector, 2014; Sweden, 2014; Walker, 2014; Wendler, 2015; Westervelt, 2015; Westervelt, 2016; Westervelt & Lonsdorf, 2016).

For the purposes of this study, the *constant stress* and *sustained attack or pressure* include

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\(^1\) Attrition is distinct from mobility. Attrition means leaving the profession entirely, whereas mobility means moving from one position or location to another within the profession.
the implementation, since the signing of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2003, of state, federal, and corporate education “reform” initiatives to which increasing numbers of teachers so strongly object that they have decided to resign or take early retirement rather than to attempt to live with or resist them.

**Beginning teacher attrition.** Attrition among *new* teachers is a well-known and ongoing phenomenon. By the end of their fifth year, nearly half of all teachers leave the profession (Gray & Taie, 2015; Ingersoll, 2003). The reasons they leave vary widely. According to Kaiser (2011), thirty-five percent of first through third year teachers who leave the profession do so because their contracts were not renewed. The remaining sixty-five percent, however, offer other reasons for leaving. These include lack of autonomy and respect, poor working conditions, high workload, and low salaries (Ingersoll, 2003; Riggs, 2013). Whereas two decades ago low salaries represented the most common reason new teachers left the profession (Ingersoll, 2003), regional and national media, as well as academic research (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2008; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Dunn, 2014; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2011), report that poor working conditions, greater workloads, and lack of respect and autonomy are emerging as factors that are as or more important than salaries in determining whether new teachers stay or leave. It is interesting to note that this change coincides with the recent implementation of major state, federal, and private sector education “reform” initiatives that have contributed to accelerated rates of attrition among teachers at all career stages in the nation’s public schools.

**Veteran teacher attrition.** Whereas new teacher attrition within the first five years is generally recognized as a constant in the teaching profession, increases in rates of *veteran* teacher attrition constitute a relatively new phenomenon. Since at least 2010, veteran
teachers in particular, those whom I define as having taught for ten years or more, have been leaving the profession in unprecedented numbers (Brenneman, 2015; Hui, 2014; Richards, 2014; Riggs, 2014; Sills, 2014; Smith, 2014; Spector, 2014; Swedien, 2014). In the district where I conducted research, teacher retirements, which by definition are taken by veteran teachers, increased forty-four percent between 2011-2014 (Swedien, 2014). During this same period, teacher resignations at all career levels increased thirty-two percent. Though the data the school district provided to me and to the press (Swedien, 2014) did not differentiate between career stages, program participation (e.g., dual-language programs), years of employment, and other professional attributes, the increases in both retirements and resignations likely included veteran as well new and mid-career teachers.2

Like new teachers, veteran teachers increasingly have cited recent federal, state, and corporate education “reforms” as the reasons they left (Bowie, 2014; Richards, 2014; Richmond, 2012; Swedien, 2014; Sills, 2014; Walker, 2014, Westervelt, 2016). Most of these “reforms” are derived from corporate-influenced standardization and quantification of the public schools. They include but are not limited to: high-stakes standardized student tests, top-down teacher evaluations, A-F school grades, school closings and turn-arounds, an emphasis on STEM-based (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) curricula, standardized and digitized curricula and assessments, the implementation of the Common Core “State” Standards (CCSS),3 attacks on teachers and teachers’ unions, the expansion of

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2 The school district provided me with several spreadsheets that show the number of retirements and resignations per school site for the years 2010-2015. These are the same documents provided to Mr. Swedien. No names are associated with the data, no reasons are provided for retiring or resigning, and the number of years at retirement or resignation are not provided.

3 I have adopted Susan Ohanian’s practice of placing quotes around the word “state” in this phrase. The standards were largely paid for by the Gates Foundation and developed by a small group of private individuals led by David Coleman, Susan Pimentel, and Jason Zimba. They were later adopted by states, or imposed on them, depending on one’s interpretation of their evolution.
semi-private charter schools, flat or reduced teacher salaries, the recruitment of “reform”-minded administrators, and increases in paperwork and quantitative accountability (see Hagopian, 2013; Nielsen, 2013; Ravitch, 2010; Schneider, 2014, among others). In fact, a recent survey conducted by the National Education Association (NEA) found that nearly half of all teachers surveyed—including veteran teachers—stated they had considered leaving the profession due to high-stakes testing alone (Walker, 2014).

**Teacher vacancies and shortages.** As teachers leave the profession, they create vacancies that usually must be filled by new or transferring teachers. When teachers leave the profession at accelerated rates, as has recently been the case, the vacancies they create are often not filled at the same rate at which they are created (District “Find a Job” online database and locator, 2014-2016). When vacancies are filled, it is often “by a first-year teacher who is substantially less effective, [t]hus [making it] impossible for schools with ongoing turnover to build instructional capacity and to ensure that students in all classrooms have effective teachers” (Johnson et al., 2011, p. 4). Further exacerbating the problem is the fact that the United States has experienced a sharp decrease in the number of students enrolling in teacher education programs, a trend that began in 2008 at the onset of the Great Recession and continues today (Bush, 2015; Derringer, 2017; Freedberg, 2014; Jones, 2014; Sanchez, 2014; Sawchuk, 2014; Mucher, 2015). Fewer students enrolling in and graduating from teacher education programs signifies a reduction in the pool of potential teacher candidates who can replace those who are leaving.

Data from the district in which I undertook this study illustrate this trend. The number of teacher vacancies in the summer of 2014 reached nearly five hundred. A year later, the vacancies were still over four hundred (district “Find a Job” online database and locator, 2014-2016). This, in a district that for decades had experienced summer teacher vacancies
in double digits. Some of these vacancies may have been due to newly created teaching positions and statutory reduction of class sizes (Swedien, 2014). However, the increase in veteran teacher retirements and resignations in the district, combined with a proportional decrease in the number of students entering teacher education programs within the state (Derringer, 2017; Jones, 2012; Sánchez, 2014; Sawchuk, 2014), may explain why, five weeks after the first day of school in September, 2014, there were still two hundred eighty-eight teacher vacancies in grades K-12 in the district (district “Find a Job” online database and locator, 2014-2016). Similar numbers were recorded in 2015 and in 2016 after the fifth week of classes, an important threshold for class size and teacher vacancies projections, referred to by the district as “the twenty-day count.” Relevant to this research is the fact that, at the elementary level alone, fifty percent of the vacancies were in classrooms in low-performing, Title I, new national demographic (NND), urban, public schools that serve high percentages of academically and economically vulnerable student populations, such as low income emergent bilinguals.4

With so many teachers leaving and so few entering the profession, it is not surprising that districts across the country are experiencing teacher shortages (Burnett, 2016; Prosen, 2015; Strauss, 2017; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016; Westervelt, 2016), including the state in which I conducted this study (Briseño, 2015; Burgess, 2015; Nott, 2016). That some of these shortages compromise the quality of education afforded some of our most vulnerable students is a growing concern and one that has contributed to the conception, design, and implementation of this study.

4 See Glossary (Appendix A) for definitions of terms such as dual-language, emergent bilinguals, Title I, low-performing, new national demographic, Anglo, veteran teacher, A-F school grades, and other terms used in this study.
Teacher Retention

The opposite of teacher attrition—and, in some respects, the solution to it—is teacher retention. The New Oxford American Dictionary defines retention as “the continued possession, use, or control of something.” From a teacher’s point of view, this can mean the teacher continues to possess, use, or control her means of employment. From the school district’s point of view, this can mean the district continues to “possess” (retain) the teacher’s employment, “use” her knowledge and expertise, and “control” desired numbers of properly credentialed teachers in particular programs or positions. This is especially important in terms of the teachers involved in this study, all of whom possess credentials required for specific programs and for the specific educational needs of the students enrolled in them.

Most of the research on teacher retention at all career levels revolves around the latter view. It amounts to prescriptions school districts could choose to follow in order to encourage “good” teachers to stay (Alvy, 2005; Certo & Fox, 2002; Guarino, Santibañez, & Daley, 2006; Harris, 2007; Shields, 2009). The prescriptions include granting teachers greater professional autonomy and decision making power, recognizing and sometimes compensating teachers’ hard won credentials and expertise, affording greater job flexibility, creating more opportunities to mentor others, differentiating professional development, and cultivating greater administrative support.

It is notable, at least in terms of this study, that few if any of the prescriptions include the reduction or elimination of recent education “reforms.” This may be due to the fact that the “reforms” are usually state or federally mandated and, therefore, often perceived as nonnegotiable. Also notable is the fact that, if recent increases in teacher attrition in districts around the country are any indication, retention efforts are largely failing, as are efforts to
encourage high school and college students to choose teaching as a profession in the first place (Bush, 2015; Derringer, 2017; Freedberg, 2013; Sanchez, 2014; Sawchuk, 2014; Strauss, 2016; Westervelt, 2015; Whites-Konditschek, 2016). Lower enrollment in teacher education programs can only exacerbate the effects of increased attrition rates, as it amounts to fewer incoming teachers to fill the vacancies of those who leave.

While prescriptive teacher retention efforts on the part of school districts are indeed relevant to this study—at least insofar as the district implemented them and the teachers were aware of and had access to them—they are not the focus of the study. Rather, I am interested in understanding what measures teachers take to essentially retain themselves, a concept one could refer to as “auto-retention.” Little if any research has focused on this phenomenon. Therefore, teacher retention strategies from the point of view of teachers is the focus of this study.

**Retention of beginning teachers.** The research on beginning teacher retention specifically is scant, as most research is focused on beginning teacher attrition. However, since efforts to reduce attrition essentially mirror efforts to retain teachers, attrition research is helpful in determining what strategies schools, districts, and states might employ to retain new teachers before they join the ranks of the fifty percent who leave the profession within the first five years. Accordingly, a recent study by the National Center for Education Research (NCES) narrowed the primary strategies for beginning teacher retention to the following: offering starting salaries of $40,000 or greater, access to a quality mentor teacher and a new teacher induction program, and the power to choose in which school to teach and the option to remain in that school without being subjected to involuntary transfers to other schools (Gray & Taie, 2015). The relative difficulty for states or districts to apply all three of
these essential strategies to beginning teachers may help explain why states and districts continue to have great difficulty retaining beginning teachers.

Finally, what effect the reduction or elimination of education “reform” initiatives might have on the retention of beginning teachers is an area that needs more attention from researchers and policy makers alike. But if the rapidly decreasing numbers of teachers entering the profession are any indication of the negative effects of these “reforms,” reducing or eliminating them could have a positive effect on the recruitment and retention of beginning teachers.

**Retention of veteran teachers.** Given the increasing rates of veteran teacher attrition over the last decade, one could conclude that institutional efforts to retain veteran teachers—such as increases in salaries, autonomy, and administrative support, to name but a few—have largely failed. In fact, one could question whether institutions such as state governments and school districts are mounting sincere and concerted campaigns to retain veteran teachers. There is some evidence that states and districts believe they would benefit more by *not* retaining veteran teachers, as their salaries tend to be more costly to increasingly lean budgets (Phillips, 2015) and their resistance to state and district supported education “reforms” more vocal and effective, at least as compared to more compliant new teachers working under probationary contacts. How, then, do we explain why some veteran teachers continue to teach, despite the ineffectiveness of institutional retention efforts, despite the teacher exodus occurring around them, and despite the fact that they face mounting political, institutional, and professional disincentives to remain?

While some recent research has explored how teachers at all career stages ultimately make the decision to stay (Dunn, 2014), much less research has been conducted regarding
why and how veteran teachers in particular manage to continue teaching, specifically those who teach in low-performing, linguistically diverse, NND, Title I, urban schools where the pressures to leave are often most acute (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). The fact that some veteran teachers in these schools defy the increasing rates of attrition in such challenging times and, in the absence of effective institutional retention efforts, essentially retain themselves, presents an intriguing paradox, as well as a need for further research. It is this paradox and this research gap I address in this study.

**Problem Statement**

**Attrition as an inherently negative phenomenon.** While this study is based on the notion that teacher attrition generally induces negative consequences, that is not always the case. For example, when some beginning teachers arrive at the realization they are burned out, distracted, undedicated, disinterested, or if they are informed that they are ineffective or otherwise not suited for teaching, they may “counsel themselves out” of teaching and leave the profession voluntarily (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff, 2008). Few districts or schools would consider this type of attrition negative, for who wants teachers unsuited for the profession to stay? Likewise, attrition, especially among mid and late career teachers, can produce net positive effects as it serves as a natural mechanism that creates vacancies that may be filled by new teachers who have the potential to bring fresh ideas, beneficial strategies, and renewed energy to the profession. Finally, from the point of view of a district strapped for resources, veteran attrition in particular can be perceived as advantageous, as it guarantees a relatively inexpensive work force in the form of newly minted teachers who often earn considerably less than the veteran teachers who leave (Phillips, 2015).
It is unlikely, however, that all teacher attrition produces positive effects. If positive attrition exists, negative attrition—where a teacher’s early exit from the profession has detrimental effects on her students, the school, or the profession in general—must exist as well. Therefore, unless most teachers are considered unsuited for the profession, which is improbable, the recent increases in teacher resignations and retirements in the United States likely also consist of teachers at various career stages and at various levels of competence and quality, including good and excellent veteran teachers whose early exit from the profession may have an overall negative effect on student achievement (Ingersoll et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2011), especially if they are replaced by less qualified and less effective teachers. How and why some veteran teachers defy these trends in negative veteran teacher attrition is the problem addressed in this study.

**Consequences of veteran teacher attrition. Lower student achievement.** When a veteran teacher leaves, she essentially takes her experiences, credentials, and expertise with her (Henry, Bastian, & Fortner, 2011). Loss of this professional capital can have a greater negative effect on student success—as measured by highly controversial standardized test scores—than when more junior colleagues leave (Ingersoll et al., 2014; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). This negative effect may be even more pronounced in schools with large percentages of low-income students and students of color (Johnson, et al., 2011; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Watlington, Shockley, Guglielmino, & Felsher, 2010) and emergent bilinguals, who historically have produced lower standardized test scores than native speakers of English (McCullough, 2014). Furthermore, when qualified, veteran teachers in such schools leave, they are often replaced by newer, temporary, or under-qualified teachers who do not possess the same degree of professional capital, thus prolonging the negative impact induced
by the departure of veteran teachers. Exacerbating the problem is the fact that decreased student achievement can imperil annual teacher evaluations and schools’ A-F letter grades, both of which are based on student achievement (District Educator Effectiveness Plan, 2014; Department of Education, 2014a) which, in turn, correlates strongly with factors outside teachers’ control, such as family income and home language (Popham, 2001). Teacher evaluations and school letter grades that rise and fall with student test scores can serve as mechanisms that drive even more veteran teachers from the profession (Bowie, 2014; Richards, 2014; Sills, 2014; Spector, 2014; Sweden, 2014; Westervelt, 2015). As they leave, they take their professional capital with them. And the cycle continues.

**Loss of programmatic continuity.** Prior to initiating this study, I had spent thirty years as a full time, dual-language, elementary teacher in the district in which this study was conducted.⁵ During that time, I had witnessed the resignation or retirement of numerous colleagues at my own school, as well as at others. It has been my experience that the resignation or retirement of a veteran teacher can have a negative effect on specialized programs and pedagogical approaches within schools. Take, for example, site-based programs that address the unique developmental, cultural, or linguistic needs of certain student populations. At the school where I have taught for the last twenty-five years, this would include the program for visually impaired students and the school’s dual-language program. Both programs tend to be staffed by highly and specifically qualified veteran teachers who have demonstrated a high degree of commitment to the school through long term investment in the learning needs of specific student populations. Such teachers occupy teacher positions that are considered by the district as “hard to fill” (District “Return-to-Work

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⁵ See Researcher Positionality statement in this chapter for further details on my personal and professional relationship to the research.
Because they are hard to fill, when a specialized teacher leaves, the position she had occupied is often filled by a new teacher (Johnson et al., 2011), one lacking in specialized credentials, or a series of under-qualified, long-term substitutes. Moreover, when vacancies in specialized programs remain unfilled, or not filled to the satisfaction of the populations they serve, families whose children are enrolled in the programs have been known to look elsewhere in order to meet the instructional and programmatic needs of their children. This practice can further weaken the integrity of the program, as the departure of both teachers and families may lead other families to question their own commitment to the program.

**Loss of institutional knowledge.** The retirement or resignation of a veteran teacher may also have unintended negative effects on her colleagues—new, novice, and veteran alike (Bentancourt-Smith, Inman, & Marlow, 1995). Just as veteran teachers take their professional experiences, credentials, talents, and expertise with them when they resign or retire, they take their institutional memory and knowledge with them as well. Unlike most new and novice teachers, veteran teachers possess a collective memory of the institutional policies and practices that existed from several decades past to the present (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). This includes policies and practices that, for whatever reason, may no longer exist.

The historical and institutional knowledge accrued by veteran teachers over the years often benefits new and novice teachers in various ways. For instance, in the event a failed policy from the past is proposed as a solution to a perennial issue or problem, veteran teachers can speak up and remind their colleagues that this failed policy of the past will likely not succeed in the future, either (Alvy, 2005). Beginning with *A Nation At Risk* (1983), and continuing through *Goals 2000* (1994), *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* (2002), *Race to the Top (RTTT)*
(2010), and Every Student Succeeds (ESSA) (2015), we have lived in an era when the nature, scope, and pace of changes in national and state education policy have accelerated so dramatically, educators have sometimes not even had time to implement one policy before another one is imposed. (Or, as was the case with the CCSS in some states and districts, such as those in which I conducted research for this study, the standards were implemented even before final versions had been written, finalized, printed, or disseminated.) This leaves virtually no room for assessment of and reflection on policies of any kind or origin. In such an environment, veteran teachers may be in the best position to recall the successes or failures of past policies and practices and gauge the value, viability, and validity of those of the present and future. Without the historical memory of veteran teachers, school staffs run the risk of implementing policies and practices that, in the past, may not have been in the best interest of their schools.

**Lower teacher morale.** The recent increase in the retirements and resignations of veteran teachers can have a negative impact on the morale of those who stay. When veteran teachers leave in increasing numbers, and especially when they leave due to political and professional factors they can no longer abide (e.g. Bowie, 2014; Dunn, 2014; Richards, 2014; Riggs, 2013; Siedel, 2014; Sills, 2014; Swedien, 2014; Walker, 2014; Westervelt, 2015), teachers who stay may be asking themselves why they, too, are not leaving. This is especially true when teachers who leave are vocal about why they leave (Dunn, Farver, Guenther, & Wexler, 2017). One’s site-based colleagues are not, however, the only retiring or resigning teachers of whom those who remain have knowledge. Thanks to social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter, teachers anywhere and at any career stage can access the thoughts and intentions of thousands of other teachers nationwide who publicly
declare why they resigned or retired, often before they had planned (Dunn, Farver et al., 2017; Dunn, Deroo, VanDerHeide, 2017). The cumulative effect of increased attrition rates among veteran teachers on those who stay has not received much attention by researchers, but it could be another factor that encourages even more teachers to leave the profession.

**Consequences of veteran dual-language teacher attrition.** The effects of increased attrition rates among veteran teachers are felt universally within schools, districts, and states. The effects of increased attrition rates among veteran dual-language teachers, however, are felt acutely among specific student populations that, save for students with cognitive and physical disabilities, rank lowest of all learners on standardized measures of achievement (McCullough, 2014). Moreover, the vacancies left by veteran dual-language teachers who resign or retire are, along with vacancies in special education, those considered the hardest to fill. Indeed, in the district where I conducted research, these vacancies are so difficult to fill that the job applications of retired teachers with bilingual or special education credentials who seek to return to active teaching are often fast-tracked despite a general freeze on the district’s “Return to Work” policy, or what the press commonly refers to as “double dipping.”

Despite the district’s efforts to fill these specialized vacancies, many have remained unfilled well after the first day of classes in recent school years (district “Find a Job” online database and locator, 2014-2016). Consequently, many emergent bilinguals spend much of the school year in classrooms with new teachers or long- and short-term substitutes who may not be highly qualified to teach linguistically diverse students. The lack of qualified, dual-language teachers in low-performing, NND urban schools may adversely affect the academic achievement of the state’s and the district’s emergent bilinguals who, it bears repeating,
already represent the lowest scoring subgroup among non-disabled students (McCullough, 2014). These realities essentially describe a worst-case scenario of teacher attrition, in general, and veteran, dual-language teacher attrition in particular: children with some of the greatest educational needs are often deprived of the specialized teachers who can best address those needs.

However, while many veteran dual-language teachers have recently left the profession—and left many children without highly qualified and experienced classroom instructors—others have stayed. Veteran dual-language teachers who have chosen to stay in low-performing, NND, urban, public elementary schools despite the often premature departures of their peers, are the focus of the present research.

**Attrition, Retention, and Education “Reforms”**

Though there is little research in this area, Dunn’s (2014) findings, as well as mounting anecdotal evidence in the media (Bowie, 2014; Dunn, 2014; Richards, 2014; Riggs, 2013, Siedel, 2014; Sills, 2014; Swedien, 2014; Walker, 2014; Westervelt, 2015), suggest that the increases in teacher attrition may be due in part to recent school “reform” initiatives, trends, and practices, most as outgrowths of NCLB, RTTT, and ESSA. In no particular order, these include:

- high-stakes standardized tests
- high-stakes teacher evaluations dependent on student test scores and value-added statistical models
- A-F school grades, also derived from students’ high-stakes test scores
- stagnant or reduced teacher pay
- lack of teacher participation or input in education policy
- lack of respect and inordinate blame for low student achievement from administrators, policy makers, the press, and the public
- implementation of the Common Core “State” Standards
- lack of professional autonomy
• adoption by districts of mandatory boxed-and-scripted curricula and required pacing guides
• the privatization and corporatization of public schools
• school closings and turnarounds
• the promotion of semi-private charter schools with low standards of accountability
• teacher bashing in the press and political spheres
• increased teacher paperwork and accountability
• increased class sizes
• the promotion of private school vouchers
• sustained attacks on teachers’ unions

Moreover, in the state and district where I conducted research for this study, these “reform” measures tend to be more prevalent in low-performing, NND urban schools—many of which support dual-language programs—where they are either recommended or mandated as remedies to historically low student achievement and where the stakes for teachers and administrators who are charged with implementing them are the highest ([State] PED A-F School Grading and Accountability System, 2014). As educators, administrators, policy makers, and researchers seek explanations for and remedies to the continuing attrition of veteran teachers, especially those occupied hard-to-fill positions in difficult-to-staff schools, they would do well to consider the effect recent education “reform” initiatives have had on that attrition, and what the retention of teachers at all career levels might look like if these “reforms” were to be reduced or eliminated.

There has been some research on external, institutional strategies designed to retain teachers in low-performing, NND urban schools who have witnessed the “reforms”-induced departure of many of their colleagues and who may be contemplating a similar move (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004; Shields, 2009). However, there has been less research on the “auto-retention” of such teachers; that is, the strategies veteran teachers employ to essentially retain themselves. There has been even less research on the auto-retention of
veteran dual-language teachers in low-performing NND urban schools who have so far managed to continue teaching in this era of intensified education “reform.” In the pages that follow, I attempt to understand the strategies veteran dual-language teachers in these schools employ in order to cope with, adapt to, and even resist the political and institutional forces and “reforms” that have contributed to the premature retirements and resignations of many of their veteran colleagues.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to understand how and why some veteran dual-language teachers in low-performing, NND urban public schools manage to continue teaching in light of recent education “reform” initiatives that have contributed to accelerated rates of attrition among their peers. The findings of this study could be of interest to teachers, schools, school districts, and teacher education programs that are searching for more information and possible solutions to the current exodus of veteran dual-language teachers. In order to reach a deeper understanding of the problem I will pose and attempt to answer the following research question and sub-questions

Research question:

How do veteran, dual-language teachers in low-performing, Title I, new national demographic (NND), urban, public elementary schools in the American Southwest manage to continue teaching despite recent education “reform” initiatives that have contributed to accelerated rates of attrition among their peers?

Sub-questions:

1. What personal and professional factors influenced veteran dual-language teachers’ decisions to choose to teach and continue to teach in low-performing, NND urban public schools?

2. What effect have recent state and national school “reform” initiatives had on veteran dual-language teachers’ decisions to continue teaching in low-performing, NND urban public elementary schools?
3. What effect have the recent increased rate of retirements and resignations among veteran teachers in general had on the decision by these veteran dual-language teachers to continue teaching in low-performing, NND urban public schools?

4. What strategies have veteran dual-language teachers developed to deal with, cope with, overcome, or resist these challenges or threats to their commitment to teaching?

5. What recommendations do veteran dual-language teachers have for peers who may be contemplating resigning or retiring due to the pressures of “reforms”?

Assumptions

Based on over thirty years of experience as a dual-language teacher in Title I, NND, urban, public schools, I formulated several important assumptions that I applied to the study while I conducted it. While these assumptions helped guide the study, they were also challenged and scrutinized by me, by peers, and by key faculty during the course of the research.

1. Most teachers, including veteran, dual-language teachers, are highly dedicated, qualified, and effective professionals who generally enjoy their work.

2. Recent education “reforms” are detrimental public education and represent the principal reasons veteran teachers are resigning or retiring prematurely in unprecedented numbers earlier than they had planned.

3. Veteran teachers are more likely than beginning teachers to be opposed to recent education “reform” initiatives and more skilled at adapting to or resisting them.

4. Veteran teachers—as opposed to beginning or mid-career teachers—possess individual and collective memories of educational practices prior to the current “reform” movement that make them uniquely qualified to assess the value and effectiveness of education policies and practices proposed by corporate elites, policy makers, and district and school administrators.

5. Many veteran teachers have developed skills and strategies that have helped them resist the temptation to leave the profession when similarly situated peers have decided to leave.

6. Veteran dual-language teachers who teach in low-performing, urban, NND schools face greater personal and professional pressure, stress, risks, and consequences related to education “reforms” than do teachers in more privileged contexts.

7. Although low salaries remain a factor that has driven some teachers from the profession,
most teachers were aware of this before they began teaching and, therefore, are motivated to teach for many reasons other than money.

8. Teachers have agency, and although they are technically employees of a state or school district, they possess great potential for thinking, speaking, and acting independently and collectively in ways that run contrary to the wishes of their employers but consistent with the needs and desires of their students, parents, schools, communities, and even themselves.

**Researcher Positionality**

**Personal considerations.** I am a middle-aged, middle-class, heterosexual, Anglo man. I was born in the Southwest, grew up in the Midwest, and returned to live in the Southwest as a young adult, where I married and had two children. I am the second of five children, born to my late father, an anthropologist, and to my mother, a social worker cum lawyer. My siblings and I attended college, obtained advanced degrees, and currently work as teachers, social workers, and lawyers with diverse populations in the Southwest. My wife is a teacher in the public schools and my two sons attended public schools during the height of the “reform” movement. Though I am a native speaker of English, I am fluent in French and Spanish and active in all three language communities in the city where I live. I refer to myself as an elective multilingual.

I believe it is relevant to the proposed study that the household in which I was raised was steeped in politics and practices related to social justice. My parents were always active in local and national affairs, including the anti-war and civil rights movements of the 1960s. Both ran for various local and national offices on social justice platforms, my father eventually serving a term as the mayor of our mid-sized city. My parents’ social justice advocacy was also reflected in the social contexts in which they chose to place their children. Though my siblings and I attended a recently integrated public school, our after-school lives remained racially segregated from our African American classmates. Concerned about this
situation, my parents encouraged us to invite our African American friends home after school and, occasionally, to spend the night. The negative reaction to this practice we sometimes received from our white schoolmates and neighbors was a reminder of the fact that our parents did not share the racial attitudes of the white power structure in our hometown and were, in fact, confronting it.

Since childhood, I have remained engaged in issues of social justice through teaching, union activities, political action, graduate work, as well as through my personal life. In many ways, these activities and experiences established a context and a purpose for this study, the focus of which is veteran dual-language teachers who teach students in low-performing, Title I, NND, urban schools, students I believe are inordinately disadvantaged by recent education “reform” initiatives. It is my firm and sincere belief that my personal and professional experiences, identities, and activities have enhanced the proposed study in ways that would not be possible if my life had followed a different path.

**Professional considerations.** In addition to my roles as student, researcher, and teaching assistant in a doctoral program at a large, state university in the Southwest, I am a teacher with over thirty years of classroom experience in the public schools. For the twenty years prior to my retirement from full-time teaching in June of 2014, I taught various combinations of third, fourth, and fifth grades in a self-contained classroom that is part of a Spanish-English dual-language program I co-founded in 1995. The program is located in a small, NND, urban elementary school in the same district where I conducted the research for this study. Immediately after my retirement in June of 2014, I accepted a 0.25 position as a retired “Return-to-Work” dual-language intervention teacher at the same school. In this capacity, I continue to work with small groups of kindergarten, first, and second grade
students who need a more personalized focus on Spanish literacy knowledge and skills.

During the first five years of the state’s A-F school grading initiative, which coincided with the first five years of my part-time position, the letter grade given by Department of Education to the school where I worked dropped from a B, to a C, to a D, and, eventually, to an F. Additionally, I have witnessed numerous veteran colleagues leave the profession before they had planned. Most of them have cited education “reforms” as the principal reason for their early exit. For these reasons and more, I have participated in a variety of union and non-union actions that have attempted to arrest, mitigate, or eliminate state and national education “reforms” that many teachers and parents consider to be harmful to the students and the teachers in the public schools.

Although I transitioned from full-time to part-time teaching, I served until recently as one of the school’s two representatives to the local teachers’ union. This position afforded me an even broader perspective on the professional lives of teachers as they struggle to teach in an era of intensified “reforms.” The union role put me in contact with teachers across the district who teach at all grade levels and in all manner of programs, and who are subject to the same “reforms.”

**Researcher familiarity with the research focus.** Relevant to this study is the fact that, during the last ten years of my career as a full-time dual-language classroom teacher, I believe I was an example of both teacher retention and attrition. I contributed to attrition the moment I decided to retire; though I had fulfilled all the requirements for full retirement, I ultimately retired nearly a decade before I had planned. I retired for reasons of health, to devote more time to research, but also because I felt I could no longer contribute to what I believed were “reforms” that were abusive to so many people in so many ways. Nonetheless,
I believe I am also an example of retention, as I continued to teach full time for a dozen years after the advent of the recent “reforms” despite the fact that they made teaching a more difficult, frustrating, and unsatisfying profession than the one I had entered many years before.

While I continued to teach, my colleagues and I witnessed an alarming increase in the premature resignations and retirements of veteran teachers. Upon retiring or resigning, many of these veterans were explicit about the connection between education “reforms” and their decision to leave the profession (Dunn, Farver et al., 2017; Dunn, Deroo et al., 2017). This led many of us who remained to question our own reasons and rationales for staying. How and why we managed to remain in the profession for so many years under what we believed to be adverse circumstances strikes at the heart of this study. Though I have left the profession—at least on a full-time basis—many other veteran dual-language teachers have chosen to continue to teach in low-performing, Title I, NND, urban public schools despite the high stakes associated with that decision. It is from this group of teachers I selected participants for this study.

**Researcher as an insider-outsider.** While the role of researcher casts me, at least theoretically, as an institutional outsider in this study, my roles as a veteran teacher and as a union representative cast me as an institutional insider. And while my insider status may in some ways add depth, detail, and richness to the data I collect and analyze, it may also create some “blind spots” in data collection and analysis, especially if I take for granted information as an insider that I would not as an outsider. Through data triangulation, consultation with fellow doctoral candidates, review of my research journal, member-checking, and constant awareness of my insider-outsider status, I have tried to balance the simultaneous roles of
insider and outsider in such a way as to benefit the study more than hinder it.

There was another way in which I did not have insider status so much as insider perspective. Three times prior to conducting my own research I agreed to participate in the qualitative dissertation research projects of other doctoral researchers related to different elements of education politics and “reforms” during the first two decades of the 21st Century. In addition to answering those researchers’ oral and written questions and cooperating with other facets of the research, I was continually conscious of the researcher-participant relationship and dynamics. This was especially true for the second and third projects in which I participated because, by that time, I had become a doctoral student and was preparing to conduct my own dissertation research. I had a keen interest in knowing how it felt to be a participant in a research project. I hoped that this “participant sensitivity” would enhance my research in several ways, some of which I discuss in Chapter 4.

**Researcher as activist.** I have attempted to do much the same with other experiences related to my teaching past. For instance, part of my motivation for undertaking this study stems from the social and political activism I have engaged in for most of my teaching career, but more intensively since the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2003. The 2003 authorization became known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and was the starting point for most of the recent education “reforms” many teachers, parents, and students around the nation have found to be the most onerous and harmful. Over the last decade I have helped organize and have participated in local and national debates and public protests concerning what I refer to as the three-legged stool of education “reform”: high-stakes student testing and teacher evaluations, the CCSS, and the various efforts to privatize our public schools.
My activism has often carried over into the schools in the form of vocalizing my opposition to standardized testing, to the implementation of the CCSS, to administrative manipulation of the teacher evaluation process, and to various issues related to bilingual education. This activism has been met with a variety of reactions from colleagues, mostly positive, but occasionally negative. The reaction of site-based and district administrators, on the other hand, has been universally negative. The administrative threats, intimidation, and censorship I have suffered over the past few years have not succeeded in silencing my voice; however, they have forced me to think more creatively about how my activism, as well as that of my colleagues, is perceived inside as opposed to outside the school (Picower, 2012). I am conscious of the fact that I represent one end of a theoretical continuum of teacher activism—that which is overt and obvious. However, I am equally conscious that there are many other teachers whose activism, for various reasons, is more covert and less obvious. My curiosity about where teachers exist along this continuum, and how they arrived there, was a major motivator for undertaking this study.

**Researcher bias.** My positionality relative to this study raises the topic of researcher bias. All research is inherently biased, to one degree or another (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). More important than eliminating bias, however, is maintaining transparency of it; that is, realizing the existence of bias, identifying instances of it, and addressing it meaningfully as part of the overall analysis. Many of my biases are evident in the assumptions listed above.

As concerns this research, I am aware that some of my personal and professional experiences, especially my activism, could be perceived as biases that might hinder my ability as a researcher to understand and accept others’ perspectives on issues about which I am passionate. However, a researcher’s experiences need not be cast necessarily as negative.
What are biases to some may be unique perspectives to others. Indeed, Corbin and Strauss (2008) note that, instead of hindrances, a researcher’s life experiences could just as easily be considered valuable tools by which the researcher might gain greater insight into the participants’ experiences and perspectives. The authors point out that the researcher’s experiences can be used to:

[B]ring up other possibilities of meaning. Our experience may even offer a negative case, or something new to think about that will make us confront our assumptions about specific data. And, if we stay on the conceptual level when making comparisons, looking at them in terms of their properties and dimensions, it might get us to start to think more closely about what properties might be in the data. (p. 80)

Over more than thirty years of teaching, I have come to know teachers as practitioners, friends, parents, neighbors, family members, union members, colleague graduate students, as well as community members who advocate for causes within their schools and without. I am confident my own experiences as a teacher, my association with other teachers, and my familiarity with the various pedagogical and political endeavors in which they engage have the potential to enrich the research more than hinder it. I invite readers of this dissertation to decide whether they concur.

**Significance and Implications of the Study**

In addition to the interest those in academia may take in this study, the findings of the research may be useful to other people and organizations who are invested in public education.

**School districts.** Assuming school districts recognize the many ways in which veteran teachers can enhance teaching and learning (Ladd & Sorensen, 2015; Papay & Kraft, 2014), districts may be increasingly interested in learning more about how some veteran teachers in challenging environments manage to continue teaching while others, subjected to
the same pressures, resign or retire at accelerated rates (Dunn, 2014). As teacher workforce experts Richard Ingersoll and John Papay have found, it is more worth the while of school districts to find ways to retain experienced teachers who already have an investment in their careers, their schools, and their students than to expend large amounts of time, effort, and money to recruit new teachers who have historically left the profession at rates of fifty percent or more (Ingersoll, 2003). As concerns this study, certain school districts may be particularly interested in retaining veteran, dual-language teachers whose positions, once vacated, are considered harder to fill than those of other teachers ([District] Selection and Retention of Employees—Return to Work, 2010), and whose students are among the most academically vulnerable (McCullough, 2014).

Schools. In many ways, veteran teachers are the keepers of the institutional history and memory of their schools (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). This holds true for veteran, dual-language teachers such as those in this study who teach in low-performing, Title I, NND, urban elementary schools. When any veteran teachers leave, their cumulative experiences, knowledge, and long-term perspectives are no longer available to the school for the purposes of questioning new or untested initiatives or promoting past or current initiatives that have proven successful over time. Of course, this questioning, if too persistent, can also have the effect of impeding the implementation of new ideas and initiatives simply because veteran teachers are more comfortable with established practices and prefer not to change. Alvy (2005) expands on this point:

One frequently hears the criticism that veteran teachers are resistant to change. And in some cases, the criticism is justified. However, we should remember that veterans often express healthy skepticism that is based on experience. They have seen too many reforms fail because of insufficient planning or because the reform ideas had little merit to begin with. Experts on the literature of change remind us that thoughtful resistance to change is normal and that worthwhile change occurs when
hard questions are asked—often by veteran teachers. (p. 765)

Thus, while a school may run a slight risk of programmatic entrenchment when veteran teachers speak from experience, it may also be the beneficiary of the teachers’ long-term wisdom, which affords some degree of assurance that the school will be less likely to commit the same mistakes twice.

Retaining veteran teachers would also help reduce the number of vacancies the school experiences and, consequently, the rate of teacher turnover, which is rarely good for a school. This is particularly true in low-performing (“D” and “F”) urban, dual-language, NND schools—such as those associated with this study—where high teacher turnover and shortages of dual-language teachers impose a greater risk of negative effects on the processes of teaching and learning than in more privileged schools (Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Watlington et al., 2010).

**Teacher education programs.** A greater understanding of why some veteran teachers stay while others leave may also be of interest to teacher education programs concerned about the professional longevity and employability of their graduates. Recently, many states, including the state where the research was conducted, are proceeding with plans to link the mandatory high-stakes test scores of K-12 students not only to their teachers’ annual performance evaluations, but to the evaluations of the professors who served as the teachers’ instructors in the states’ teacher education programs (Kemenetz, 2016; State Department of Education, 2012). In light of this trend, teacher education programs may have a vested interest in supporting university, district, or union-sponsored induction practices, where veteran teachers serve as mentors to pre-service, new, or mid-career teachers. One

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6 In early 2019, the newly elected governor of the state eliminated the A-F school letter grade mandate implemented by the former governor.
indirect result of expanded mentor programs might be increased retention of teachers at all career stages, including the mentor teachers themselves, who would by definition be veterans (Alvy, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Guarino et al., 2006; Shields, 2009). If some of the mentor teachers are also dual-language teachers who teach in challenging schools that are difficult to staff, their participation could help districts with shortages while addressing retention issues at both the beginning and veteran ends of the career continuum.

**Teachers’ unions.** As veteran union members resign and retire at increasing rates, unions may find it more difficult to offset this loss with new members and the dues they pay. This may be especially true following the 2018 Supreme Court decision in *Janus v. AFSCME*, which found that non-union public sector employees are no longer obligated to pay union dues, even when they are covered by the terms of the union’s contract with the employer. Future membership in teachers’ unions may also be threatened as potential new members (i.e., beginning teachers) around the country continue to experience increased rates of attrition (Ingersoll, 2003), face anti-union propaganda by “reformers,” and suffer cuts to salaries and benefits that may make union dues less affordable (DePillis, 2017). Like district administrators, union staff may decide that efforts to retain existing veteran members may be more effective than recruiting new members (Armario & Leff, 2015).

**Teacher retirement boards.** Teacher retirement boards might be interested in strategies that keep more veteran teachers employed beyond the minimum retirement age. The recent increase in teacher retirements has correlated with nationwide reductions in the financial health of state teacher pension systems (Boyd, 2013; Magyar, 2014). Indeed, by definition, increases in the rate of teachers retiring from the system constitutes a decrease in the rate of contributions to retirement funds. In some states, cost of living adjustments or
base payments and benefits to retirees have been cut in an effort to accommodate the increase in teacher retirements while planning for the retirement of many more teachers in the near future (Boyd, 2013). Greater retention rates among veteran teachers means teachers’ contributions to the system will be prolonged, while the number of years they ultimately receive pension payments will be reduced. This, in turn, will help to keep the entire system healthier and more solvent.

**Policy makers.** Legislators, particularly those at the state level, may have an interest in addressing the retention of veteran teachers, especially if they are convinced the accelerated rates of attrition among this group of teachers are primarily due to federal and state education “reform” initiatives that many of these legislators have authored, sponsored, approved, voted for, or even had no role in at all due to the fact that some “reforms,” such as high-stakes teacher evaluations, became policy by executive fiat. If legislators can be convinced that the recent increase in veteran teacher attrition is one of the main causes of the current teacher shortage, and that retaining veteran teachers is one of the easiest and most cost-effective solutions to the shortage, they may be interested in knowing more about why some veteran teachers have continued teaching while many of their peers have not. Once legislators have more knowledge about what motivates some veteran teachers to stay while others leave, they may be able to pass legislation that incentivizes even more veteran teachers to continue teaching rather than leave the profession out of disgust, anger, or frustration.

Of special concern in the state where this study took place are recent lawsuits that demand the state address more broadly and urgently the education of low-income children of color, many of whose first language is not English. Consequently, the state may be required to hire many more dual-language teachers who are familiar with the creation and
implementation of linguistically and culturally sensitive curricula. Since the state is already experiencing a shortage of qualified dual-language teachers, it is likely in the state’s interest to slow or curtail the hemorrhaging of teachers at the veteran end of the career continuum while taking necessary steps to assure that many more new dual-language teachers with experience and training in multicultural and multilingual practices are hired, mentored, adequately compensated, and encouraged to remain in the profession long term.7

**Veteran teachers.** Finally, veteran teachers themselves may be interested in the findings so as to better understand the characteristics, strategies, and skills other veteran teachers have developed or cultivated in order to remain teaching. This includes veteran, dual-language teachers, such as those in this study, who choose to teach in challenging environments during challenging times. Knowing about and adopting these characteristics, strategies, and skills may encourage other veteran, dual-language teachers in similar situations to continue teaching despite current trends in education that have driven many of their colleagues from the profession.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

**Limitations.** All quantitative and qualitative research have limitations. It is important for researchers to acknowledge the limitations inherent in their studies and account for them in their findings. Identifying and accounting for a study’s limitations enhances the trustworthiness, ethics, and overall integrity of the study. Failure to identify and account for limitations may constitute a breach of trust between the researcher, his or her participants, and fellow researchers. This could in turn cast doubt on the findings and jeopardize future

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7 In mid 2018, a state judge ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in the two main lawsuits, thus assuring the state would be legally obligated to provide an increased number of specially qualified teachers to districts and schools with greatest need for such teachers.
research in the field. For these reasons, I have identified and considered potential limitations to this study, which I discuss below.

**Bias and subjectivity.** One limitation to this study is researcher bias, or the possibility the various experiences, knowledge, and orientations of the researcher will unduly influence the findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glesne, 2011; Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 1980; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). However, due to the strong negative connotations commonly associated with the word “bias,” Maxwell (2013) and others have observed that qualitative researchers are increasingly favoring the term “subjectivity,” since “qualitative research is primarily concerned with understanding how a particular researcher’s values and expectations may have influenced the conduct and conclusions of the study” (p. 124).

Among the subjective lenses I bring to the study are the personal and professional perceptions and beliefs accrued from three decades of experience as a bilingual teacher of emergent bilinguals in a low-performing, urban, NND elementary school; two decades as the father of public school students during the core years of recent era of reform (2003-2018); a decade of activism oriented toward the elimination of education policies I felt were harmful to students; and a decade of experience with strategies aimed at keeping myself in the profession.

While some might argue that these subjective perspectives may have enriched the collection, analysis, synthesis, and interpretation of the data, others might argue they risk impeding my ability to acquire a broader perspective into the phenomena in question and the perceptions of those who are experiencing them. One way I addressed this argument was by retiring from full-time teaching in the public schools a year prior to the initiation of this
My retirement allowed me to gain some distance from the topics this study addresses. This distance was impossible to create while I continued to teach full-time in the public schools. Another way I have addressed some of the pitfalls of subjectivity is by acknowledging subjectivity at the outset of the study (see Researcher Positionality, Chapter 1) and monitoring it throughout. It is my hope transparency in subjectivity has ultimately done more to enhance than to hinder the integrity and credibility of the researcher, the research, and, ultimately, the findings.

**Participant reactivity.** Participant reactivity constitutes a second potential limitation to this study. Maxwell (2013) defines reactivity as “the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied” (p. 124). However, he states that the elimination of the actual influence of the researcher is impossible and that any observational influence is often overestimated; the setting often has a greater influence on the participant than does the observer.

In this study, most of the researcher-participant interactions occurred during face-to-face interviews. In the context of an interview, Maxwell (2013) points out that the participants’ responses are always influenced by the interviewer, as well as by the context in which the interview takes place. Instead of expending time, energy, and resources attempting to eliminate the influence researchers may have on participant responses, Maxwell urges researchers instead to strive to understand how their presence may influence responses and affect the inferences the researcher makes when analyzing the data and drawing conclusions. Patton (1980) states, “[E]valuators should strive to neither overestimate nor underestimate their effects, but to take seriously their responsibility to describe and study what those effects

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8 I continued as a 0.25 return-to-work retired bilingual intervention teacher at the same school from which I retired.
are” (p. 335). This I have attempted to do in subsequent chapters.

I believe I experienced some degree of reactivity while conducting the interviews and focus groups. This may have been especially true in cases where one or more of the participants had prior knowledge of my perspectives on research topics. In such cases, the participants may have been tempted to tailor their responses to what they believed I wanted to hear. However, I have no evidence of this. I addressed potential participant reactivity by encouraging the participants to respond as candidly and honestly as possible, regardless of what they believed were my perceptions, feelings, opinions, and beliefs. Furthermore, I reminded them that I was not only interested in identifying areas of concurrence among those involved in the interviews and focus groups, but areas of differences, as well.

**Volatility of policy contexts.** A third and final limitation to this study may be the rapidly changing policy landscape of public education in the United States. Just as the perspectives of researchers and participants can change during a study, so can the political contexts in which I conduct the study. Policy makers and corporate powers continue to propose, create, implement, and alter “reform” initiatives on a weekly if not daily basis. These “reforms” invariably affect teachers and the work they do in schools. At the same time, the constant creation, implementation, and even repeal of “reforms” assures that attempts to develop a static definition of public education policy in the United States from one week to the next remains elusive.

Therefore, instead of imposing a fixed definition onto a dynamic process, I have attempted to incorporate the evolving nature of public education into the design, analysis, and findings of the study. That is, as policies have evolved, I have updated the literature, re-worded interview questions, and re-interpreted data so as to portray as accurately as possible
the participants’ actions and perceptions in the rapidly changing political context. It will be up to future readers of the study to determine how closely the policy contexts that existed in the study correspond to future policy contexts and, therefore, the relevance of past findings to those of the future.

**Delimitations.** Distinct from a study’s limitations are its delimitations. The delimitations of a study are essentially the boundaries of the study, the ways in which I attempt to narrow its focus through the selection of a problem, participants, time frame, etc. (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This study is delimited in the following ways:

- The participants meet narrow criteria: veteran dual-language teachers with at least ten years’ experience who hold a bilingual endorsement and who teach emergent bilingual students in four urban new national demographic schools in the Southwest that have received performance grades of “D” or “F” from the state Department of Education.

- Education “reforms,” though increasingly global, are defined and interpreted by me and by the participants as those adopted and implemented by political institutions within the United States, and the state in which this study was conducted, from approximately 2002 to 2017. The study itself was conducted between September 2016 and June 2017.

- The school sites are located in the same school district in a large city in the Southwest United States.

- I am the sole researcher, data collector, analyst, and reporter.

Data collection took place between October 2016 and October 2017.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Prior to conducting research for this study, I determined that certain areas of published research would be relevant and helpful in formulating a methodological approach, addressing the research questions, collecting and analyzing the data, and framing the findings. These areas of research consisted of teacher attrition, retention, resilience, and resistance. After analyzing the data, teacher advocacy on behalf of students emerged as an important area I felt it necessary to investigate in order to better understand the data I collected. What follows is a critical review of the literature in these areas.

Teacher Attrition

Attrition defined. As I stated in Chapter 1, teacher retention, not teacher attrition, is the focus of this research. However, since teacher retention is often a response to teacher attrition, I believe retention is better understood after a discussion of attrition. Consequently, I discuss the relevant literature on teacher attrition before discussing the literature on teacher retention.

*The American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd Edition* (1985) defines attrition as “a gradual diminution in number or strength due to constant stress” or to “sustained attack or pressure” (p. 140). “Constant stress” and “sustained attack or pressure” might well characterize the result of state and federal education “reforms” on public education after the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002. Since that time, increasing numbers of teachers have found the “reforms” so intolerable that they have left the profession permanently, through resignation or retirement, rather than continue to comply with mandates with which
they disagree (Brenneman, 2015; Bowie, 2014; Hui, 2014; Huseman, 2015; Morello, 2014; Phillips, 2015; Richards, 2014; Riggs, 2013; Seidel, 2014; Sills, 2014; Smith, 2014; Spector, 2014; Swedien, 2014 Walker, 2014; Wendler, 2015; Westervelt, 2015; Westervelt, 2016; Westervelt & Lonsdorf, 2016). This is especially true for veteran teachers who, by definition, have been subjected to these reforms longer than new teachers. The vacancies created by these veteran teachers, combined with historically high rates of attrition among beginning teachers (Gray & Taie, 2015; Ingersoll, 2003), are increasingly not filled, at least in the short term. This describes the state of affairs in many parts of the United States in the second decade of the 21st century where various waves of overall teacher attrition have led to sudden and sustained teacher shortages (Burnett, 2016; Prosen, 2015; Strauss, 2017; Sutcher et al., 2016; Westervelt, 2016).

**Causes of Attrition**

**Federal and state education policy.** Recent federal education policy initiatives, such as the Bush era No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and President Obama’s Race to the Top (RTTT) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and the state initiatives that essentially mirror them, are key to understanding teacher attrition in public schools today. Qualitative studies (Dunn, 2014; Dunn, Farver, et al., 2017; Santoro, 2011), quantitative meta-analyses (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005), university presidential addresses (Feldman, 2011), all have implicated recent federal and state education policy as major contributors to local, regional, and nationwide increases in teacher attrition. Recent press reports from major urban centers around the country have supported the connection between federal and state education “reform” and teacher attrition (e.g., Bowie, 2014; Richards, 2014; Prosen, 2015. Seidel, 2014; Sills, 2014; Spector, 2014; Swedien, 2014;
Westervelt, 2015). These collective policy initiatives are having an increasing influence on teachers’ decisions to continue teaching or to leave the profession altogether (Dunn, 2014; Ingersoll et al., 2014; Santoro, 2011).

Lack of respect, recognition, prestige, and trust. One of the effects of recent education policy may be the lack of respect, recognition, prestige, and trust that teachers are reporting more now than in the last thirty years. Almost two decades ago, Betancourt-Smith, Inman, and Marlow (1995) reported that beginning and veteran teachers found the teaching profession far less prestigious than they had imagined; indeed, two-thirds of teachers had cited lack of prestige or respect as the reason they left teaching. Few connections seem to have been made, however, between lack of respect for the teaching profession and the major education policies at the time—A Nation at Risk and Goals 2000—which promoted voluntary adherence to policy initiatives. Writing during the NCLB and RTTT eras, Dunn (2014), Dunn, Farver et al. (2017), Santoro (2011), and Feldman (2011) establish direct connections between these mandatory education policies and lack of respect, prestige, recognition, and trust reported by teachers.

Workplace climate. In addition to the lack of professional prestige, respect, recognition, and trust that is driving many teachers from the profession, issues defined broadly as poor working conditions, poor workplace climate, workplace stress, and general job dissatisfaction contribute to that effect, though there is not always a clear or direct connection between these factors and education policy (Johnson et al., 2011; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Mihans, 2008; Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005; Watlington et al., 2010). However, in their analysis of data from the National Center for Education Statistics’ (NCES) 2011-2012 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the 2014 Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS),
Ingersoll et al. (2014) report that teacher dissatisfaction with policy-related conditions, such as teacher accountability measures, opportunities for professional development, teacher decision making power, and school (administrative) leadership, is a major contributor to their decision to leave the teaching profession. The data collection timeframe of 2011-2012 falls within the latter years of No Child Left Behind and the first years of Race to the Top, mandatory policy agendas that many teachers have found challenging, if not objectionable.

A closer look at working conditions, climate, dissatisfaction, and stress reveals more specific causes of teacher attrition and mobility, several of which are related to quantity or volume. For example, some research implicates reductions in school funding in general, and material resources in particular, as factors influencing teacher attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Dunn, 2014). Other research specifies increased paperwork (Dunn, 2014), greater teacher workload (Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005) and the resulting reduction in lesson planning time as potential causes of increased attrition. Increased class sizes, which can be the result of reduced funding for public education, were cited by teachers in the 2012 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher as a key factor in their decision to leave teaching (Richmond, 2012).

Additionally, lack of administrative support, especially at the school level, has been cited by teachers and researchers as a phenomenon that may exacerbate already poor working conditions (Dunn, 2014; Feldman, 2011; Richards, 2014). In the past, teachers have often perceived the role of the school principal as more like that of a head teacher than administrator. As far as teachers were concerned, the principal’s main role relative to teachers was to support their efforts to teach, not undermine them. This often involved “protecting” teachers from policies and procedures that might impinge on teachers’ abilities
to do their jobs (Brown & Wynn, 2009; Shields, 2009). In recent years, however, newly mandated state and federal policy initiatives have changed the role of the principal. Today it is just as likely the principal will be perceived by teachers not as a buffer between bad policy and teachers’ work, but as the person who ultimately implements and enforces those bad policies. If the notion of administrative support is still a valid term today, it may only be perceived as support insofar as it facilitates the implementation of education “reform” mandates passed down from the White House, to the State House, to the schoolhouse.

**Teacher disempowerment.** Much of the literature on teacher attrition emphasizes teachers’ lack of power, autonomy, control, academic freedom, professional judgment, and decision-making opportunities as reasons for dissatisfaction with their profession (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Mihans, 2008; Borman & Dowling, 2008). Santoro (2011) and Feldman (2011) in particular link these effects to recent changes in regional or national education policy. In her qualitative case study of teachers who are deciding whether to continue teaching or to quit, Dunn (2014) found that much of the lack of professional autonomy and control felt by teachers is explained by them as a direct result of top-down policy initiatives in which teachers have little to no input.

**Teacher salaries.** Finally, reductions in teacher pay—whether through pay cuts, the cessation of annual cost of living adjustments, or through increased teacher contributions to benefit packages—have been cited by some teachers as a factor that led to their decision to leave the profession (Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005; Dunn, 2014; Richards, 2014; Strunk & Robinson, 2006). However, it is important to note that teacher salary issues in general have historically been more of a concern to teachers entering the profession than to established teachers who are considering a change in schools or career. Teachers may tolerate low or
modest salaries for extended periods of time if they are confident they can maintain or increase positive working conditions and job satisfaction in general (Bacolod, 2007).

**Effects of Attrition**

**Student achievement.** A growing body of research has indicated that schools with high rates of poverty and low student achievement (as measured by standardized test scores) continue to be the schools that teachers leave most often (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2011; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). These low-performing schools, located in economically disadvantaged areas, also tend to be urban schools with high percentages of students from the new national demographic (NND). During the NCLB era, schools like these were often subjected to rigorous and often punitive academic “corrective” measures designed to raise student reading and math scores at almost any cost (Ravitch, 2010). One of the costs may have been the loss of large numbers of qualified and dedicated teachers who transferred to high-performing schools or left teaching altogether rather than continue to suffer, along with their students, the punitive “remedies” imposed by federal policy regulations (Santoro, 2011). The ultimate losers in this process have been, of course, the students these teachers unwittingly “left behind.” Indeed, there is evidence linking recent increases in the attrition of qualified, dedicated, and experienced teachers to stagnant or reduced student achievement in high poverty schools (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Boyd et al., 2008; Henry et al., 2011; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Watlington et al., 2010). Finally, Ingersoll et al. (2014) assert that while teacher attrition in general can adversely affect student achievement—especially in low-performing, urban, NND schools— the increased attrition of veteran teachers in particular can exacerbate that effect.

Interestingly, Kelly’s (2004) analysis of data from the National Center for Education
Statistic’s (NCES) 1990-1991 School and Staffing Survey (SASS) found that teacher attrition was not statistically greater in high poverty schools than in low poverty schools. Since the study was published, however, one of the most intensive periods of education “reform” has occurred. Many of these “reforms” have targeted high-poverty schools more than low-poverty schools (Lipman, 2011). Furthermore, teachers have increasingly cited recent education “reforms” as the principal reasons they have left (Dunn, 2014; Santoro, 2011). This may explain the apparent contradiction in findings. If teachers in 1990 had been subject to many of today’s education “reform” initiatives, Kelly’s study may have reported different findings.

**Staff cohesion, school climate, and culture.** Just as a negative school climate or culture can lead to increased teacher attrition, so, too, can attrition contribute to a degradation in school climate and culture. This is especially true when veteran teachers, who have contributed to the long-term construction of a school’s climate, culture, traditions, and community, and who have a greater sense of the history of the school’s successes and failures, leave the school in greater numbers. Veteran teachers are likely to be replaced by first year teachers who have yet to be inducted into the school culture. According to Johnson et al. (2011), this “persistent turnover in a school’s teaching staff disrupts efforts to build a strong organizational culture, making it difficult to develop and sustain coordinated instructional programs throughout the school” (p. 2). Any weakness in a school’s organizational culture or instructional programs, be they home-grown or imposed from without, is likely to have a negative impact both on staff cohesion as well as on student achievement. Ronfeldt et al. (2013) emphasize the importance of maintaining staff and community cohesion in order to maintain or raise student achievement and teacher
satisfaction. Research conducted by Bentancourt-Smith et al. (1995) in the South and Southwestern states considered the effect of environmental factors on teacher satisfaction and dissatisfaction. One assumption on which they based their analysis was that, when good teachers leave the school, their departure will likely have a negative effect on those who stay. Conversely, when “bad” or ineffective teachers leave the school, this may contribute to a net positive effect on staff cohesion (Boyd et al., 2008). Regardless of the causes of teacher attrition, researchers seem to agree that the high turnover rates caused by attrition will have some effect on staff cohesion, climate, and culture; most of the time, that effect will be negative.

**Critique of the Literature on Teacher Attrition**

**Lack of studies on veteran teachers.** Teacher attrition has been a perennial reality in U.S. public schools. This is especially true among beginning teachers; that is, those who have taught for five years or fewer (Gray & Taie, 2015; Ingersoll, 2003; Kaiser, 2011). What is different about teacher attrition today, however, is the increased rates of attrition among veteran teachers, which I defined here as those who have taught for ten years or more. While the reasons fifty percent of all beginning teachers leave the profession have long been a research and policy focus, the reasons veteran teachers are leaving in increasing numbers is a much newer phenomenon and, consequently, scarcely represented in the literature on teacher attrition.

**Recent “reforms” not considered.** Much of the research on teacher attrition occurred before the implementation of regional and national education “reform” initiatives that many teachers today cite as the primary reason they left the profession prematurely (Bowie, 2014; Richards, 2014; Seidel, 2014; Sills, 2014; Spector, 2014; Swedien, 2014;
Westervelt, 2015). Other research was conducted after the implementation of these “reforms,” but researchers analyzed data collected before the “reforms” (e.g., Borman & Dowling, 2008; Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005; Kelly, 2004; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Mihans, 2008). Still other research focuses on broadly defined causes of attrition, such as “dissatisfaction,” “lack of autonomy,” and “lack of administrative support,” without specifying the precise causes or providing concrete examples (e.g., Ingersoll et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2011; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). Had researchers looked more closely, might they have discovered that much of the dissatisfaction, lack of autonomy, and lack of administrative support and other practices perceived as onerous were due to recent state and federally mandated education “reforms”? 

**English language learners, teacher evaluations, and school grades.** Another area where research on teacher attrition is lacking is in regard to schools with high percentages of English language learners (ELLs). In many districts, such as the one that serves as the setting for the current research, ELLs constitute the lowest performing group of students as measured by high-stakes standardized tests (McCullough, 2014). The test scores of these ELLs are factored into the teachers’ evaluations as well as the school’s grade (District Educator Effectiveness Plan, 2013), thus putting more performance pressure on dual-language teachers and their schools than on those who teach in schools where children receive instruction in English only. The effects on teacher attrition of high-stakes student tests, teacher evaluations, and school grades is an area ripe for research.

**Lack of distinction between types of attrition.** Most of the research on attrition does not distinguish between types of attrition and mobility: voluntary and involuntary inter-school transfers, dismissals, resignations, or retirements. I believe it is important to make a
distinction between choosing to permanently leave the profession (resignation and retirement) and voluntary or involuntary inter-school transfers, or dismissals. As Dunn (2014) points out, it is the voluntary and often reluctant act of leaving the profession forever that is becoming more common and where more research needs to be focused.

**Abundance of quantitative research.** Finally, one cannot help but notice that the majority of the studies on teacher attrition is quantitative in nature. Many of these studies involve complex statistical analyses of large amounts of data collected through the National Center for Education Statistics’ (NCES) School and Staffing Surveys (SASS), Teacher Follow up Surveys (TFS), or other large-scale data collection strategies. While these studies have contributed valuable information to our understanding of teacher attrition, they are by and large faceless; that is, teachers are represented as data points that are entered into statistical formulae not unlike the formula used by the state Department of Education to determine a teacher’s “effectiveness.” On the other hand, qualitative studies, such as those undertaken by Dunn (2014) and Santoro (2011), contribute faces, personalities, emotions, interactions, reactions, and other facets of humanness to research on attrition and therefore to our understanding of attrition. At least part of the motivation driving this study is a desire to “put the face back on” the research of teacher attrition and retention.

**Teacher Retention**

**Retention defined.** For the purposes of this proposal, I define teacher retention as the act of remaining in the profession despite experiencing pressures, including those brought on by recent “reforms,” that have led others to leave. I broaden this definition to include not only the more common, extrinsic or administrative/institutional efforts to retain teachers, but also intrinsic or individual efforts on the part of teachers to essentially retain themselves.
refer to the latter as “auto-retention.” In addition to simply broadening the definition of retention, this term affords a degree of agency to teachers, an element I believe is lacking in many discussions of teacher retention. In terms of this study, which focuses on veteran teacher retention, the definition of retention would apply specifically to teachers with ten or more years’ experience. The final refinement I would make to the term retention would be to point out that it can occur multiple times over the course of a career. Each time a teacher contemplates leaving the profession, but ultimately remains, can constitute an incidence of retention. This would apply both to extrinsic or intrinsic retention.

**Retention of beginning teachers.** Much if not most of the research on teacher retention has focused on beginning teachers. While this research may not have a direct application to this study, which is focused on veteran teacher retention, it may well have an indirect application, since all veteran teachers were once beginning teachers. Issues not resolved in the early years often persist into the later years, at which time they become redefined as veteran teacher issues simply due to the passage of time. Therefore, some of the attrition and retention issues relevant to beginning teachers may also be relevant to veteran teachers. Furthermore, since most recent education “reform” initiatives (test-based evaluations, merit pay, prescribed curricula, privatization schemes, etc.) do not necessarily discriminate between teachers of various career stages, these relatively new factors driving beginning teachers prematurely from the profession may be the same as those driving veteran teachers from the profession. In fact, Swedien (2014) reports that teacher retirements (presumably veteran teachers) and teacher resignations in one urban district in the Southwest (presumably newer teachers and some veteran teachers) increased markedly between 2011-2014. Numerous letters of teacher resignation and retirement shared on social media over the
last few years leave little doubt as to the effect recent education “reforms” have had on teachers at all career stages (Dunn, Farver et al., 2017; Dunn, Deroo et al., 2017).

Certo and Fox’s (2002) qualitative case study of beginning teachers begins with an analysis of attrition before arriving at remedies for attrition, since the “[r]easons for leaving and reasons for staying often act as inverse variables” (p. 60). Therefore, based on the many reasons beginning teachers gave for leaving the profession, we can infer that rectifying them might have led to their decision to stay. These would include better pay, more administrative attention to teachers’ needs, less paperwork and workload, more planning time, more administrative visibility in classrooms, and less administrative condescension toward teachers. Other reasons beginning teachers provided for continuing to teach, even under difficult circumstances, included “a commitment to the profession, quality administration, and appreciation for a relationship with their colleagues” (p. 60). These findings were consistent with previous studies on beginning teacher retention. The authors conclude their study with a thirteen-point district level and an eight-point school level prescription for the retention of beginning teachers that incorporate most of the elements of their findings on attrition and retention.

In a theoretical and practical narrative based on her experiences as a beginning and beginning urban teacher as well as her work with similar teachers, Shields (2009) also includes a prescription for retention. Like Certo and Fox (2002), the author concludes that more teachers can be retained if schools and districts increase administrative support and protection of teachers’ duties; pay urban teachers more; treat teachers more like professionals; set reasonable expectations and duties for teachers; and lower class sizes. Additionally, Shields describes strategies such as involving more parents and community
members in the school’s mission, providing more support for special education students, implementing teacher induction and mentor programs, delinking school funding and teacher pay from test scores, and requiring student teaching in urban schools prior to placement in such schools as potentially helpful in either stemming rates of attrition or enhancing the incidence of retention.

Many of the conditions for beginning teacher retention revolve around factors that can be controlled by the school principal. These include general school climate, daily and weekly workloads, the number of required meetings, access to materials, and other forms of institutional support. In fact, one of six characteristics of principals in schools with high rates of retention was what Brown and Wynn (2009) refer to as an “umbrella of support.” Principals felt that quality and quantity of the professional, pedagogical, and material support they extended to beginning teachers was key to short term retention. Likewise, principals who perceived their roles as advocates, mentors, colleagues, and especially protectors of teachers tended to have higher retention rates (as measured by lack of annual turnover). It must be noted, however, that this study included only principals of schools with demonstrably low teacher turnover rates prior to the beginning of the study. Additionally, no teachers were surveyed regarding the effective retention practices claimed by principals.

Retention of veteran teachers. In an effort to extend the discussion of retention beyond that of beginning teachers, Alvy (2005) refocuses the discussion on the retention of veteran teachers. The author’s recommendations for the retention of veteran teachers include: shaping a school culture that values their wisdom and setting up mentoring programs through which they can share it, providing individual or group mentors to veteran teachers in order to keep them teaching longer, promoting creative job sharing for teachers who want to
continue teaching but want a break from the demands of full-time classroom teaching, changing retirement requirements that encourage or entice teachers to leave even when they would rather stay, and differentiating professional development between veteran and beginning teachers. Alvy’s final suggestion is a letter of encouragement from the district office that asks veteran teachers what the district can do to keep them employed.

In their review of empirical literature on recruitment and retention, Guarino et al. (2006) begin their review with a discussion of retention at multiple career stages, among both genders, and between white teachers and teachers of color. One study they reviewed found that teachers who are neither new nor approaching retirement age are more likely to remain in the profession. The authors imply that this career stage might be a propitious time to implement retention strategies. The authors also report on research that found that while white male teachers are slightly more likely to stay in the profession than white females, male and female Teachers of color are much more likely to remain teaching than are white male and female teachers. When considered together, these findings seem to indicate that strategies aimed at retaining veteran teachers of color could be effective.

Guarino et al. (2006) discuss other studies that consider the effect of teachers’ preservice test scores (ACT), advanced degrees, student standardized test scores, school poverty rates, and long-term professional plans on higher rates of retention. Some studies found that retention rates were greater—and in some cases double—for teachers with lower ACT scores, even after four years of teaching. Likewise, other studies found that teachers without advanced degrees were more likely to continue teaching. The researchers also found that teachers at high-achieving, low-poverty schools and teachers who enter the profession certain about their career choice, were more likely to remain in the profession. Still other
studies indicate that increases in teacher salaries and the duration of teacher education programs led to higher levels of teacher retention. The authors also point to the availability of alternative certification programs as indicators of greater teacher retention, especially among urban, multilingual teachers as well as among older teachers. Through a prescriptive lens, then, strategies aimed at older, urban, multilingual teachers, or career ambivalent teachers, or teachers with high preservice test scores or advanced degrees who teach at low-performing, high poverty schools, may be where future retention efforts need to be focused.

Guarino et al. (2006) conclude their extensive meta-review of teacher retention research with a survey of studies related to in-service policies that may affect teacher retention. Several policies affecting working conditions were associated with teacher retention. Reduced class sizes, greater teacher autonomy and administrative support, the implementation of mentoring and induction programs, collective teacher planning, regularly scheduled collaboration times, connections to an external network of teachers, and teacher influence over a variety of school-based decisions all correlated to high rates of teacher retention. Finally, referring to a study that has a direct bearing on this study, the authors discuss research where strict statewide accountability of teachers in low-performing schools was strongly associated with a reduction in the schools’ ability to retain teachers.

As a part of an ethnographic study of an urban high school, Cohen (2009) came to know two male high school teachers, each of whom had taught at the school for twenty-five years or more. Both teachers were white: David, a self-described non-practicing Jew from New York, and Brian, a non-practicing Catholic from Mississippi. Seventy-five percent of their students were urban teenagers of color. Cohen highlights the importance of this feat of professional longevity in light of the fact that teacher attrition from urban schools historically
has been higher than in non-urban schools regardless of the career stage of the teachers who leave. Personal or character traits that contributed to the teachers’ professional longevity were the focus of her research and led to her findings, several of which might be considered surprising by many educators and researchers. Among the study’s more predictable findings was the intense passion the teachers had for their subject matter: literature. Also predictable was the teachers’ ability to quickly and effectively forgive and forget negative experiences at school, what Cohen refers to as “useful amnesia.”

Two other findings, however, might be considered more unexpected. For example, both teachers eschewed the educational practice of “self-abnegation,” or deflecting the focus away from the teacher and teaching, in favor of a child-centered environment, where the focus remains on the child and her learning. Cohen described their teaching styles this way: “David and Brian were prima donnas, frontal lecturers, teachers who told their students what to think and how to think. Indeed, their classrooms were often the very opposite of student-centered: they were teacher-centered” (Cohen, 2009, p. 480). The teachers were convinced that teacher-centered learning environments were far more conducive to teacher longevity than were child centered environments. Perhaps equally if not more unexpected was the teachers’ rejection of becoming culturally or politically relevant or culturally sensitive teachers. In fact, much of their verbal rapport with their students of color might be considered culturally insensitive, as they frequently exchanged racially charged jokes and insults with their students. Both teachers also dismiss as naïve the work of critical race theorists such as Jonathan Kozol and Lisa Delpit, since neither is a life-long educator in urban public schools and therefore has never had to cultivate interracial and interpersonal social skills in order to “survive” in challenging educational environments for so long.
Finally, while Cohen does not venture into the world of recent education “reforms” and their relationship to veteran teacher retention, she does provide detailed biographies of both teachers and infuses her methodology with additional qualitative practices that bring alive her findings in ways that so many studies of teacher attrition and retention do not.

**Critique of the Literature on Teacher Retention**

Most of the shortcomings of the research on teacher attrition are reflected in the research on teacher retention: lack of focus on education “reforms,” on veteran teachers, on the effects of teaching ELLs, and on the overabundance of quantitative versus qualitative studies, though this last seems to be somewhat less pronounced in the literature on retention.

One critique of teacher retention research that does not directly apply to teacher attrition research is the prescriptive nature of it. Whereas an understanding of the causes of attrition implies that addressing and reversing the causes will lead to retention, this is rarely stated explicitly. In the literature, however, prescriptions are relatively common (Alvy, 2005; Certo & Fox, 2002; Shields, 2009). That is, do X, Y, and Z and teachers will stay in the profession. What is interesting about these prescriptions, however, is that they are nearly always directed toward school principals, district administrators, and policy makers—not teachers. Therefore, they are necessarily applied externally, from non-teachers upon teachers. There seems to be little recognition in the relevant research of the possibility that retention strategies could be applied internally, that is, by teachers themselves. I refer to this phenomenon as auto-retention. The fact that research on teacher retention essentially fails to differentiate between external and internal efforts to retain teachers suggests that it shares with the research on teacher attrition an essential feature: the lack of investigation into type variation.
Teacher Resilience

**Resilience defined.** Resilience has been variously defined as coping with, overcoming, adapting to, and bouncing back from adversity and challenges (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011), recovering one’s strength and spirit in the face of adversity (Gu & Day, 2007), or “a personal characteristic that enables individuals to ‘stay the course’ despite difficulties they encounter” (Brunetti, 2006, p. 813). In a similar vein, Patterson, Collins, and Abbott (2004) define resilience as “using energy productively to achieve school goals in the fact of adverse conditions” (p. 3). Others assert that resilience must first be categorized as psychological, environmental, professional, emotional, social, and motivational (Mansfield, Beltman, Price, & McConney, 2012) or personal, situated, or professional (Gu & Day, 2007) before being further defined. Interestingly, some researchers prefer to avoid the use of the term “resilience” altogether because of its association with negative circumstances. They focus instead on one common attribute of resilience—commitment—to explain how and why some teachers continue teaching despite circumstances that lead other teachers to change course (e.g., seek a different role within the school system) or even leave the profession altogether (Brunetti, 2006; Day, Elliot, & Kington, 2005; Gu & Day, 2007).

Recently, however, some researchers have challenged these conventional definitions. Gu and Day (2013) define resilience as not just a collection of innate attributes, but personal skills that teachers have developed over time in response to adverse circumstances. In other words, in addition to perhaps coming to the profession as a naturally resilient person, even teachers normally not considered resilient are capable of becoming resilient by successfully

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9 This definition is potentially problematic. Since 2002, school goals have largely been prescribed and enforced by “reforms” that create or exacerbate the adverse conditions that elicit teacher resilience in the first place.
confronting challenges and adversity in the course of their jobs. Gu and Day (2007) take this definition even further. They assert that a resilient teacher is not simply one who confronts adversity and stays on the job, but one whose work effectiveness, motivation, and commitment are enhanced by becoming more resilient. Furthermore, Gu and Day (2013) recognize that factors that often elicit resilience in teachers do not arise solely in the classroom or the workplace but increasingly in external political contexts. Finally, their research supports—perhaps counterintuitively—the notion that, as teachers arrive in the latter years of their careers, they become less resilient, perhaps due to the “erosion” of their repertoire of resilience skills.

The increase in external, political challenges to teaching, as well as the recognition that many teachers actually become less resilient over time, are particularly relevant to this study, whose foci include resilience, veteran teachers, and the inexorable pressures of external “reforms.”

Factors that elicit teacher resilience. Much of the research on resilience attempts to identify the factors that elicit resilience in teachers. If resilience is most commonly defined as coping with, overcoming, adapting to, and bouncing back from adversity and challenges (Beltman et al., 2011), or recovering one’s strength and spirit in the face of adversity (Gu & Day, 2007), what is the nature of the adversity and challenges to which some teachers are resilient? In their meta-analysis of teacher resilience literature, Beltman et al. (2011) identify two key categories of factors that lead teachers to exercise varying degrees of resilience: individual factors, or those that reside within the teacher, and contextual factors, or those that reside within the school and with those who work there. The individual factors they identify include lack of confidence in one’s ability, reluctance to ask for help, and conflicts between
one’s personal beliefs and professional practices. Other individual factors include
dissatisfaction with the results of one’s efforts, not having one’s emotional needs met, and
also found that stress is a major factor that often tests teachers’ resilience. While all teachers
face stress at school, the authors assert that teachers in urban schools tend to experience
greater workplace stress. Therefore, in order to continue teaching, these teachers may need
to muster greater amounts of resilience than do teachers in suburban and rural schools. All
four participants in this study teach in urban schools.

With respect to contextual factors that elicit resilience in teachers, Beltman et al.
(2011) cite classroom management, increased workloads, meeting the needs of
disadvantaged students, professional work challenges, and unsupportive staff and
administrators as the most salient. To these Brunetti (2006) adds lack of teacher
empowerment, lack of qualifications and support for teaching English Language Learners
(ELLs), and the inability of the system to effectively address student dropouts, violence, and
mobility. Day et al. (2005) suggest other key factors, such as lack of funding and resources,
as well as pressure on teachers to perpetually learn and implement new programs and
policies.

Education “reforms” and their impact on teachers is an important focus of this study.
Three studies mention various education “reforms” as major factors that often test teachers’
resilience. Day et al. (2005) cite the centralization and imposition of education “reforms” as
key to alienating teachers from their jobs and, consequently, obliging them to become more
resilient in order to continue teaching. Gu and Day (2007) discuss how two decades of
“reforms” and administrative control of teachers have helped substantiate teaching as one of
the most stressful professions. For their part, Patterson et al. (2004) point out that education “reforms,” such as those included in the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law of 2003, exacerbate the already inordinate workplace stress often considered endemic in urban schools.

**Attributes of teacher resilience.** Once researchers define resilience and identify factors that often elicit resilience in teachers, many invariably turn their focus to the attributes teachers possess or cultivate that make them resilient in the face of adversity or challenges. As with the presentation of factors of resilience, I find it helpful to organize the presentation of the attributes of resilience around the same broad categories suggested by Beltman et al. (2011): individual and contextual, which I discuss below.

**Individual attributes.** The meta-analysis conducted by Beltman et al. (2011) identifies twenty-nine individual attributes organized into six broad categories: personal (e.g., altruism, tenacity, sense of humor, intrinsic motivation), self-efficacy (e.g., competence, control, experience), coping skills (e.g., adapting, seeking help, letting go, moving on), teaching skills (e.g., knowing students, confidence, creativity), professional reflection and growth (e.g., self-awareness, professional aspirations, professional development), and self-care (e.g., focus on well-being, supportive relationships). Additionally, Gu and Day (2007), whose research is included in the meta-analysis, identifies vocation, or the notion of being “called” to teach, as an important attribute. Day et al. (2005) cite commitment or dedication to one’s job, maintaining healthy networks of friends and family, and a sense of leadership to the list.

In a survey of two hundred fifty-nine pre-service and licensed teachers in Australia, Mansfield et al. (2012) identify twenty-three distinct attributes of teacher resilience. Among
them are attributes that would likely be considered *individual*. (Beltman and Mansfield are co-authors in each other’s studies.) Like Beltman et al. (2011), they found that *coping skills* and *caring for one’s own well-being* were important. However, they found that *positivity and optimism, self-confidence and persistence, and a focus on learning and improvement* were other major attributes that sustained teachers through various professional challenges. They also identify the *ability to focus by dismissing, ignoring, and refusing to internalize institutional stressors*, such as unacceptable student behavior, unreasonable parent demands, and adverse school politics, as an important element of *individual* resilience.

In a multi-case study of sixteen teachers in U.S. urban public schools, Patterson et al. (2004) suggest still more individual attributes that may enhance teachers’ resilience. They include: *strong personal and spiritual values, a sense of social justice, a desire to mentor others, maintaining a focus on students, strong support from friends and colleagues, an ability to remain flexible and open to new ideas and ways of teaching, a sense of when to take charge, strong problem solving skills, and an acute sense of when to persist and when to relent.*

Finally, Brunetti (2006) employed a life history approach to conduct an Experienced Teacher Survey (ETS) of nine teachers who had been teaching for fifteen years or more in an urban public school in California. He found that the following individual attributes contributed to teachers’ ability to stay the course in the face of adversity: a *commitment to their students*, a strong sense of *responsibility, job satisfaction, and making a difference*, a desire for *social justice, a desire to exercise unearned privileges by giving back to the community*, the ability to *seek support from administrators*, retaining *decision-making rights*.

**Contextual attributes of resilience.** Contextual attributes are those associated with
the people and structures of the workplace other than the teacher herself. Beltman et al. (2011) identified six major categories: administrative support (e.g., class and student assignments, behavioral management, meaningful feedback), mentor support (formal), colleague support (informal), student support (teachers’ ability to enhance their own resilience by observing the resilience of their students), quality of pre-service program, support from family and friends. The researchers go on to state that, regardless of what are ultimately identified as key attributes of resilience, or whether they are individual or contextual, a teacher’s positive experiences in the workplace contribute more toward her overall resilience than does the absence of negative experiences. Therefore, to the extent a teacher can create, cultivate, control, or take advantage of positive experiences at work, the more likely she is to be resilient, regardless of the individual or contextual attributes of resilience that may apply to her work as a teacher.

**Critique of the Literature on Resilience**

While some research has begun to address various workplace stressors brought on by recent education “reforms” and their relationship to teacher resilience, the research remains scant. Observations I have made over more than three decades as a public school teacher and nearly a decade as a teachers’ union representative correspond closely with recent press reports that indicate that the “reforms” that began with the signing of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002 constitute the major stressors in teachers’ professional lives today (Brenneman, 2015; Briseño, 2015; Bowie, 2014; Hui, 2014; Huseman, 2015; Morello, 2014; Phillips, 2015; Richards, 2014; Riggs, 2013; Seidel, 2014; Sills, 2014; Smith, 2014; Spector, 2014; Swedien, 2014; Walker, 2014; Wendler, 2015; Westervelt, 2015; Westervelt, 2016; Westervelt & Lonsdorf, 2016). According to these and other reports, recent “reform” related
stressors are emerging more frequently as the main reasons teachers today find they need to muster greater resilience in order to remain in the profession.

This may be especially true for veteran teachers, such as those in this study, who have worked for years in urban schools with large populations of emergent bilinguals and other student groups that historically have produced low scores on high stakes standardized tests, scores that have had a substantial effect (35%) on the teachers’ annual evaluations as well as on their schools’ A-F letter grade (90%). The fact that increasing numbers of veteran teachers since 2002 have ultimately given up—as evidenced by the aforementioned increased rates of veteran teacher attrition—may indicate that the newer “reform” stressors are breaking teachers’ resilience in ways previous stressors did not. Ultimately, the relationship between recent “reforms” and teacher resilience is a topic that needs further research.

**Teacher Resistance**

**Resistance defined.** Whereas *resilience* can be defined as coping with, overcoming, adapting to, and recovering from adversity, regaining one’s strength and spirit in the face of adversity, or staying the course despite encountering seemingly insurmountable obstacles and challenges, *resistance* consists of “the refusal to accept or comply with something; the attempt to prevent something by action or argument” (*The New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2018, online version 2.3.0). And whereas *resilience* consists of discovering or developing ways to *survive* adversity, *resistance* involves taking concrete steps to *confront* adversity, *resist* its various manifestations and, as de Oliveira and Athanases (2011) assert, *propose and build alternatives to it*. Additionally, I propose that any act of resistance be accompanied by some *risk to the resistor*. This definitively distinguishes resistance from resilience, as the latter is generally more averse to risk, whereas the former is more prone to it.
According to this definition, a teacher who informs the school principal she is refusing to administer the state mandated standardized tests and instead requires her students to create performance-based portfolios, is an example of resistance. She confronts, rejects, replaces, and, in so doing, incurs risk, in this case, a reprimand or even loss of employment. Alternatively, a teacher who, in direct opposition to state law, refuses to stand and recite the pledge of allegiance to the flag, but who does so inconspicuously and without alerting the state’s agent (i.e., the school principal), may be demonstrating resilience, not resistance, as her actions correspond more closely to the exercise of coping skills (resilience) than to confrontation, rejection, and replacement (resistance).

Types of resistance. I have identified four substages within the resistance literature: resistance as a problem, resistance as a symptom of institutional weaknesses, resistance as a legitimate strategy for positive change, and resistance as transformational change. In general, my discussion of the literature is limited to these substages. However, I believe it is important to keep in mind an underlying structure that is rarely apparent or made explicit by researchers, but which is nonetheless instructive, especially in light of the current state of affairs regarding education policy in the United States and teachers’ responses to it. This structure consists of four types of resistance: individual versus collective, and internal versus external. For the purposes of this study, individual resistance involves a single teacher acting largely alone, whereas collective resistance involves a group of teachers acting together. Likewise, internal resistance is defined as occurring inside the school, whereas external resistance occurs outside the school.

These four types of resistance can be further combined into four basic pairs: A) individual-internal, B) collective-internal, C) individual-external, and D) collective-external.
The derivation of the four pairs is demonstrated in Table 1. An example of A might be a teacher resisting a policy or a mandate on her own and within her own school. If her colleagues later joined her in this endeavor, their collective efforts might be defined as B. If the same teacher undertook actions of resistance outside the school—e.g., at a school board meeting or through a social medium—she might be said as participating in C. Finally, if she were to join with colleagues locally, statewide, or otherwise in acts of resistance to education policy, those acts might be defined as D. This A-B-C-D meta-structure should be borne in mind while considering the discussion of resistance that follows.

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Table 1. The four basic combinations of teacher resistance.

Resistance as a problem. The first substage of resistance is articulated by Knight (2009), who considers teacher resistance a problem to be overcome, accommodated, diverted, or preempted by what he refers to as “change agents,” or administrators, policy makers, and other proponents or implementors of education “reforms.” In fact, the very title of the article characterizes teacher resistance as a problem: “What Can We Do About Teacher Resistance?” At the outset, the author states, “Rather than blame teachers and ask, ‘Why do teachers resist?’ perhaps those of us who lead change should ask, ‘What can we do to make it easier for teachers to implement new practices?’” (p. 508). Here, resistance is clearly perceived as an obstacle to the implementation of the change agents’ “new practices.”

In an attempt to answer this question, Knight poses six additional questions, the answers to which would ostensibly help “change agents” deal with initial teacher resistance,
which would in turn pave the way for the successful implementation of the agents’ proposed teaching practices: 1) Are the teaching practices powerful? 2) Are the teaching practices easy to implement? 3) Do teachers have the opportunity to experience the proposed practices? 4) Are teachers treated with respect? 5) Are teachers doing the thinking? 6) What has happened in the past? He concludes with a list of eight suggestions which, theoretically at least, would reduce or preempt teacher resistance and establish a context in which teachers would be more likely to implement various elements of “reform.” Among the suggestions: a) provide quality coaching, b) obtain commitment by offering teachers choices and valuing their voices, c) align activities to professional development, and d) increase relational trust.

Knight ultimately condemns the practice of “attempt, attack, abandon” that often greets new initiatives when introduced within a school or district. He believes that if “change agents” can more carefully anticipate and plan for those elements of initiatives teachers may resist, they are more likely to gain teachers’ trust and cooperation with respect to the implementation of these initiatives.

**Resistance as an indication of institutional weaknesses.** Gitlin and Margonis (1995) take a slightly different approach to resistance. In an article entitled “The Political Aspect of Reform: Teacher Resistance as Good Sense,” the authors identify two waves of what they refer to as “school change” literature. The first wave strives to overcome teacher resistance by bringing in outside consultants to facilitate and even force the change, which is defined as state- and federal-sponsored “school change” proposals. The second wave focuses on how school culture can enable or limit school change. Though the two waves are different in some respects, both operate on the following assumptions: a) that school change originates outside the school; b) that school change is inevitable; c) that school change is in
all cases good; d) that implementation of change—not the change itself—is the problem; e) that teacher resistance to change is the main obstacle to implementation; and f) that overcoming teacher resistance through teacher “education” and engagement is the key to successful implementation and change. Ultimately, both waves cast teacher resistance as a problem to be solved and suggest various solutions to that problem.

The authors distinguish themselves from Knight (2009), however, by arguing, first, that there is a lot of good sense embodied in teacher resistance and, second, that “reformers” ignore that good sense at their peril. They assert that those who design the “reforms” are largely unaware of the many changes in the classroom to which teachers object—but, nevertheless, will be asked to make—so that the “reforms” are fully implemented. The authors state with confidence that teachers will likely resist all changes that leave them with less control over the classroom. In other words, if teachers object to the changes they are being forced to make in order to accommodate “reforms,” it will not matter whether or not they approve of the “reforms.” The changes are not worth it.

Furthermore, Gitlin and Margonis (1995) challenge the notion put forth by first wave authors that school change can occur without changes to the hierarchical structure of schools and school systems. Instead, the authors articulate a second substage of teacher resistance: that resistance is often a symptom of institutional or hierarchical weaknesses. Additionally, they question the effectiveness of site-based collaboration, referring to it as “contrived collegiality” where promises of greater teacher authority amount to a ruse to get teachers to comply with and implement “reforms.” Despite a more sympathetic understanding of the nature of teacher resistance, however, Gitlin and Margonis essentially agree with Knight’s assumption that “school change” and teacher resistance to it are inevitable; the difference lies
in their belief that teacher resistance is legitimate and therefore should be taken more seriously by “agents of change.”

**Resistance as a legitimate strategy for positive change.** Resistance becomes less a reaction to outside forces and more a legitimate strategy for positive change in Kanpol’s (1991) collective case study and ethnography of “Hillview” Middle School. He defines two types of teacher resistance within schools, both of which are highly political. The first is resistance to cultural practices outside the school. These practices include sexism, racism, interpersonal competition, and so on. Through emancipatory critique, the teacher engages students in challenging many of the cultural practices acquired in the broader cultural context that surrounds the school and subsequently incorporated into the classroom culture. The second is resistance to institutional practices specific to the school: for example, not standing outside one’s classroom door at an appointed time, having class parties despite the school’s class party prohibition, or not showing up on time to meetings that are considered a waste of time. In both cases, teacher resistance centers on what teachers consider to be oppressive practices, inside and outside the school.

But the author eventually moves beyond resistance as a problem to resistance as a legitimate strategy for teachers to actually prevent the continuation or implementation of policies and practices they deem unproductive and even harmful to the learning process. Although Kanpol (1991) recognizes and appreciates the power of the autonomously resistant teacher, he concludes that it is only when teacher autonomy evolves into teacher alliances—a process he refers to as “intersubjectivity”—that teacher resistance can lead to substantive and lasting change. This evolution is possible only when teachers realize that the interests of the group have become more important than the interests of the individual. Kanpol suggests that
The evolution of intersubjectively will occur when teachers interact on a consistent basis. Only then will they be able to understand that it is not only the individual teacher who is being deskillled and de-intellectualized by powerful forces inside and outside the school, but teachers everywhere.

Resistance as transformational change. The next form of resistance is that which is not only resistant, but transformational. Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) define “transformational” as conditions where the individual sustains both of Henry Giroux’s criteria for resistance: “some level of awareness and critique of her or his oppressive conditions and structures of domination and must be at least somewhat motivated by a sense of social justice” (p. 319). While in this case the authors are referring to resistance among high school students, I believe the same notion of transformational resistance can be applied to teachers who are, after all, responding to many of the same pressures, oppressions, and surveillance as their students.

Transformational resistance in teachers is exemplified by “Ms. Hall,” the subject of Vassallo’s (2013) case study of resistance in secondary teachers. In this study the author details the ways in which Ms. Hall resists and rejects the imposition of a pedagogy—Self-Regulated Learning, or SRL—she believes promotes a host of neoliberal values and practices, the foremost of which is the prioritization of the individual over the group. Ms. Hall’s resistance to the new pedagogy, however, is not limited to her objections to the fact that the pedagogy is often just another top-down initiative that neither teachers, students, nor parents requested, or that the new program will create more work for teachers, or that she and her colleagues are being held strictly accountable for its implementation. She resists and rejects SRL because she believes it promotes values that infringe on her efforts to foster more
powerful and substantive social relationships in her students, more focused critical thought and action, and strategies oriented toward issues of social justice. Ms. Hall cites the likes of Freire, Bourdieu, Marx, Gramsci, and Foucault to articulate her resistance to and rejection of the neoliberal pedagogy. Vassallo’s research demonstrates the ways in which Ms. Hall is acutely aware of the oppressive conditions and structures to which she and her students are subjected and the sense of social justice that pervades her teaching. She strives to channel her students’ and her own awareness of oppression and motivation for social justice towards new realities that are simultaneously liberating, transformative, and resistant to future oppressions. Ms. Hall closely approximates Solórzano and Delgado Bernal’s definition of “transformational.”

She is not alone. The successful student and teacher boycott of Washington’s standardized Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) exam at Seattle’s Garfield High (Hagopian, 2013), the successful teacher resistance to excessive testing and to the practice of state sanctioned school letter grade shaming at “High Desert” Elementary school in Albuquerque, New Mexico (Crawford-Garret, Sánchez, Tyson, Pérez, & Short, 2016), plus examples of resistance across the country recounted by Compton and Weiner (2008) and Schniedewind and Sapon-Shevin (2012), are but some examples of how teachers have persevered beyond resilience to transformational resistance, which may have led, at least so far, to successful auto-retention among participating teachers.

Critique of the Literature on Resistance

Vassallo’s (2013) case study of Ms. Hall falls fully within the bounds of relevant literature on teacher resistance, as it addresses quite directly the intersection of resistance and “reform.” The same is true of teachers and groups described by Hagopian (2013), Crawford-
Garret et al. (2016), Compton and Weiner (2008), Schniedewind and Sapon-Shevin (2012), and others. Other literature is more dated, but still relevant in theoretical terms. Though Kanpol was writing in 1991, his observations on teacher resistance to cultural practices outside the school and institutional practices inside of school, could be applied easily in many school settings today. What is lacking, however, are studies involving resistance to the flood of binding “reforms” introduced in 2002 with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and continuing today. Gitlin and Margonis (1995) seem to foreshadow some ways in which schools will respond to teacher resistance after the passage of NCLB eight years later. Knight (2009) offers a prescription for schools, districts, and states to follow in order to dispense with teacher resistance as effectively as possible so that the “reform” movement can continue unimpeded. Literature of this genre does little to explain or contextualize the teachers involved in this study. Finally, as I discuss above, I would welcome more literature that takes into consideration the nuances of the various definitions of resistance: internal, individual, external, and collective.

**Teacher Advocacy**

**Advocacy defined.** “Advocacy” is, at least superficially, a relatively well defined and unambiguous word. It is derived from the Latin verb *advocare*, or “call to one’s aid.” It is manifested in the Romance languages variously as *avocat*, *abogado*, *advogado*: French, Spanish, and Portuguese for “attorney, or representative of others who cannot represent themselves, and involves taking actions on their behalf” (Athanases & de Oliveira, 2007, p. 124). When modified by “teacher,” however, the term “advocacy” becomes more ambiguous. On the one hand, the term “teacher advocacy” can be interpreted as teachers (or others) acting *on behalf of teachers*. On the other hand, the term could be interpreted as
teachers acting on behalf of others, namely, their students, the parents of their students, or the communities to which their students and their parents belong. It is this latter interpretation of teacher advocacy that is relevant to this study and operative in the published research I reviewed. Although definitions of this second interpretation of teacher advocacy abound, I found the following definition both the most encompassing and succinct: teachers “acting proactively on behalf of students to ensure that they are treated equitably and have access to needed resources” (Haneda & Alexander, 2015, p. 152). This definition is broad enough to include various and diverse forms of teacher advocacy, as I discuss below, but precise enough so as to minimize definitional ambiguity.

The genesis and evolution of teacher advocacy. Life experiences, such as family composition and dynamics or memorable childhood events, are often instrumental in teachers’ decisions not only to teach, but to advocate for their students once they become teachers (Collay, 2010; Cahnmann & Varghese, 2005; Mawhinney, Rinke, & Park, 2012). This is especially true for teachers of color from marginalized communities who seek formal education outside their communities. Through their education in elite centers of education (i.e., colleges and universities), they often gain an acute awareness of the fact that the course of their lives represents an anomaly compared to the majority of their classmates. They become aware of turning points in their lives that later led to advocacy. Their education may also imbue them with a sense of responsibility to “carry the water back” (Collay, 2010, p. 230) from their hard-won education to the communities from which they emerged, or to similar communities. Life experiences, combined with the obligation to use their education to advocate for students and their communities, can culminate in a lifelong commitment to teaching that is centered on advocacy inside and outside the classroom (Collay, 2010).
The life experiences of white teachers, too, can be instrumental in their decisions to become not just teachers, but teacher-advocates. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2005) present Anna, a white early childhood educator, whose childhood experiences and trauma, though not race related, were instrumental in her decision to be a teacher-advocate. Because, as an adult, Anna was able to recognize that her trauma was linked to failures in various social and bureaucratic systems, she was able to detect lies in those and other systems when similar failures posed potential or actual threats to her students. She stated that, because her childhood experiences so closely resembled those of her students, traumas and all, the link between teacher and students was all the stronger and her advocacy all the more effective. Anna concluded that teachers, regardless of their personal identities, who have experienced the challenges their students are confronting outside the classroom, are more likely to examine their work in the context of social political forces and, therefore, more likely to act as much as advocates as they do as teachers.

When white teachers engage with students of color, they can be advocates. Delpit (2012) and others have written about the ways in which white teachers can be effective when teaching “other people’s children” (see also: Howard, 1999; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2015; White, 2012). Though they do not experience the world as teachers of color, they are nonetheless capable of increasing their awareness of others’ experiences with the world through family, friends, or education work in communities of color, which can, in turn, sensitize them to the lives of their students. In Anna’s case, this awareness began through experiences that involved her adopted son, who is African American, and extended through other salient relationships and experiences in her life. And though the nature of the advocacy undertaken by teachers of color and white teachers can be quite different—the
former primarily as individual and collective role models in and out of the classroom, and the latter as individuals focused on curricular-centered actions and results within classrooms (Mawhinney et al., 2012)—teachers of all identities from myriad backgrounds are capable of becoming teacher-advocates, given adequate self-awareness that enlightens them and ultimately connects them to the lives of their students.

**Characteristics of teacher advocacy.** Advocacy among teachers can take a variety of forms. Several researchers take a three-pronged approach to teacher advocacy. Peters and Reid (2009) assert that teacher advocacy is a combination of what they term “Disturbing Knowledge” (challenging the paradigm of positivist knowledge), “Transforming Practice” (relative to hegemonic ideologies), and “Exercising Power” (their own as well as that of their students). When these areas are addressed, either in teacher education programs or after teachers have officially entered the profession, teachers are better prepared to act “individually and collectively to effect social justice through equity in teaching and learning in schools” (p. 556), i.e., to advocate.

Picower (2012) proposes a different three-pronged approach. She suggests teachers can advocate successfully and effectively by “Reconciling the Vision” of social justice education, “Moving Toward Liberation” through the implementation of culturally relevant curricula, and “Standing Up to Oppression” through individual or collective action outside the school. She cautions, however, that if “Standing Up to Oppression” is not implemented, “Reconciling the Vision” and “Moving Toward Liberation” cannot be fully realized.

A three-pronged approach to teacher advocacy is also adopted by Athanases and de Oliveira (2007). They define the foundations of advocacy as a) considering all aspects of school as problematic rather than given, b) learning to locate expertise in oneself, and c)
being able to envision how schools can foster the equitable and fair treatment of students in order to effectively meet all students’ needs. Like Picower (2012), the authors suggest that the elements of teacher advocacy they define must culminate in acting on behalf of students, either inside or outside the school, in order to effectively address the underlying sources of the inequitable treatment experienced by students.

**Forms of teacher advocacy.** Regardless of what one considers the essential characteristics of teacher advocacy, the forms it takes are varied. Much like teacher resistance to education reform, teacher advocacy can occur both inside and outside the school (Dubetz & de Jong, 2011; Haneda & Alexander, 2015). Internal advocacy can include creating and maintaining a physically, culturally, intellectually safe and sensitive environment, responding in class to sociopolitical issues students encounter outside of class, and diversifying and tailoring instruction to the linguistic needs of students (de Oliveira & Athanases, 2007), which often includes the teacher’s use of her students’ home languages (Dubetz & de Jong, 2011). Internal teacher advocacy can also include responding positively and productively to students’ immigrant experiences, assuring students have access to resources unique to their educational needs, helping students overcome the various social inequities maintained by mainstream schools, and assuring the implementation of culturally sensitive and relevant curricula (Dubetz & de Jong, 2011). Finally, internal advocacy often takes the form of educating the school’s “positional” leaders (e.g., instructional coaches, specialists, administrators) as to the needs of one’s students and how best the school can meet those needs (Collay, 2010), as well as supporting programs that target the needs of disadvantaged students and mentoring teachers new to such programs (Dubetz & de Jong, 2011).
While there seems to be broad agreement among researchers concerning the need for and the existence and effectiveness of internal advocacy, there is less agreement concerning external advocacy. In fact, Linville (2016) prioritizes advocacy in the classroom and within the school over advocacy outside the school. Dubetz & de Jong (2011) suggest that, though the general public and policy makers may assume teacher advocacy takes place primarily in formal political arenas, most educators recognize this is not the case. Teachers tend to advocate in spheres where they feel most comfortable, i.e., their schools and their classrooms. When they do advocate in more formalized spheres, it is important teachers articulate clearly their critiques of oppressive forces and propose alternatives that are politically and bureaucratically feasible (de Oliveira & Athanases, 2007). Outside the more formalized political arenas, external advocacy often takes the form of home-to-school advocacy, where teachers serve as cultural and linguistic arbitrators between the home, the school, and the various systems and bureaucracies in which immigrant and marginalized populations must learn to navigate (Dubetz & de Jong, 2011). In situations where the teacher is also a community member, external advocacy can include involvement in any number of community organizations and activities oriented toward student empowerment and educational equity.

Individual and collective advocacy represent another way in which teacher advocacy can be interpreted. Even though teacher advocacy is often individual in nature, the general public and policy makers tend to perceive it and define it almost exclusively as a collective effort (Dubetz & de Jong, 2011). This may be due in part to the fact that collective advocacy, such as union-sponsored protests and strikes, is often carried out in public spheres, whereas individual advocacy occurs more often in schools and classrooms, out of view of
public view. In fact, if it is true that teachers tend to advocate in spheres where they feel most comfortable, it is logical the bulk of teacher advocacy would take place in the “comfort” of classrooms where the teacher is largely on her own. Cahnmann and Varghese (2005) caution that the combination of fighting battles on behalf of students both as an individual (primarily inside the school) and as a group member (primarily outside the school) carries with it a greater potential for burnout than were a teacher to battle in only one sphere or in no sphere at all.

A third and final perspective on teacher advocacy can be characterized as advocacy that occurs among new teachers versus advocacy among veteran teachers. Perhaps unsurprisingly, new teachers often find it challenging to advocate for their students. Advocacy often challenges institutional or administrative norms, requirements, and expectations. This, coupled with the probationary period usually imposed on new teachers, often results in greater employment vulnerability, which, in turn, reduces the likelihood new teachers will take on the risks inherent in advocacy (de Oliveira & Athanases, 2007).

Veteran teachers, on the other hand, may have more experience with advocacy, both effective and ineffective. Consequently, they are more likely to be in a position—indeed, under an obligation—to share their experience with new teachers as well as with “positional” leaders within the school. And because of the fact that they are no longer in probationary employment, have accumulated years of experience, and perhaps have earned positive reputations within the school and its community, their advocacy, be it individual or collective, in school or out of school, has the potential to establish standards for others to emulate.
Critique of the Literature on Teacher Advocacy

The evidence in the literature that links teachers’ awareness of challenges in their own lives, challenges in the lives of their students, and becoming a teacher-advocate, is abundant. Less so is the evidence regarding the catalysts, motivations, and opportunities for action. For example, two teachers might possess similar identities and life experiences. The first, a veteran teacher, might be able to leverage her seniority, experience, and knowledge to act relatively risk free on behalf of her students. The other, a new teacher, for reasons of probationary employment, lack of time, or political concerns, might not. And there are other factors, such as the personality, political orientation, and exertion of power of the school principal or the degree of racial or linguistic correspondence between a teacher and her students.

Further, what exactly is the nature of teacher advocacy? Is it acting out of a benevolent cultural deficit perspective (e.g., the white “savior” working in marginalized communities), or sincere and authentic advocacy undertaken from a well-grounded social justice perspective (Haneda & Alexander, 2015)? Does this distinction matter if the ultimate goals are the same?

Dubetz and de Jong (2011) ask the following questions about advocacy work: Does advocacy vary from teacher to teacher, regardless of their personal or professional profiles? Does advocacy change over time, depending on contextual factors as well as changes in teacher knowledge and practice? Does advocacy work undertaken by new teachers look different than that undertaken by experienced teachers? Does “going to battle” multiple times hone a teacher’s advocacy skills, or lead to battle fatigue and discouragement? What are key differences in strategy and effectiveness between individual and collective advocacy?
This study does not purport to answer these questions, as teacher advocacy is not its central focus. However, these are areas I believe need more attention by researchers, especially in light of the increases nationally in the percentages of public school students of color from marginalized communities whose education is occurring during an extended period of “reform,” the likes of which may be causing them varying degrees of irreparable harm.
Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

I have situated this study of veteran dual-language teachers within the framework of Critical Theory. I have done so because I believe Critical Theory recognizes and helps to explain teachers’ critical consciousness and, ultimately, their agency in the context of U.S. public education in the first two decades of the 21st Century. These decades have been largely defined by increased corporatization, privatization, and politicization of public education, forces many believe owe much of their success to the marginalization and de-professionalization of teachers (Milner, 2013). I believe the political and corporate powers that have fueled this movement, known collectively as the Global Education Reform Movement, or GERM (Sahlberg, 2012), find their efforts are better served by compliant “workers” than by critical professionals, for there may be no greater threat to the implementation of these “reforms” than critical thought and action on the part of those ultimately responsible for implementing them. While some teachers may have become resigned to the GERM and even unwitting agents of it, others have found ways to withstand or resist it. I believe the degree to which teachers have succeeded in withstanding and resisting the GERM has been due in no small part to their ability to critically examine and challenge the motives and actions of the “reformers,” both within the contexts of the classroom and the school as well as within the larger social, political, and professional spheres in which their schools function. Critical Theory provides a framework for understanding this process.

It has been my personal experience that there is no universal agreement among
qualitative researchers as to the explicit inclusion of theoretical frameworks in their work. Some argue that such frameworks can limit and constrain the research, the researcher, and the readers of the research, as much as they support it. Nevertheless, such frameworks can be useful in the ways they help contextualize the research, position the researcher, and provide a theoretical rationale for the interpretation of the data and the findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Furthermore, I am aware of the reputation classical Critical Theory has gained over time. From the perspective of the early 21st century, it can be considered quaint, antiquated, rigid, and static. Moreover, it is dominated by white, privileged men. This reputation partially explains the subsequent development of Feminist Theory, Critical Race Theory, LatCrit Theory, Post-colonialism, Post-structuralism, Postmodernism, Queer Theory, Gender Identity Theory, and others as responses to the real or perceived shortcomings of Critical Theory. I appreciate and agree with many of the critiques of Critical Theory and welcome the ways in which related theories have made the general theory more universal, versatile, and inclusive.

Nonetheless, I believe no theory addresses or frames the issues involved in the current research more effectively than Critical Theory. If that were not the case, a well-developed Critical Education Theory would exist. Such a theory indeed may be in development, as scholars and others respond to the so-called education “reforms” of the last several decades. In the meantime, I believe Critical Theory is best suited for facilitating an understanding of teachers as professionals, their relationship to their work, and the ways in which teachers interact with and respond to those who attempt to supervise them and control what they do.
In the sections that follow, I offer a brief history of Critical Theory and its modern derivations. I follow with an explanation of Critical Theory as concerns U.S. public education and, specifically, teachers. I continue with a discussion of how Critical Theory applies to this study.

**Critical Theory**

The origins of Critical Theory can be found in the establishment of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfort, Germany, in February 1923 (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990; Giroux, 2001; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). The Institute was founded by Felix Weil, a wealthy grain merchant. In 1930, Max Horkheimer became the Institute’s director. It was under his leadership that the now famous critical theorists Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and eventually Jürgens Habermas, joined the institute. These theorists, and the Institute to which they belonged, eventually became known as the Frankfort School.

Critical Theory at the Frankfort School was developed largely as a response to the perceived failure of facets of orthodox Marxism. The members of the Frankfort School considered the rigid theoretical doctrines and historical perspectives of Marxist theory overly objective, scientific, positivistic, and rational. They believed Marxist thought had generally failed to consider important human values and aspirations such as hope, agency, autonomy, individuality, and identity (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990; Giroux, 2001). They felt the Marxist focus on generic workplace power struggles between workers and management was too narrow. They were concerned about the apparent lack of accommodation in Marxist thought for critical self-reflection, self-evaluation, or other forms of institutional, theoretical, or political consciousness. They were concerned not so much with Marxist theory, per se, but
with the fact that it had not kept pace with the changing economic, political, and social structures on which it was based (Giroux, 2001).

In contrast to Marxist theorists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the critical theorists of the Frankfort School advanced a more historical, subjective, and humanistic theoretical approach, one in which the complex and often contradictory social relationships behind the more static, material, and positivistic world of the Marxists were exposed and examined in their myriad and complex contexts (Giroux, 2001). Gone was the seemingly singular focus on the struggles between the opposing monoliths of workers and management. The critical theorists of the Frankfort School attempted to address and explain, in the specific social, cultural, economic, and political contexts of contemporary life, new forms of capitalism and the issues of domination, subordination, and emancipation associated with them (Giroux, 2001). This new approach helped create a more modern and relevant framework for investigating the wider variety of struggles and conflicts emerging in a world undergoing rapid economic, social, and political change.

**Modern Critical Theory**

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) define Modern Critical Theory as “an ethically heightened and politically reflective study of the relationships between power, knowledge, and discourse that are produced in contexts of historical and cultural struggle” (p. 47). Furthermore, Modern Critical Theory asserts that this struggle occurs between social groups and associated political organizations, the latter possessing privileges others do not. This imbalance of privilege gives rise to an imbalance of power, often political and economic in nature, which is then leveraged to establish dominance over groups with less privilege and power (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990). The objective of this dominance is the promotion of policies and
practices favorable to the interests of the privileged and powerful and harmful to the interests of others.

Modern critical theorists recognize, however, that the subjugation of one group by another does not occur in a vacuum. They acknowledge that, in response to the exertion of dominance, subjugated groups have developed strategies that help them challenge and ultimately overcome the forces that seek to dominate or marginalize them. To this end, these groups often engage in intensive critical reflection within the social, economic, and political spheres in which they live and act (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990). In this way, they acquire the knowledge and historical perspective they need to evaluate the nature of the imbalances in privilege and power, devise effective responses to them, and, ultimately, transform and overcome them.

This is, however, no easy task, as dominant groups have largely succeeded in normalizing and institutionalizing these imbalances. Gramsci argued that the emancipatory options of subjugated groups are limited due to the pervasiveness of dominant ideologies and practices oriented insidiously toward securing the consent and complicity of others, a phenomenon he referred to as hegemony (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Moreover, as subjugated groups negotiate their independence or emancipation, the imbalances of privilege and power between dominant and subjugated groups are such that the latter often run the risk of excessive compromise, which may result in facilitating the very social, political, and economic practices they oppose. Consequently, much of what might be gained as a result of this negotiation may be limited, muted, or temporary. Modern Critical Theory does not preclude the attainment of emancipation, nor does it assure the futility of resistance to dominant powers. It does, however, admonish subjugated groups to be wise to the ways of
the privileged and powerful and to challenge and attempt to transform what may be perceived as the “normal,” “natural,” “common sense,” or “benevolent” practices and ideologies of dominant groups (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

**Critical Theory and Education**

Much of Critical Theory, as applied to education, has been focused on the lives of students and based on the notion that the social, economic, and political inequalities, conflicts, and struggles that affect students in schools largely correspond to those of the wider society (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 1983). Furthermore, due to their origins in the centers of social, economic, and political power of the mid 19th century, public schools historically have been characterized as sites where these inequalities remain largely unaddressed and uncontested and are, consequently, reproduced (Bourdieu, 1977). Implicit in much of this line of reasoning, at least in the past, has been the role of the teacher as an unwitting or passive agent of these reproductive forces. Accordingly, some theorists and educators have concluded that only by abolishing public schools altogether can we prevent schools and teachers from reproducing the social, economic, and political inequalities that pervade the contexts in which they operate (Giroux, 1986).

There is, perhaps, a more optimistic approach to this reality, one that casts students as more than victims and teachers as more than unwitting agents of the social, economic, and political inequalities inside and outside of schools. That approach, of course, is one of human agency, or the notion that students and teachers do not simply act and react within the pre-existing and sometimes oppressive social, economic, and political contexts in which they find themselves. Rather, through critical reflection and action, they develop command of their respective and collective destinies in order to challenge and transform these contexts.
from what many groups perceive as engines of domination and reproduction into arenas of possibility, empowerment, and emancipation (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990; Giroux, 1986; Giroux, 1983). Instead of abolishing public education, this approach encourages teachers and students to challenge and transform it.

The recent history of Critical Theory as applied to education might be best characterized by what I believe may be an unnecessary schism between macrostructural and microstructural approaches to understanding the relationships between schools and society (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990). The former is generally represented by social reproduction theory and the latter by interpretive theory. While both are critical in nature, reproduction theory assumes a macro-level approach to schools that focuses on how states and districts promote school cultures and practices that perpetuate the inequalities and imbalances of power of the societies in which they are located. Interpretative theory, on the other hand, assumes a micro-level approach to schools that focuses on the minutiae of school and classroom life and the interpretation of it within a critical framework. Though greatly simplified, Figure A demonstrates the demarcation between the macrostructural and microstructural perspectives of U.S. public schools.

American critical theorists Michael Apple (1978) and Henry Giroux (1986) have
asserted, however, that neither theory alone can fully explain the relationship between schools and society. They believe that Critical Theory must proceed at both the macro and micro levels in order to provide a comprehensive perspective on education in the 21st century. In fact, Apple goes so far as establishing a sequence concerning the investigation of the macro and micro levels. He suggests we first understand what is happening inside schools on a micro level before we can understand what is happening outside schools on a macro level; that is, the cultural practices of the classroom must be investigated before larger societal, political, and economic frameworks can be meaningfully applied.

**Critical Theory and Teachers**

The perils of employing only one of the aforementioned theoretical lenses over another are evident when we address teachers specifically. When a macro lens alone is applied, as in social reproductive theory, one runs the risk of casting teacher as mere extensions or agents of the state and, as such, are instrumental in the reproduction of pre-existing social, economic, and political inequities outside schools. After all, teachers are charged with implementing the state’s standards and curricula, administering the state’s high stakes standardized tests, filling out the state’s report cards, enforcing state law regarding student discipline and special education, and so on. (This is not to mention other important macrostructural influences teachers may introduce into the classroom, such as biases and practices associated with race, class, economic status, and languages.)

Following this line of reasoning, we might conclude that students alone suffer the effects of potentially harmful extra-scholastic policies and practices imposed upon, accepted by, or reproduced by schools. However, due to the conflation of the contractual obligations of teachers with the political and institutional interests of the state, the ways in which the
same policies and practices may also affect teachers—though in different ways and to different degrees—may be all but indiscernible from a macrostructural perspective. Indiscernible, however, does not mean non-existent, and this fact serves to elevate the importance of taking a bi-structural approach when investigating the work of teachers in schools.

More importantly, however, the application of a macrostructural view alone could result in a failure to recognize the ability of teachers, as individuals or as willing group members, to engage in critical reflection and action. Because it sometimes employs a distant, generic, and top-down view of school structures, functions, and populations, a macrostructural view risks casting teachers as a monolithic group that denies them individual or collective agency, independent of their contractual roles as state actors. In other words, the macrostructural view can be relatively blind to the microstructural contexts in which teacher agency arises. This is the essence of Giroux’s (1983) critique of both Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of social reproduction and Bowles and Gintis’ (1976) correspondence theory, which are macro-level views of the relationship between schools and society. While teachers may sometimes function as cogs in institutional machinery that is designed to protect powerful social, economic, and political interests, such positioning does not necessarily preclude teachers’ willingness and ability to engage in critical thought, reflection, and action opposed to those interests. A teacher can be perceived as a compliant state agent one day, a formidable adversary the next.

The pitfalls of a monostructural approach to the study of teachers in schools holds true at the micro level, too. Were we to use only a microstructural approach to classrooms and teachers, we might run the risk of interpreting our observations in a social, political, and
economic vacuum, devoid of essential context. Classrooms are subdivisions of schools, schools belong to school districts, and school districts are part of state governments. State governments consist of elected and appointed officials whose affiliations with myriad political, economic, and sociocultural constituencies influence decisions they make regarding public education. To focus solely on teachers in classrooms, without considering the broader contexts in which they practice, risks painting an incomplete portrait of what teachers think, say, and do—and why.

Returning to Apple’s (1978) sequential approach, if we focus first on the micro-level dynamics of classrooms, we are more likely to perceive and appreciate teachers as unique, complex, independent agents, who sometimes think, speak, and act autonomously, sometimes not, and sometimes both. Likewise, if we investigate teachers before the larger structures in which they practice, we are less likely to essentialize them, to perceive them only as necessary components of a monolithic organism, and thereby deprive them of agency. By first recognizing teachers as individuals (or willing group members), we are more likely to continue perceiving them as such when subsequently applying a macrostructural lens to their work.

Another rationale for prioritizing the microstructural contexts in which teachers work involves the very ways in which we go about understanding the surrounding macrostructural contexts. Researchers may be more likely to discover and understand macrostructural influences on schools by asking teachers about them than we are to discover and understand the microstructural realities of teachers’ practices by interrogating macro agents such as administrators, politicians, and CEOs. As in many situations that involve institutional
imbalances of power, those with less power often possess more insights into the mechanisms and effects of power than do those who possess and wield the power.

Finally, the schism between the micro and macrostructural approaches seems somewhat outdated today. I know of few contemporary social researchers or educators who study the work of teachers without also applying a comprehensive understanding of the larger social, political, and economic spheres in which teachers work. In fact, these spheres are often as much a focus of these researchers’ work as are the teachers they study. The inextricable link between the macro and microstructural perspectives on the work of teachers is especially evident in important branches of Critical Theory—e.g., Critical Race Theory, Critical Feminist Theory, and LatCrit Theory—where researchers simultaneously consider what teachers think, say, and do in classrooms relative to the broader social, political, and economic contexts in which they function. In a word, many of today’s researchers and theorists understand that teaching does not occur in a social, political, or economic vacuum and, therefore, should not be studied and interpreted in one.

Critical Theory and This Study

This study is about four veteran dual-language teachers—Fatima, Julie, Selene, and Theo—three women and one man, and their relationships to local and national education “reforms” with which, as part of contractual agreements, they are expected to comply, but against which they have many grievances. Such grievances have led to the self-initiated departures of increasing numbers of their colleagues. Nonetheless, these four teachers, along with some others, remain active as classrooms teachers. The objective of this study is to investigate why and how they manage to remain.

At the macrostructural level of the state and district in which they teach, these
teachers may appear somewhat two-dimensional: employees tasked only with the implementation of approved curricula, policy, and practices. At the microstructural level, however, one that begins at their respective schools and classrooms and extends into their personal lives beyond, we begin to consider them in a more holistic and humanistic way. At this micro level, we are able to appreciate them as complex individuals and global citizens who possess unique and complex histories and identities. At this level, we are better able to appreciate their engagement in all manner of cultural, political, and economic activities outside their classrooms. As a result, we can better understand how they develop multiple critical lenses through which they interpret their experiences while engaging in these cultural, political, and economic activities.

Equally important is the recognition that teachers as public employees, on the one hand, and teachers as private citizens, on the other, are not mutually exclusive roles or identities. One is never a teacher and not a citizen, or vice versa. Rather, one is a citizen-teacher who does not shed one’s personal or professional identities by entering or exiting the schoolhouse gate.10 Similarly, the critical lenses teachers employ to interpret their lives as private citizens or as teachers are not deactivated upon arriving at home or at school. Once cultivated, critical lenses can be employed regardless of what specific role or identity a teacher emphasizes at any given time.

Modern Critical Theory as applied to this study would require we recognize teachers as holistic beings who combine their private and professional experiences and their formal and informal knowledge of history, politics, education, and social relationships to develop

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10 Here I acknowledge the well-known Tinker v. Des Moines Supreme Court decision of 1969, in which Justice William O. Douglas stated, “students do not shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.”
lenses for the critical evaluation and interpretation of the barrage of mandates they have experienced in the current era of “reform.” To that end, I have included in-depth investigations, descriptions, analyses, and interpretations of the teacher participants as whole persons, from childhood to adulthood, and the complex characteristics that make up the citizen-teacher. I have attempted to recognize the teachers’ roles and identities as publicly contracted employees, while simultaneously appreciating their private lives as citizens. Above all, I have strived to recognize teachers not simply as sources of data or bricks in a theoretical construct, but as complex humans, concerned citizens, and critically minded educators.

Finally, I believe it is important to note that one salient characteristic of Modern Critical Theory is its insistence on the inclusion of an ongoing and self-conscious self-critique (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). That is, in addition to conducting critical examinations of the social and material worlds around them, critical researchers must also direct their critical lens toward all facets of their own work. I believe this process is evident in the critical perspective I take relative to my participation in this study. I have included positionality statements concerning my personal and professional lives, explicit statements of beliefs and assumptions that may be considered biases, and a discussion of my status as an insider and an outsider in an effort to enhance the transparency and critical nature of the study.

**Conclusion**

In the letter of invitation I sent to a small group of potential participants, I stated as one of the criteria for participation an “interest in expressing [your] feelings and perceptions regarding the content of my primary research question.” The four teachers who ultimately
agreed to participate in this research did so in part because they felt they were indeed continuing to teach despite these “reforms.” In fact, all four had communicated to me a history of confronting the negative impacts these “reforms” had on their students, their schools, and themselves and working inside their classrooms and their schools to either eliminate or reduce these negative impacts.

Adopting a critical perspective on their work as educators aligns them squarely with the long history of like-minded teachers who have thought and acted critically as they undertook the various practices associated with their profession. When the work of such teachers becomes the focus of research, it requires equally critical researchers who employ critical research methods that explore the work of teachers in light of the volatile political contexts in which they practice. This involves elevating their histories, identities, and voices so their work, philosophies, activism, and advocacy can be appreciated, validated, and critiqued. The work of critical education researchers therefore benefits from a theoretical framework that recognizes the critical nature of the thoughts, words, and actions of many of today’s educators. It is within this framework I structured and conducted this study.
Chapter 4

Methodology and Methods

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, multi-case study is to explore how and why veteran dual language teachers in new national demographic (NND) urban public schools, rated “D” and “F” by the state’s Department of Education, have managed to continue teaching despite education “reform” initiatives that have contributed to the resignations or early retirements of similarly situated peers. In order to investigate this phenomenon, I conducted a qualitative, multi-case study and collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data for the study in ways consistent with qualitative research methodology. In this chapter, I discuss: a) the nature of qualitative research and its application to this study; b) the case study as the qualitative methodology; c) the participant selection process; d) the overall design of the study; e) data collection, logistics, and organization; f) data coding, analysis, and synthesis; g) issues of ethics and trustworthiness; and h) the limitations and delimitations of the study.

Qualitative Research

The research question central to this study is:

How do veteran, dual-language teachers in low-performing, Title I, new national demographic, urban, public elementary schools in the Southwest manage to continue teaching despite recent education “reform” initiatives that have contributed to accelerated rates of attrition among their peers?

Because this question addresses the qualities of the human experience, I found it logical to conduct a qualitative study, specifically, multi-case study of four veteran, dual-language teachers in an urban, public school district in the American Southwest. A qualitative orientation to research is an investigative approach that focuses on the qualities of humans
and human populations: human emotions, perceptions, beliefs, motivations, phenomena, and myriad individual and collective identities and histories (Creswell, 2007).

Essential components of qualitative research include the researcher as the primary research instrument, the maintenance of an emergent and flexible research design, and the focus on a holistic, interpretive inquiry in which the researcher’s own identities, experiences, histories, and assumptions are transparent and included in the overall interpretation of the data (Yin, 2009).

Additionally, qualitative researchers should consider questions related to the ontological, epistemological, and axiological implications of their work (Creswell, 2007), such as: What is the nature of the reality experienced by the human participants and how does it compare to that of the researcher? To what extent can and should the researcher strive to reduce the distance between him or herself and the research topic? What are the inherent values and biases the researcher brings to the research and what implications do they present for the research?

Finally, the qualitative researcher employs a rhetorical style of writing that is relatively informal and composed through the author’s own voice.

As I hope is apparent in the following sections, I attempted to stay true to the historical beliefs and practices of qualitative research as I undertook and completed various stages of this research.

**The Case Study as Research Methodology**

I selected the case study as the basis of my research because I believed it to be the research method best suited to the primary research question. Yin (2009) asserts that the more the question is designed to apply a holistic and meaningful approach to the
investigation of the how or why of a complex social phenomenon, the more a case study emerges as a relevant method. The relevance of the case study increases when the researcher determines that the research question requires the description of the phenomenon to be detailed and extensive. As the primary research question in this study addresses how and why the teacher participants manage to continue teaching despite what they conceive to be harmful “reforms,” and because thick and detailed description is necessary to explain their extensive responses, I felt the case study was the most relevant and appropriate methodological choice.

Importantly, Yin (2009) states that researchers should consider a case study approach when they determine the boundaries that separate the phenomenon from the context are not necessarily clear. In this study, separating phenomenon and context would be not only difficult, but unproductive. While one could attempt to study education “reform” policies in isolation, those policies would have little meaning if not applied to the contexts in which they are intended to operate and where they have consequences. Because I believe education “reform” policies and the contexts in which they are carried out are inextricably linked, a holistic, case study approach is appropriate and valid.

Once case study methodology has been selected, Yin (2009) suggests researchers address three important technical considerations. The first is the fact that case studies involve more variables of interest than data points. The variables in the current study are myriad. In addition to differences evident in the personal and professional histories and identities of the participants themselves, there are variables associated with the demographics of the schools and communities in which they teach, the age of their students, their years of classroom teaching experience, their experiences with various administrators, and so on.
multi-case study consists of a broad and flexible design capable of capturing and including in various and meaningful ways the many different variables the teacher participants bring with them to the research.

The second technical consideration involves the reliance on multiple sources of triangulated evidence. In this study, sources of evidence include four distinct teacher participants who teach four different grade levels in four distinct schools in different parts of the same city. They provided evidence through questionnaires, extensive interviews and focus groups, and physical artifacts. Other sources of evidence include curriculum and testing materials (and my and the participants’ experiences with them), access to government websites that stipulate national and local education “reform” policies, and direct observations of the intersection of teaching and “reforms” in my own school, in other schools, in the union hall, in meetings of a dissident union caucus, and in various online fora where teachers bear witness to the ways in which education “reforms” affect their teaching.

Finally, the case study’s theoretical framework helps guide the investigation through data collection, analysis, and interpretation. In this case, Modern Critical Theory (see Chapter 3) frames the study and, at least ideally, leads the researcher and the readers to a better understanding of the participants’ relationship to their work, as well as to the various “reforms” that often threaten to undermine it.

**Participant Selection**

**Purposeful sampling.** Purposeful (or purposive) sampling describes many sampling strategies used in qualitative research. Creswell (2007) describes purposeful sampling as the selection of “individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 125).
Miles, et al. (2014) emphasize that purposeful sampling maintains a focus on the case’s unique contexts in ways random sampling, common in quantitative research, might not. The purpose of this study is to investigate the ways certain teachers in certain contexts (or specific sites) manage to continue teaching while similarly situated peers do not. It was therefore incumbent upon me, as the researcher, to establish criteria that would help me identify teachers whose participation in my study would serve a specific purpose: to produce rich and informative data that would best address the research question. This process is known as criterion sampling.

**Criterion sampling.** Criterion sampling, a subgroup of purposeful sampling, involves establishing a set of criteria that people or places must meet in order to be selected for the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007). I intended to study teachers in schools where failure to meet the goals and standards established by “reforms” might lead to “corrective actions” that would augment teachers’ responsibilities and accountability relative to the “reforms.” This decision was based on the assumption that if teaching responsibilities and accountability are increased with no commensurate increase in salary, teachers might be more likely to consider leaving the school, or leaving the profession altogether. Since compliance with “reforms” is measured largely by student test scores, this meant selecting schools where student scores are the lowest; specifically, large percentages of students of color and English learners (McCollough, 2014). I felt it important to first select these schools, then to select teachers within those schools. In the sections below, I discuss the site-based criteria I applied to the selection of schools, followed by the participant-based criteria I applied to the teachers I selected from within.

**Site-based criteria.** The site-based criteria are largely based on my belief, born out
of years of teaching in the modern era of “reform,” that urban, dual-language, elementary schools with high percentages of PHLOTE students (most of whom are classified as English learners), and which have received “D” and “F” grades from the state Department of Education, represent “flash points” where the collective pressures brought on by recent education “reforms” are most acute and where the consequences for teachers and students are most pronounced. I reasoned that teachers who choose to continue teaching in such schools, even while others leave them, possess a unique set of personal and professional attributes that are worth investigating, especially if schools, districts, and governments are serious about stemming the increased attrition rates among the most experienced—and often most effective—teachers. I address the following site-based criteria below: urban schools, elementary schools, high percentage of English learners, schools with dual-language programs, and schools assigned a “D” or “F” grade from the state Department of Education.

Urban schools\footnote{Although the entire school district in question could be considered urban, the demographics of many parts of the district far from downtown and the oldest parts of the city reflect much more closely those of suburban districts. See Chapter 5 for detailed demographic information regarding this district.} have long suffered from greater teacher turnover than suburban and rural schools (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Moreover, high rates of teacher turnover can have negative effects on student achievement (Ronfeldt et al., 2013), at least as that achievement is determined by standardized test scores. These depressed levels of student achievement can have a negative effect on annual teacher evaluations and the school’s letter grade, as both are linked to student test scores. In fact, in the largely urban district in which the participants of this study teach, thirty-five percent of a teacher’s annual evaluation and ninety percent of a school’s grade are linked directly to students’ standardized test scores. Teachers in this district (Swedien, 2014a) and across the country (Richards, 2014; Sills, 2014; Spector, 2014;
Strauss, 2017; Walker, 2014; Wendler, 2015; Westervelt, 2016) have cited the link between poor student test scores and poor teacher evaluations as one reason they have decided to leave the profession. Teachers who manage to continue teaching in such settings may offer insights into characteristics, qualities, and strategies that lead to staying in the profession rather than leaving.

Elementary level was the next site-based criterion for site selection. Unlike middle and high school teachers who generally teach and are accountable for one subject, elementary school teachers are responsible and accountable for all core subjects, including all subjects included in annual high-stakes tests. Therefore, it may be more difficult for elementary school teachers than middle and high school teachers to escape the effects of their students’ test scores. Consequently, elementary school teachers may feel more pressure to conform to test-dependent education “reforms,” whether they agree with them or not. Such pressure has led many teachers in this district and around the nation to leave the profession rather than continually subject themselves to pressures and “reforms” that make teaching more difficult and less gratifying (Walker, 2014).

Schools with high percentages of English learners can create similar pressure on teachers to leave the profession. This is due in part to the fact that, in the district where I conducted research, the test scores of English learners are the lowest of all regular education subgroups (McCullough, 2014). Not only can these scores have a negative effect on the annual evaluations of those who teach English learners, but they also contribute to lower school letter grades, as ninety percent of a school’s grade is determined by student test scores. Schools with sustained low grades are often subject to “corrective measures” (A-F School Grading Accountability System, 2014-2015) that can make education “reforms” more
intense, more inescapable, and therefore more intolerable to teachers who have already found the “reforms” problematic to their teaching success.

Schools with a dual-language program constitute the fourth site-based criterion for participant selection. The school district’s own demographic data demonstrate that dual-language programs tend to be where English learner populations are most concentrated, where test scores are lower, and, consequently, where schools are more likely to receive a “D” or “F” grade from the state Department of Education (district Strategic Analysis and Program Research website). Moreover, the academic achievement of English learners in dual-language programs, is sometimes assessed in English. This is due in part to the state’s and federal government’s interest in transitioning students to an English-only curriculum as soon as possible (Crawford, 2004). It may be also due to the use of standardized measures of English proficiency\(^{12}\) whose design was based on the assumption that a student who is recategorized as proficient in English is necessarily prepared to read and understand the content of high stakes, grade-level tests in English. Not only is this practice antithetical to the goals of dual-language education, where both languages of instruction are theoretically imbued with equal status (Baker, 2011; de Jong, 2011), but instructing students in one language and assessing them in another can lead to a depressed and distorted representation of their academic achievement, as the test can be as much an evaluation of the students’ language proficiency as it is of the students’ knowledge of academic content. Depressed student scores on assessments can have a negative effect on teacher evaluations and on school grades and can further intensify the effects of the “reforms.”

\(^{12}\) The district uses a standardized language proficiency assessment that sorts English learners into various levels of English proficiency. A student must reach Level 5 in order to be classified as English proficient.
The fifth and final site-based criterion I considered was schools that have been assigned a “D” or “F” grade from the state Department of Education. Schools with sustained “D” and “F” grades are eventually subject to “corrective measures” by the Department of Education. These “corrective measures” are designed to instill pressure on teachers and students to raise student test scores in hopes of improving the school’s grade and teachers’ annual evaluations (A-F School Grading Accountability System, 2014-2015). Pressure to raise student test scores can increase constraints on teacher autonomy and further narrow the curriculum, as teachers are pressured to focus on skills and knowledge that appear on the tests at the expense of broader and more substantive pedagogical content and methods.

Teaching at schools with “D” or “F” grades can be demoralizing for teachers, as such grades have been equated to “failing,” a designation with which few conscientious professionals would want to be publicly associated.

Finally, in addition to the reasons stipulated above, I chose to select participants from urban, dual-language elementary schools with high percentages of English learners and “D” or “F” grades because these schools represented a context with which I had had the most experience during my thirty-year teaching career. Bloomberg and Volpe (2011) state that much qualitative research is derived from personal and professional activities and experiences with which the researcher already has considerable expertise or familiarity. Like many qualitative researchers before me, I concluded that working with participants in a context with which I was familiar and in which I had considerable experience and expertise would more likely enhance the research than hinder it. I anticipated numerous occasions throughout the research process where I would be able to contextualize and interpret the
participants’ responses in ways I might not otherwise be able to if I were conducting research as more of an outsider. In fact, I found this to be true throughout the research process.

While the advantages to familiarity with the research context are numerous, there may be disadvantages as well. Despite the advantages of context familiarity, I would nonetheless have to consider the ways in which I might be so familiar with the context that I risked activating unnecessary bias, or positioning myself so close to the research topic and the participants that I might be blinded to information and phenomena that others, approaching the research from well outside the context, would be more likely to note. Wariness of my possible excessive familiarity with the broader research context partially explains why I decided to retire from full-time classroom teaching before accepting a part-time “return-to-work” position as a bilingual intervention specialist just prior to conducting research. This new role includes greatly reduced classroom or schoolwide obligations that have allowed me to establish a healthy distance from the context while simultaneously maintaining a relatively seamless connection to it.

The site-based criteria produced an initial list of approximately twenty schools in which I could begin to seek teacher participants.

**Participant-based criteria.** The phenomenon that is the focus of this study is the recent and marked increase in attrition rates among veteran dual-language teachers in an age of intensifying “reforms.” Therefore, being a veteran teacher was the first participant criterion I applied to the selection of participants (see Glossary and Chapter 1). Ideally, I was looking for veteran teachers who, like me, had teaching experience prior to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2003, which marked the starting point for the most recent wave of “reforms,” and who, therefore, were more likely to possess a critical and historical
perspective on them. As I began my search for participants, however, it became clear that, perhaps due to the increased rates of veteran teacher attrition in the district, it might be difficult to find teachers with “pre-reform” experience who also met the rest of the criteria (see below). Consequently, I resolved to seek teachers who began teaching either before or immediately after the signing of NCLB. Indeed, one of the participants, Fatima, was in her eleventh year of teaching in the fall of 2016 when she agreed to participate. Participants Selene, Theo, and Julie had twenty, seventeen, and fifteen years’ experience, respectively.

In addition to seeking teachers who fell within my definition of veteran, I was seeking full-time classroom teachers who were responsible and accountable for providing instruction in all content areas except art, music, and physical education. It has been my experience that these are the educators who experience the full force of education “reforms,” as opposed to part-time teachers and/or auxiliary educators who are responsible for only one content area or for an area outside the state mandated curriculum (e.g., once-a-week physical education or counseling classes). This is because the success or failure of the “reforms” is measured by high stakes standardized tests, the results of which are applied directly to the annual evaluations of full-time, classroom teachers who are charged with implementing them.

The third participant-based criterion I considered consisted of possessing a bilingual teaching endorsement from the state Department of Education. This endorsement is appended to teachers’ licenses after they pass a rigorous test in Spanish in which they demonstrate proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and understanding Spanish. Most teachers who seek the bilingual endorsement do so in order to be able to teach in Spanish and

\footnote{Why both native English and native Spanish speakers must take the Spanish language proficiency test, and why no similar test exists in English, remains unknown.}
in English in a K-12 dual-language program. However, not all teachers who obtain the bilingual endorsement choose to teach dual-language programs. Therefore, the fourth participant-based criterion consisted of teaching in a dual-language program, where students from two distinct language communities receive instruction alternately throughout the week in two languages.

Teaching in a school that has recently received a “D” or “F” letter grade from the state Department of Education was the final participant-based criterion. Ninety percent of a school’s letter grade is determined by student scores on high stakes standardized tests. The test scores also determine a large portion of a teacher’s annual evaluation (fifty percent prior to 2016 and thirty-five percent after). Significantly, the majority of the district’s dual language programs are located in such schools. Therefore, choosing to teach in a school with a dual language program is often tantamount to choosing to teach in a school that bears the onus of a “D” or “F” grade, which, in turn, means running the risk of receiving a poorer evaluation than a teacher might receive at a school with an “A” or “B” grade. The fact that some veteran dual-language teachers choose to teach and remain teaching in “D” and “F” schools, despite the risks and onuses, strikes at the heart of this study.

**Participant selection, initial phase.** Snowball sampling—also known as network, chain, or opportunistic sampling—involves requesting knowledgeable primary informants to recommend others they believe meet the criteria for participation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007; Miles, et al., 2014). This method assures that, although the researcher may be the ultimate decision maker in terms of who participates in the study, he or she will not be the only decision maker. I selected the final participants from a list of informant recommendations. I believe the inclusion of the perspectives of knowledgeable informants in
the participant selection process rendered the process more transparent and the final participants more credible, especially in cases where potential participants were recommended by more than one informant.

The informants for this study fell into two categories. The first consisted of teachers who I had come to know during my three decades of teaching in the district. These were dual language teachers or other school staff at qualifying school sites (see above) who were in a position to recommend colleagues for the study. In the event I did not know any teachers at a particular school, I selected teachers from the list of dual language teachers on the school’s website. These previously unknown and randomly selected teachers constituted the second category of informant. The total number of known and unknown informants was one hundred eight.

Next, via e-mail, I shared with the informants the purpose and goals of the study. I asked them if they might recommend any of their site-based colleagues as participants. I also urged them to consider recommending teachers they knew or had known at other sites. Finally, in the event an informant felt he or she was also a qualified candidate, I invited the informants to nominate themselves. Not all the informants responded with participant recommendations. Of those who did, I received a total of thirty-six recommendations.

The next step was to narrow the field of candidates. Narrowing first occurred through response rates. Of the thirty-six teachers I contacted through an introductory e-mail, only twenty responded. Further narrowing occurred as potential candidates offered personal or logistical reasons for not being able to participate. Several others stated they did not satisfy the participant criteria. Still others stated that one of their colleagues might be a better fit for the research. Ultimately, twelve teachers remained in contact with me and continued to
express interest in participating. As I was seeking only four participants, I needed to further narrow the field.

**Participant selection, final phase.** In order to narrow the field to four participants, I found it necessary to design a second set of participant selection criteria. The first set of criteria consisted of *shared* attributes and characteristics: veteran, dual-language, teachers in “D” and “F” urban public elementary schools. In contrast, I designed the second set of criteria to select for attributes that would *distinguish* potential participants from each other, thus rendering the group of participants more diverse. These criteria included participant gender, ethnicity, first language, and childhood geography, grade levels taught and years of teaching experience in the district, geographic distances and demographic differences between the schools and their communities, as well as other information I had acquired about the candidates and their schools during my thirty years as a teacher in the district. My goal was for the similarities among participants established by the first set of criteria to create a sense of group identity and cohesion that would, in turn, enhance the quantity and quality of our focus group discussions. At the same time, the second set of criteria would establish basic differences among participants in an effort to broaden the scope of the data and the perspectives represented.

I applied the second set of group diversity criteria to the twelve remaining candidates to select the three female and one male participants for this study: “Fatima,” a fourth-grade teacher at “San Juan” Elementary, “Julie,” a third-grade teacher at “Mountain” Elementary, “Selene,” a third-grade teacher at “Valley” Elementary, and “Theo,” a fourth-and-fifth-grade teacher at “Zapata” Elementary. (“Victoria,” a third-grade teacher at Julie’s school, had also agreed to participate, but withdrew from the study soon after signing a letter of consent.)
Within two weeks of being selected for the study, all four teachers signed letters of consent and returned online questionnaires that served as preambles to the first one-on-one interviews I would soon schedule with them.

Ultimately, I was satisfied with the attributes the final group of participants shared, as well as those they did not. I was disappointed I was not able to achieve diversity in grade levels represented, but to have insisted on a Kindergarten, first, or second grade teacher would have forced me to compromise on several other diversity attributes, thus rendering the final group less instead of more diverse. Profiles of the participants, their schools, and school communities, including ways in which they differed, are included in Chapter 5.

The Research Design

In the sections that follow I discuss the sequential stages in the research. The first section relates to steps I took prior to collecting data. These steps included: review of a pilot study, completion of a literature review, articulation of a theoretical framework, the proposal defense, IRB approval, and participant consent. The second section addresses the collection, transcription, coding, and analysis and interpretation of the data.

Pilot study. Twenty-four months prior to submitting and defending the proposal for this study, I conducted a pilot study. This qualitative, multi-case study took place at the elementary school where I at that time was employed full-time in the school’s dual language program. I conducted the study just prior to retiring from full-time teaching and returning to teach on a part-time basis. The participants in the study were the four other teachers in the school’s dual language program. The research question for the pilot study was:

*What factors in their personal and professional lives do teachers consider when choosing to teach or remain teaching in low-performing (i.e., state-designated “D” or “F”) schools that enroll linguistically, culturally, racially, and economically diverse students?*
The purpose of the study was to gain insights into the research process, to work out key logistics, and to identify potential obstacles, contingencies, and pitfalls before undertaking the research for this dissertation. The pilot study found that the benefits in such schools to student bilingualism and achievement, as well as to teacher bilingualism and job satisfaction, so far outweighed the consequences and stigma of teaching in “D” and “F” schools, that the teachers had long before dedicated their careers to teaching in such schools rather than in schools that receive more favorable letter grades. The skills, insights, and knowledge I gained from conducting the pilot study proved valuable in the current study.

**Literature review.** According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2011), the purpose of the literature review is to “situate the study in the context of previous research, present a critical synthesis of empirical literature […]], justify how the study addresses a gap or problem in the literature, and outline the theoretical or conceptual framework of the study” (p. 7).

Accordingly, Chapter 2 contains a critical review of the literature relevant to this study, namely, teacher retention, attrition, resilience, and resistance. After conducting an analysis of the data, I found a review of the literature on teacher advocacy was also needed. The literature review included relevant research in the five areas and demonstrated how the research related or did not relate to this study. In so doing, important gaps in the research were revealed. I concluded each section of the literature review with a critical analysis that established the basis for the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 3.

**Theoretical framework.** The purpose of the theoretical framework is to provide a general conceptual universe that encompasses important facets of the research process, such as the choice of concepts that are researched, research questions, interpretation of data, and findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The theoretical framework for this study is classical
Critical Theory and is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Critical Theory, at least at it applies to the present research, asserts that teachers, as workers, are not simply obedient agents of the state’s public education apparatus, but critically conscious and critically active individuals and groups who are acutely aware of their sociopolitical status and positions and think, teach, and act accordingly. Critical Theory was instrumental in the development of the research questions and of various elements of the research process, including the methods used. It was also essential in terms of understanding and interpreting the core concepts explored in the literature review: attrition, retention, resilience, resistance, and advocacy. Critical Theory, combined with the literature, constitute the broader theoretical framework of this study.

Proposal defense. Prior to conducting research for this study, I designed and successfully defended a proposal stipulating the background and context for the research, the problem statement, the purpose statement, the main research question and sub questions, the underlying assumptions I would be bringing to the research, my positionality relative to the research, and the significance and implications of the research to potential interest groups. These elements are discussed in Chapter 1.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approvals. Following the proposal defense, I began writing a research protocol for the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). I submitted the protocol three months after defending the proposal. The protocol was approved with the status of “exempt.” In addition to including much of the content of the proposal, the IRB protocol include a copy of the participant letter of introduction and invitation, a copy of the participant letter of consent, samples of interview and focus group questions, a copy of proposed questionnaire items, a brief discussion of the risks and benefits
of the research the participants might experience, data management and security, participant privacy and right to withdraw, and more.

Immediately after receiving approval from the university’s IRB, I completed, submitted, and received approval for a similar but separate IRB protocol required by the school district as a condition for conducting research with its employees. At that point, I began the process of selecting participants and preparing for the collection of data.

Data Collection

In an effort to elicit rich and meaningful qualitative data from the participants, as well as to triangulate the data so as to reduce the possibility that the findings would reflect the biases of one data collection method over another (Maxwell, 2013), I employed a variety of data collection devices for this dissertation. What follows is a brief description of each device and an explanation of its use in this study. I present the devices in the order they were used in the research process.

Questionnaire. After receiving the participants’ signed letters of consent, I sent each participant a secure, online, open-ended questionnaire that consisted of four questions, the first three of which related to different facets of identity: race/culture/ethnicity, language, and social class. The fourth question involved how these identities related to the participants’ school experiences in K-12 education and in college. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to give the participants the opportunity to provide precise definitions and descriptions of different facets of their identities. Defining one’s identities is always important, but I believe it is particularly important in the American Southwest, where the distinctions between terms such as Anglo and White, or Mexican
American, Chicano, Latino, Spanish, and Hispanic are significant and can elicit strong emotions, including anger, if naively or erroneously attributed by one individual or group to another (Comas-Diaz, 2001; Gómez, 2007). The same is true for identities related to language and social class. Moreover, identities are rarely static and can and do evolve over time. While in one context or epoch a culturally knowledgeable and sensitive person might identify as Mexican American, in another the same person might identify as Hispanic or Chicano. Context matters, and therefore so does identity.

Self-identification was essential to understanding the participants in this study and their work as teachers. I was interested in the participants’ identities in order to gain greater insights into their choice of teaching as a profession, as well as their decision to choose to teach in certain schools and programs over others. The open-ended questions were designed to elicit thoughtful, written responses that the participants could reconsider and revise over a period of at least a week before returning the questionnaire to me. During the data collection period, more than one participant expressed appreciation for the opportunity to reflect more profoundly on their individual identities.

**Individual interviews.** After receiving the participants’ written responses to the open-ended questionnaire, I began scheduling the first of two semi-structured interviews with each of the four participants. Discussions of the transcripts and coding schemes are found below.

**Definition and purpose of interviews.** Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) define the semi-structured, qualitative interview as “a conversation that has a structure and a purpose” (p. 5). The structure ranged from the quantity, wording, order, content, and presentation of the questions to the date, time, duration, and location of the interviews. Although the format and
implementation of the interviews were indeed structured, they were not rigidly structured, as they involved significant flexibility and collaboration on the part of the researcher and the participants. The participants were asked by me to designate a date, time, and place for each interview, as well as whether they agreed to my suggestion of a ninety minute to two-hour duration. And though most of the main questions were based on my research agenda and designed by me beforehand, I allowed for spontaneous follow-up questions, for the recasting or rewording of prepared questions, as well as for questions of clarification from the participants themselves, so that all questions posed were better suited to the flow of the interview and to each participant’s identity, experiences, previous statements, and so on. These practices and procedures, among others, contributed to the characterization of the interviews I conducted as “semi-structured.”

The primary purpose of the semi-structured interview was to obtain “descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 6). In this study, the life worlds consisted of public schools, school districts, and political contexts in which the participants functioned, as well as their family histories, childhoods, adult lives, K-12 and college educations, significant life experiences, and more. The described phenomenon was the totality of education “reforms” the participants had experienced and against which they continued to struggle. All facets of the interviews were designed and carried out in the context of the participants’ life worlds and the common phenomenon of education “reform.”

**Interview questions.** The interview questions themselves were based on the research question and sub questions and designed such that they were recursive, structurally varied, and proceeded gradually from the more general to the more specific. (Krueger, 1994;
The recursive questioning strategy was evident in the ways I used key responses from the questionnaires to design questions for the first interview, key responses from the first interview to design new questions for the second, and so on (Morgan, 1997). This created an overlapping effect that served to review the previous session while simultaneously linking it to the next. The variation of question structure was evident in the question types I used within and between interviews with a single participant, or between interviews of different participants, in order to address key topics and concepts in specific ways. The movement from more general to more specific questions—sometimes known as “funneling”—was evident in my decision to pose the more general and indirect questions near the beginning of the first interview and the specific and direct questions near the end of the second interview (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1997; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Questions posed in the first and second interviews are included in Appendix C and Appendix D.

It is important to note that the questions I designed were open-ended, intended to elicit candid and creative responses crafted in the participants’ own words. Unless I judged a participant was particularly reticent in responding and needed some prompting, I refrained from including specific examples and potentially “loaded” terms in the questions. I believed that doing so might bias the participants and “lead” them toward certain answers. For example, when I asked about education “reforms,” I did not present a definition or a list of “reforms.” Rather, I simply asked the participants how they defined “reforms” and what recent education policies they believed fell within their own definition. Later, during the second focus group, the participants had the opportunity to view and interact with a comprehensive list of “reforms” created from their collective responses. The list provided
each participant the opportunity to respond to “reforms” he or she may not have mentioned or explained during the one-on-one interviews with me.

**Interview logistics: date, time, place, and duration.** As I maintained control of the interview questions and duration (two hours), I thought it was important the participants have control over other aspects of the interviews. Therefore, after receiving the online questionnaire from each participant, I asked the participants to specify a date, time, and place for the first round of interviews. The dates they chose for the first round of interviews ranged from mid-October to late November 2016. The times they chose ranged from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. for Fatima’s interview to 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. for Theo’s interview. And the places preferred by participants included a classroom, public and university library meeting rooms, and the custodial “break room” of a cultural center. The times and places of the second round of interviews in the spring of 2017 were essentially the same as in the fall with only minor changes. The spring interviews took place between mid-March and mid-April.

**Interview logistics: technical considerations.** I conducted each interview at a large or medium sized table or, in the case of Theo, at a student desk. In each case, I invited the participant to sit directly across from me. This was intended to facilitate eye contact as well as to equalize the audio input relative to the audio recorder.

I began each interview with five to ten minutes of casual conversation, mostly about our shared experiences as teachers and what had occurred in our respective classrooms during the day. The purpose of the casual conversation was to help the participants decompress and debrief after a long and exhausting day in an elementary classroom, to reestablish a teacher-to-teacher relationship before activating my identity as researcher, and
generally to prime the imminent dialogue between us. The small talk was not recorded; however, I noted the substance of such talk in my research journal.

I employed a redundant recording strategy for the interviews. The primary recording device consisted of a ZOOM H1 multidirectional digit recorder. I attached it to a small tripod, fitted it with a spherical, foam windscreen, and placed it between the participant and me. I toggled all settings to automatic. The secondary recording device was my iPhone. The purpose of the secondary device was as a safety net in the event the primary device malfunctioned, or I forgot to activate it.

After each interview, I uploaded the recording from the ZOOM H1 audio recorder to HyperTRANSCRIBE, software that facilitates transcription by looping the audio recording at specified durations until the audio included in the loop has been transcribed by the researcher. Upon finishing the transcript of each interview, I exported the text from HyperTRANSCRIBE into Microsoft Word, where I added important elements such as date, time, place, duration, pseudonyms, and, most importantly, continuous line numbers. I saved each finalized transcript in folders on my computer dedicated to each participant.

**Interview issues.** With the exception of three minor and unanticipated logistical issues, the interviews took place essentially as planned. I corrected a recording equipment snafu during Theo’s first interview by recording the same part of the interview the next morning. I resolved Fatima’s concern regarding the inclusion of conversation fillers (e.g., “um,” “you know”) in the interview transcripts by assuring her that, unless omitting them would change the meaning of the passage, they would be omitted if included in the final report. And I took under consideration for future research Fatima and Selene’s suggestion after their second interviews that higher quality responses might have been obtained had the
participants received the interview questions ahead of time. While the logistics of the interviews were not perfect, they proceeded as well as I had anticipated.

**Focus Groups.** In addition to the individual interviews, I conducted two focus groups. The first focus group took place three months after the first round of individual interviews. During this time, I transcribed the interviews and began to code and analyze them. This gave me the opportunity to familiarize myself with the responses from the first round of individual interviews in order to design questions for the first focus group (Morgan, 1997). The second focus group took place two weeks after the conclusion of the second round of individual interviews. As with the first focus group, some of the questions for the second focus group were based on information from the interviews that preceded it, as well as from the first focus group. In the following sections I discuss the definition and purpose of focus groups, focus group questions, the role of the moderator, focus group logistics, and some of the drawbacks or pitfalls of this data collection method.

**Definition and purpose of focus groups.** The focus group format is qualitatively and structurally distinct from one-on-one interviews in the following ways: a) it increases the possibility that data and insights unique to group interactions will emerge (Morgan, 1997); b) it affords the participants the opportunity to interact with one another (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990); c) it allows participants to discover concurring and opposing views among themselves (Liamputto, 2011); d) it creates space for greater non-linear, spontaneous, and unexpected dialogue (Morgan, 1997); e) it can facilitate the prioritization of depth over coverage (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990); and f) it serves an important data triangulation tool. These characteristics render focus groups both complementary and necessary in relation to one-on-one interviews. It was my intention that the inclusion of
focus groups as a data collection method would complement and enhance the data collected by other means.

**Focus group questions.** I designed the questions for the focus groups based on purpose, structure, and type (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). The primary *purpose* was to stimulate verbal interactions between participants in order to gain greater insights into the topic under consideration. In an effort to encourage depth over coverage, I attempted to *structure* the questions, at least as much as was possible, to be open-ended, “rolling,” and “funneling” (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1997; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Finally, the *types* of questions I posed ranged from introductory to conclusive, neutral to provocative, exploratory to probing, concurring to “devil’s advocate,” as well as many others (Liamputtong, 2011; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). My goal was to construct a wide net of questions in an effort to capture the greatest amount and variety of relevant data as possible. A list of the focus group questions can be found in *Appendix E* and *Appendix F*.

**The focus group moderator.** While conducting the focus groups, I remained aware and wary of the various *roles, traits, and actions* associated with the group moderator. In terms of roles, I avoided taking a central role in the focus groups. When appropriate, I assumed the role of guide, learner (Morgan, 1997), seeker of wisdom, enlightened novice, consultant, challenger, referee (Krueger, 1994), and even co-participant (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

The traits I brought to the role of moderator were varied, as was the degree to which I was successful in maintaining them. Throughout the two focus groups I strived to be sensitive, non-judgmental, open-minded, and respectful of participants’ identities, needs, and responses; knowledgeable and insightful with respect to the subject matter; and patient and
flexible in terms of the pace, content, and logistics of the session (Liamputtong, 2011).

Finally, some of the actions I employed in order to facilitate the group discussion in productive ways included pausing and probing, eye contact and other body language, linking responses between participants, and redirecting the group when the conversation strayed from its intended focus (Kreuger, 1994).

**Focus group logistics.** Most of the logistics for the individual interviews remained the same for the focus groups. We met in a conference room in a university library, adhered to a two-hour time limit, and used the same recording devices. There were only three significant differences in logistics between the interviews and the focus groups. The first consisted of the strategic seating of participants, whereby I attempted to arrange the participants in a configuration I believed would allow for maximum interaction (see below). The second consisted of the inclusion of two breaks for refreshments, one before the session began and one in the middle. These breaks were designed to give the participants the opportunity to interact informally and off the record, thereby stimulating the more formalized discussions that followed. The third and final difference between the interviews and the focus groups was my invitation, at the conclusion of the first focus group, to each participant to ask questions of other participants or of me, which, in fact, they did. Ultimately, I concluded these logistical additions enhanced the focus groups.

**Pitfalls and drawbacks of focus groups:** Prior to conducting this research, I had never conducted focus groups. Therefore, I was wary of potential pitfalls, especially those that might ensnare novices. One common pitfall is lack of group cohesiveness (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Because of the fact that the four participants were selected from an array of common attributes, this pitfall was essentially addressed before the focus group session
began. The group had enough in common as veteran, dual-language educators in the same school district, that I never felt I had to intervene in order to provoke or even stimulate discussion.

The same attributes that lead to group cohesion may also lead to “group think,” or the tendency of group members to unwittingly agree with the group’s prevailing views, opinions, and beliefs, even though they might not agree with them as individuals (Liamputtong, 2011). The subtle peer pressure group that think may create can further impede the proposal and consideration of alternative views. There were indeed occasions when the four participants agreed on a particular point; however, I never thought it was because they felt pressure to do so. I had already conducted one-on-one interviews prior to each focus group; therefore, I was in a position to detect situations where a group member was agreeing to a position that was contrary to the position he or she had taken in a one-on-one interview.

Encouraging the contributions of shy or reluctant participants and regulating those of “experts” or dominant participants are common challenges that can turn into pitfalls to the unwary researcher (Kreuger, 1994; Liamputtong, 2011). Again, the experience with the one-on-one interviews had afforded me insights into the participants’ personalities, enough so that I felt I was prepared to intervene subtly in order to instill a degree of equity in the content and quantity of responses. I accomplished this primarily by seating the more timid participants directly across from me and between the more dominant speakers.

Another potential pitfall involved the temptation to share my own views on the topics I or the group members raised. I was wary of my own experiences in education and the effect they might have on the group discussion if I were to share them (Liamputtong, 2011). I felt it was important for me to suppress the urge to share so that the participants’ voices
could be featured. This did not mean I shared no views. I did so, however, only when I believed they contributed to clarity or when asked directly by one of the participants.

A final pitfall to focus groups is an insistence on continuing the group beyond the point of saturation, where questions and responses have been exhausted and the necessary data acquired. Although I was wary of this pitfall, both focus groups seemed to be approaching the point of saturation just prior to the two-hour time limit, which amounted to a rather propitious coincidence.

**Artifacts.** The final data collection instrument, after questionnaires, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups, was the voluntary sharing of a physical artifact. At the conclusion of the first focus group, I invited the participants to bring a meaningful and relevant artifact to the second focus group. I explained that the artifact could be anything they felt represented their resolve to continue teaching in the age of “reform.”

Glesne (2011) defines artifacts as “the material objects that, for your work, represent the culture of the people and the setting you are studying. When you ‘read’ an artifact, you try to get at the stories that surround it and which it embodies” (p. 88). This was precisely what I was seeking: personally meaningful objects related to a central assumption in the research (in this case, how you have managed to continue teaching while others have not) and that evoke stories that are illustrative of that assumption. I was interested in redirecting the group’s attention from the more abstract and philosophical discussions of pedagogy and politics to more concrete discussions stimulated by objects existing in the moment in our proximate, physical space. In addition to eliciting discussion from participants in a different way, I intended the artifacts to serve as a way to triangulate data I was gathering from the questionnaires, the interviews, and the focus groups. Finally, I wanted to introduce the
artifacts during the closing moments of our time together so the participants could avail
themselves of all they had shared, individually and collectively, while presenting and
explaining them. The artifacts proved to be varied, relevant, and meaningful. They are
discussed in Chapter 8.

Transcripts, Coding, and Analysis

Transcripts. Shortly after conducting each interview, I uploaded the audio file to my
computer. I then imported the file into HyperTRANSCRIBE, which repeats short audio
sections at specified intervals until the user selects a designated keystroke to advance the
audio. The default interval is five seconds. I listened to each five-second audio selection
until I had transcribed each audible word or utterance. The transcript appears in a window
within the software.

There were three additional items I felt were important to format within the text
window. Both related to text orientation, navigation, and reference. The first is a series of
hyperlinked time stamps I inserted manually at approximately every five minutes of text.
The time stamps are “hyper” in the sense that, when selected, the text advances or returns to
the portion of the audio file that corresponded to the time stamp. The time stamps served as
guideposts that maintained a correspondence between audio file and transcript. The second
text type consists of continuous line numbers. I placed these numbers on the left margin of
the page. I found them essential to my ability to locate the precise passage in a transcript.
They are also valuable in the construction of analytic matrices. Finally, I formatted the font
in bold for my voice and “normal” font for the participants’ voices. I used single line spacing
throughout the transcript with double line spacing for changes of speaker. For the focus
group transcripts, I added the participants’ names at each change of speaker.
I continued this process of transcribing and formatting until I reached the end of each audio file. I saved the transcript as ParticipantInterview1a.hdt (“hyper transcribe document”). I then imported the file directly into HyperRESEARCH, the companion to HyperTRANSCRIBE, where it was ready for coding.

Coding. Qualitative research can and often does benefit from a highly structured coding scheme, such as the one I describe below. Such a scheme can facilitate and enhance data analysis and provide road maps for the study’s findings. If too tightly structured, however, it risks impeding analysis, especially if the researcher adheres to it too closely. Overzealous adherence to any scheme can blind the researcher to other ways of looking at the data and, consequently, “filter out the unusual and serendipitous” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2011, p. 138). This may result in an incomplete and inaccurate picture of the phenomena under study. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that the following scheme was but one tool I used to understand the holistic meanings of data collected through earnest interactions with fellow human beings.

First-cycle coding, Phase I. According to Miles, et al. (2014), first-cycle or “open” coding involves assigning key words or phrases to chunks of data. In most cases, the data consist of transcripts of recorded interviews or other human speech collected by the researcher. The key words or phrases assigned by the researcher represent the researcher’s first impressions of the meaning of the data chunks. Second-cycle coding, discussed below, involves working with first-cycle codes.

First-cycle of coding for this study began when I imported interview or focus group transcripts from HyperTRANSCRIBE into the Source Window of HyperRESEARCH. The next step was to read the transcript line by line, highlighting text passages of varying lengths
I found meaningful. Once a passage was highlighted, the software’s Code Book window opened. Within the Code Book window, I selected New Code and entered a key word or two I believed best captured the essence of the text passage. This key word or code appeared simultaneously in three locations: the Code Book’s alphabetical list of all codes created in the Study Window, where each case and its associated codes and locations are catalogued; and the left margin of the text in the Source Window (Figure B). Clicking on any code in the Study Window or in the left margin of the Source Window Code Book reveals all occurrences of an individual code if used in conjunction with the code filter function in the Study Window automatically highlights the text with which the code is associated. Clicking on a code in the Code Book reveals all occurrences of an individual code filtered through the filter function in the Source Window.

Figure B: HyperRESEARCH Source Window, Study Window, Code Book (l-r).
Table 2. Partial list of coding methods by type. Based on Chapter 4 of Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014). “Story coding” and “Traits coding” my own. Methods I-IV are inductive methods, whereas Method V is deductive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. Exploratory Methods</th>
<th>II. Elemental Methods</th>
<th>III. Affective Methods</th>
<th>IV. Grammatical Methods</th>
<th>V. Procedural Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holistic coding: single code to large unit of data as a first glance analysis of raw data.</td>
<td>Descriptive coding: basic topic of a passage of data.</td>
<td>Emotions coding: emotions recalled by participants or inferred by researcher.</td>
<td>Attribute coding: participant characteristics or demographic information.</td>
<td>Protocol coding: based on a reestablished, recommended, or prescribed system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provisional coding: A “starter list” of codes that might apply when data is subsequently analyzed.</td>
<td>In vivo coding: use of participants’ own words or phrases in quotation marks.</td>
<td>Values coding: participants’ values, beliefs, and worldview.</td>
<td>Magnitude coding: a subcode that indicates intensity, frequency, direction, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub coding: second order tag designed to enrich the code.</td>
<td>Story coding: participants relate a stories or anecdotes that illustrate points he or she is making.</td>
<td>Traits coding: a code that identifies personality traits</td>
<td>Simultaneous coding: two or more codes that coincide on same datum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Importantly, not all first cycle codes are similar in nature. Miles et al. (2014) identify at least twenty-five types of codes. They arrange them into five different categories or “methods.” It is the responsibility and the prerogative of the researcher to select which type of code is appropriate for any given passage and to apply each type consistently throughout.

For example, emotions coding is one of several schemes categorized under Affective Methods: Exploratory, Elemental, Affective, Grammatical, and Procedural (Table 2). During the first cycle coding, I created codes such as Anxiety, Stress, Surprise, Doubt, Excitement, and Dismay to indicate passages where a participant seemed to be expressing these emotions. Likewise, simultaneous coding, categorized under Grammatical Methods, proved to be a common and informative coding method, as many passages could be accurately assigned more than one code.

Equally important is the distinction between inductive and deductive coding. Exploratory, Elemental, Affective, and Grammatical Methods, and the coding types they
include, are considered inductive: the researcher focuses on the specific in order to ultimately arrive at more general principles. Deductive coding, on the other hand, is the application of general, higher-order principles to specific data. In deductive coding, the researcher comes to the coding process with predetermined codes and selects data that correspond to them. Unlike inductive codes, these codes are created as a result of coding rather than of theorizing that took place prior to the collection, coding, and analysis of data. I employed both inductive and deductive coding strategies as appropriate throughout the coding process.

Finally, though the first cycle coding cycle was focused on coding raw data, I was continually exploring themes that emerged as I alternated between the coding of data produced by one participant to that produced by another, a practice that is often referred to as constant case comparison (Glesne, 2011). This exploration generally took the form of analytic memos (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2011; Maxwell, 2013; Miles, et al., 2014), which I included either in HyperRESEARCH’s “annotation” window linked to specific, highlighted text in the Source Window, or entered by hand in my research notebook.

During the first coding cycle, these emerging themes were highly provisional in nature and evolved or mutated over time at varying rates and to varying degrees (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2011). They served as temporary and flexible “bins” or templates into which subsequent codes could be placed. I reexamined them many times afterwards for their relevance to the bin or template in which I had placed them and moved them or removed them altogether if relevance did not hold true.

**First-cycle coding, Phase II.** After coding the eight participant interviews and the two focus group interviews in the manner detailed above, I grew increasingly dissatisfied
with HyperRESEARCH, especially with the absence of a function that allows the user to color-code text, import continuous line numbers from HyperTRANSCRIBE, or perform other functions I considered essential to the research process.

Therefore, after coding the last transcript—which happened to be that of the second focus group—I exported the transcripts from HyperRESEARCH to Microsoft Word, inserted page numbers at the bottom of each page, added continuous line numbers in the left margin, printed out each transcript, placed the transcripts in a three ring binder, and began coding anew, this time by hand.

The decision to code again from the beginning was based on several realities. First, I concluded I had no choice: while there is a coding function in HyperRESEARCH, there is no export function, which means all codes are lost during the export process. Second, hard copies of the transcripts would afford me the opportunity to apply any number of other coding tools and strategies: colored highlights, comments, and arrows, memos entered directly in the margins (instead of in a separate window), the ability to view multiple pages simultaneously, and more.

Third, what I had initially interpreted as a setback, I re-interpreted as a collection of benefits. Coding a second time afforded me the opportunity to compare codes I had applied during the first, computer-based phase of the first coding cycle to those I applied during the second, paper phase. In this way, I was able to test my own coding consistency over time, change codes I believed were not well named or applied the first time, and affirm the integrity of codes I coded the same during both the first and the second phases of the first coding cycle. The conclusion of Phase II of first-cycle coding established the starting point for the next coding cycle.
**Second-cycle coding.** Miles et al. (2014) define second cycle coding as “a way to initially summarize segments of data. Pattern coding . . . is a way of grouping [collapsing] those summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes, or constructs” (p. 86), a process known as induction. Though I concur with this general description, I felt the need to assign terms to the different stages of the process, so I could locate any given identifier in the hierarchical process.

Therefore, while engaged in second-cycle coding, I devised a basic nomenclature for the organizational terms I used in the coding and analysis stages of this study. I refer to the results of second-cycle or pattern coding as sub-themes. In other words, a collection of first-cycle codes forms a sub-theme. Sub-themes, in turn, combine with other sub-themes to form broader and more permanent themes. Combined themes form higher order concepts. In order to establish a degree of clarity between these terms in the study’s conceptual hierarchy, I used lower case for first-cycle codes, Title Case for sub-themes, UPPER CASE for themes, and UPPER-CASE UNDERLINE for higher-order concepts. In Figure C and Figure D, “prioritizing,” “original motivation,” “suppression” are first-cycle codes that together form the sub-theme Focus. Focus is part of a Theme known as TRAITS. Though not pictured in Figure 3, TRAITS is one element of a higher-order concept known as IDENTITY. The process of collapsing or combining similar or synonymous codes served to maintain my focus on the inductive process of moving from a large number of specific codes to a smaller number of more important themes or concepts (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2011).

As incipient sub-themes and themes emerged through this process, I created a spreadsheet that consisted of various matrices where I listed sub-themes derived from second cycle coding as the row headings (with the first cycle codes from which they were derived in
parentheses), the participants’ names as the column headings, and the theme to which they relate as vertical text in the extreme left column of the matrix (Figure C). In cells where a row and a column intersected, I entered a source reference (1a, 2b, FG1, etc.) followed by checkmarks that indicated the number of times the code was applied to each source and participant. In this way I could follow the frequency of the code within and across cases as well as across various data resources. I completed this process by making a copy of the coding matrices and replacing the frequency checkmarks with in-vivo codes and their associated sources and line references (Figure D). It was at this point I felt I prepared to redirect my focus from data coding and reorganization to data analysis, synthesis, and interpretation.

**Data Analysis, Synthesis, and Interpretation**

Given the chronological presentation of the methods used in this study, one could conclude that the qualitative research process is linear in nature; that it consists of a series of discrete and finite tasks, the next beginning where the previous ended. The researcher collects the data, transcribes the data, codes the data, analyzes and interprets the data, and so on. In practice, however, this is generally not the case. Rather, the various stages of the research process begin at different times, overlap, start and stop and start again, and pass through cycles as the researcher attempts to narrow the massive collection of raw data, make connections, and ultimately understand the data well enough to explain it coherently to others (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2011). This results in processes that are as much simultaneous and holistic as they are linear and hierarchical. Consequently, any description of analysis, synthesis, and interpretation is challenging.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Fatima</th>
<th>Julie</th>
<th>Selene</th>
<th>Theo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perseverance</strong></td>
<td>1a √ 2 √ FG2a √ FG2b √√</td>
<td>1a √</td>
<td>1a √</td>
<td>2 √VVVVVVVVVV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(persistence,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stubbornness)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Patience</strong></td>
<td>1a √ 2 √ √ √ FG1a √ FG1b √</td>
<td>2a √</td>
<td>Q √ FG1a √ FG1b √</td>
<td>1b √ √ √ √ FG1a √ FG2a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(long view,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>endurance)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td>1a √ 2 √VVVV</td>
<td>1a √</td>
<td>2a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(prioritizing,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>original motivation, suppression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure C: Data matrix excerpt with checkmarks.** Some sub-themes associated with the theme TRAITS. Numbers refer to interviews and focus group sessions (Q = questionnaire; 1a, 1b = interview 1, first (a) or second (b) half; FG1a, FG1b = Focus Group 1, first (a) or second (b) half; FG2a, FG2b = Focus Group 2, first (a) or second (b) half).

Corbin and Strauss (2008) state “[A]nalysis involves examining a substance and its components in order to determine their properties and functions, then using the acquired knowledge to make inferences about the whole” (p. 45). That is, analysis is concerned with taking apart a large and as yet indecipherable structure (such as a massive collection of data) and examining each part. Synthesis involves reassembling the component parts in accordance with the preceding analysis in order to arrive at a holistic perspective of the phenomenon in question. Finally, interpretation is the act of regarding the newly formed structure and developing broad and meaningful conclusions from it.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Fatima</th>
<th>Julie</th>
<th>Selene</th>
<th>Theo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Figure D:** Excerpt from the data matrix for sub-themes associated with the theme TRAITS with descriptive or in-vivo codes and source and line references. (See Figure C for key to abbreviations.)

Miles et al. (2014) describe the genesis of analysis-synthesis-interpretation as the coding process, described above. In first-cycle coding, a structure, such as a transcript, is essentially disassembled into parts, or text excerpts. As each part passes through filters (teacher retention, resilience, etc.) and frameworks (Modern Critical Theory), meaning is assigned to each part by the researcher in the form of a code. In second-cycle coding, the researcher combines the codes according to shared attributes. While this second cycle is essentially still considered analysis, it represents the beginnings of synthesis, as parts are
being reconstructed. This process continues until, as in this study, the researcher arrives at themes and higher-order concepts. Perseverance, Patience, Focus, Hope, Dedication, and Adaptation emerged as sub-themes in the data collected from participant questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. Together, they formed a theme I identified as TRAITS. This theme formed part of a higher-order concept of IDENTITY. From this reconstruction of the data, I interpreted this to mean that key identity attributes were important to the teachers’ abilities to continue teaching during a period when pressures from a wave of education “reform” initiatives were contributing to the resignations or early retirements of similarly situated peers.

As this process evolves, it undergoes unanticipated changes and cycles through multiple iterations until the researcher is convinced the ultimate interpretations are comprehensive, plausible, and defensible. As a result, no two processes of analysis-synthesis-interpretation are the same, even when undertaken by the same researcher. The preceding description of the process represents my best attempt to describe how I arrived at the findings for this multiple case study.

**Ethical Considerations**

As one engaged in qualitative research with human subjects, I understood from the outset my responsibility to maintain high ethical standards while conducting research with human subjects. Many (but not all) of these standards are included in the research protocol required of researchers by a research university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). I believe IRB protocols form the basis of the research ethics that underlie both quantitative and qualitative research. The section that follows details specific sections of the IRB protocol I completed, which were subsequently approved prior to conducting research. I conclude this
section with brief discussions of honesty, trust, intervention, and advocacy in qualitative research (Miles, et al., 2014), important considerations which are often not explicit in the IRB protocol.

**Informed consent.** After obtaining provisional verbal consent from the original five participants, I presented them with a formal consent form. This amounted to a concrete way of providing participants with the information they needed in order to make informed decisions about their participation. The form detailed the rights and responsibilities they could expect as research participants, specifically: a) the nature of the research and their participation in it; b) the duration of the study; c) their right to withdraw from the study at any time; d) the risks and benefits of participating in the study; e) the ways in which I planned to safeguard data collected from participants and guarantee participant anonymity and confidentiality; f) issues regarding participant or researcher compensation; and g) contact information participants could access if they had questions about the research, the researcher, or related items. I discussed the form in detail with each participant and offered them time to think about their participation in the research before they signed the form. Ultimately, five potential participants signed the consent form (see next section).

**Right to withdraw.** Included in the IRB protocol and the consent form was a provision that allowed for participants to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. It is possible that participants do not fully understand what they have committed to until they have begun to actively participate in the research. What they imagine to be the form, duration, or commitment of their participation may turn out to be very different once the research has begun. Consequently, participants need an “escape” provision that allows them a graceful and anonymous exit from the study. Of the five original participants who
signed the form, four remained in the study for the duration. “Victoria,” the fifth participant, never returned calls or e-mails requesting the completed online questionnaire or the dates, times, and places for the first interview. I ultimately interpreted the lack of response as a tacit withdrawal and removed her from the list of participants. As she had provided me with no data, there were none to destroy. Her identity remains anonymous.

Elimination of potential risk or harm. Prior to initiating this research, I considered physical harm to the participants to be highly unlikely, especially in light of the fact that data collection would be limited to the completion and return of questionnaires and engagement in a series of recorded individual or group interviews. No physically invasive procedures of any kind were included in this research design.

On the other hand, I considered it slightly more likely—though still remote—that participants would incur emotional or psychological harm as a result of certain sensitive topics germane to the research. Therefore, I informed the participants of the topics we would address, reminded them of their right not to respond to questions that gave them discomfort, and invited them to designate locations for interviews and focus group where they felt the most at ease.

Other potential risks or harm included breaches of data or of participant anonymity. I initiated several measures to minimize the chances such breaches would occur. These included:

- Activating encryption software on my laptop.
- Establishing passwords on all devices configurable for password protection.
- Erasing all data on non-secured devices.
- Storing the password protected devices in locked areas to which only I had access.
• Assigning pseudonyms to all people and places mentioned in the research.

• Issuing cautions as to the risks of data breaches by the participants themselves.

**Benefits outweigh potential risks.** In addition to informing the participants of risks they may run by agreeing to participate in a study, I also informed them of potential benefits to their participation. These benefits are sometimes known as reciprocity. Glesne (2011) cautions that, when considering possible benefits to research participants, researchers must consider benefits beyond those that take the form of material gifts of thanks; that is, intrinsic benefits that can be internalized and accessed by participants long after the research has concluded.

Chief among these is the acquisition of new insights and knowledge. It is possible that through demographic questionnaires, in depth interviews, focus groups, and the selection of important artifacts, participants may have learned more about themselves and the context in which they teach than they would have had they not participated in the research. Once acquired, this new knowledge could be accessible to the participants in future contexts, such as when acquiring even newer knowledge related to teaching and learning in the current era of education “reform.”

A greater sense of professional confidence and respect is another benefit the participants may derive from participating in this research. Being treated seriously and respectfully as experts and professionals in this study may constitute a welcomed change from the negative and sometimes humiliating ways in which many teachers recently have been treated or portrayed, either directly by site-based administrators or indirectly by the press, politicians, or the general public.

Third, through their participation in the research, these veteran dual-language teachers
may gain valuable allies in whom they can confide and with whom they can act as they enter
the latter phase of their careers. The first ally may be the researcher himself. Through their
participation in the research, they may come to realize they have an ally in the academic
world who will strive to accurately represent their voices to audiences that never would have
heard them had they not accepted the offer to participate in the research.

The second ally or allies may consist of the other participants in the study. The time
spent sharing and debating views during the two focus groups afforded the participants
significant insights into each other’s views on myriad issues, thus establishing the possibility
for future alliances as they continue their individual and collective careers in education
within the district.

The preceding represents some possible benefits to the participants. They may have
experienced others, none at all, or may experience the benefits sometime in the future. What
is most important is that if participation in qualitative research implies potential risks, it
implies potential benefits, as well.

**Research conducted by qualified investigators.** The degree to which I was a
qualified researcher prior to conducting this study could be debated. I felt that five years of
challenging doctoral-level course work had provided me adequate preparation for many of
the theoretical and methodological facets of the research. I cannot say, however, that I had
years of experience as a researcher prior to undertaking this research. I was aware of my
status as a novice researcher and that I would likely commit mistakes commensurate with
that status. Indeed, a few such mistakes occurred during the research process. I did my best
to address them promptly, ethically, and professionally. It was my estimation that none had
any substantive or lasting effects on the research.
Regardless of any objective assessment of my qualifications as a researcher, I felt I was as qualified as I could be prior to the research. After the research began in earnest, I tried to enhance my research knowledge and skills by consulting more seasoned researchers and their work. Finally, I believe I was honest with all parties, including the participants, with regard to the level of research expertise and experience I possessed prior to and during the study.

**Intervention and advocacy.** Intervention and advocacy in research often refer to the researcher’s role and response when harmful, illegal, or wrongful behavior is discovered during a study (Miles et al., 2014). Intervention could come into play in regard to certain actions on the part of the participants or people with whom the participants are in contact. While I did identify a few occasions where individual participants took action in response to actions by others they believed were potentially harmful to their students or the school community, I did not identify anything in their responses that could be even remotely interpreted as wrongful, harmful, or illegal.

As for researcher advocacy, Miles et al. (2014) suggest the researcher ask him or herself, “Should I speak for anyone’s interests besides my own? If so, whose interests do I advocate?” (p. 64). The four participants are strong advocates for the students, dual-language programs, schools, and communities where they teach. They are also strong advocates for their own interests. No researcher could advocate for these interests better than the participants themselves. The participants are also quite adept at advocating for teachers, including themselves. There are, however, natural limitations on the advocacy in which hard-working teachers can engage. Is it possible another party, perhaps in the form of a researcher, could refine and amplify these voices of advocacy such that they reached new and
broader audiences?

I believe the underlying premise and motivation for this research constitute an act of advocacy. Interpreting and telling the stories of veteran, dual-language teachers who have found ways to continue teaching despite political forces of “reform” that have led others to leave the profession is a form of advocacy that has the potential not only to increase their own professional longevity but that of others. Such stories can provide teachers, administrators, and policy makers with points of departure for the development of policies and programs aimed at retaining more experienced, dedicated, and talented teachers in classrooms. This could, in turn, address acute and chronic teacher shortages at all levels, as well as growing imbalances in the teaching corps that favor less experienced teachers, who entered the profession after modern “reforms” had become normalized, over more veteran teachers, who retain historical knowledge that affords them a more critical perspective on the genesis and evolution of “reforms.” Human groups large and small have always benefited from the historical knowledge of the oldest among them and the teaching corps is no exception. If any advocacy imbedded in the current research results in greater preservation of public education’s “elders,” it will surpass the purely academic goal of contributing new knowledge to the field and render the research more than just an arduous requirement to fulfill.

**Honesty, truthfulness, and trust.** Miles et al. (2014) address these important concepts in three ways. The first concerns the nature of the relationship between the researchers and the participants. Is it an honest relationship? That is, is the relationship transparent, balanced, and void of deception? The second involves the degree of truthfulness in reporting data and what they have learned from the data. Are the researchers, to the best
of their ability, telling the truth about the data and the conclusions they have drawn from it? The third concerns the trust between the researcher and participants. Do the researchers trust that the participants are providing truthful, sincere, and accurate responses to the researchers’ questions? For their part, do the participants trust the researchers’ expertise, judgment, and ability to portray the participants’ responses as accurately as possible?

I believe honesty was evident in my relationship with the four participants. From the outset, I was honest, open, and transparent about who I was and what I was investigating and about my views regarding education “reforms,” among other things. For their part, I found all four participants to be open, honest, and transparent with me and with each other, whether it was recounting intimate personal or professional experiences relevant to the research, their changing roles at their respective schools, or their feelings and opinions concerning how I was conducting the research. At times, the participants’ responses contrasted with responses they believed I or others might want to hear (e.g., a positive comment regarding high-stakes standardized tests), yet they provided their responses anyway. This, more than anything else, demonstrated to me their honesty and integrity as participants, as well as their determination not to tailor their responses to what they thought I would like to hear.

I have found truthfulness is a more difficult concept to judge than honesty. One can justifiably ask, whose truth? When two people experience the same phenomenon, who is to say their perceptions of the phenomenon will necessarily correspond? They could derive very different conclusions from the experience and report them both as “the truth,” even though a third person might correctly perceive the two “truths” as an irreconcilable paradox.

Such is the researcher’s dilemma. What truths I might tell after collecting and analyzing the data might not correspond to the truths others, including the participants, might
tell. The prospect of being told “I didn’t say that” or “that’s not what I meant” haunts many a researcher. Whose truths or what truths are told, and how they are told, constitute some of the risks as well as some of the joyous benefits of qualitative research. If the researchers and participants are honest, open, and sincere about their roles in the research and perceive their work as oriented toward mutual goals, differences between their respective truths may be interpreted simply as characteristic of research conducted with human subjects in all their perceptual complexity.

Finally, I believe trust is the direct result of honesty and truthfulness. If the latter two are mutual and strong, it is more likely that trust will be strong, as well. In addition to any trust I may have accrued through honesty and truthfulness, I have confidence I earned trust from the participants in others ways, such as through follow-up questions, as well as through our shared professional identities and experiences as dual language teachers in the same public school district. Although I will never know, it is quite possible the degree of trust between the participants and me would not have been as strong, and the data not as rich, had they only been able to relate to me as a researcher, and not as a fellow teacher.

Honesty, truthfulness, and trust in research are intertwined and interrelated. Each comes into play in different ways and to different degrees at key points in the research process. None is perfect, pure, or constant. In the end, what may be more important than actually attaining perfection in these areas may be the degree to which all parties involved strive to achieve them.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to “how well the researcher has provided evidence that her . . . descriptions and analysis represent the reality of the situations
and persons studied” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 112). Qualitative researchers have addressed trustworthiness through credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. In the sections below I describe the four main elements of trustworthiness in qualitative research and how I attempted to apply them to the current study.

**Credibility.** In qualitative research, credibility refers to the degree of accuracy of the perceptions of the participants and how they correspond to the manner in which they are portrayed by the researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The credibility of a study is fortified when the researchers are able to answer the following questions in the affirmative: “Do the findings of the study make sense? Are they credible to the people we study and to our readers? Do we have an authentic portrait of what we are looking at?” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 312).

I believe the following nine of fourteen “credibility” strategies identified by Shenton (2004), and adopted by me, fortify this study’s credibility:

a) Adoption of established research methods and the triangulation of data.

b) Gaining familiarity with the research context.

c) Encouraging honesty in participant responses.

d) Creating opportunities for debriefing and member checking.

e) Engaging peers and faculty in the review of research, data, and analysis.

f) Documenting my critical and analytic growth in my researcher’s journal.

g) Asserting my personal and professional qualifications, background, experiences.

h) Including thick description of the phenomenon being studied.

i) Completing a thorough examination of previous findings.

To this list, Miles et al. (2014) add identifying areas of uncertainty and the
presentation of negative evidence and rival explanations.

**Dependability.** Dependability has been defined as the stability over time of the research process across both researchers and methods (Miles et al., 2014), or how well the research process dependably returns findings that are compatible with the findings of other researchers studying the same phenomena (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2011). As I conducted my research, I attempted to include some of the strategies related to research dependability suggested by these authors, including:

a) Creating an audit trail.

b) Seeking inter-rater reliability.

c) Developing a research design that is congruent with clearly stated research questions.

d) Discussing my role and status in relation to the study.

e) Collecting data across a range of appropriate settings, times, and participants.

**Confirmability.** Miles, et al. (2014) describe confirmability as the “relative neutrality and reasonable freedom from unacknowledged researcher biases” (p. 311), at minimum, being explicit about the inevitability of biases. Most qualitative (and, increasingly, many quantitative researchers) accept the inevitability of researcher subjectivity and associated biases and respond by asserting the strengths of the study’s design and process. Marshall and Rossman (1989) suggest ways that researchers, including me, have attempted to strengthen their design:

a) Playing “devil’s advocate” and questioning their own analyses.

b) Searching for negative evidence.

c) Checking and rechecking the data and testing rival hypotheses and assumptions.

d) Controlling for data quality.
e) Creating an audit trail of the data collection and analysis.

To these I would add member checking or confirming with participants that I correctly interpreted what they meant to say, and a positionality statement, in which I am open about relevant biases I bring to the research.

**Transferability.** In qualitative studies, *transferability* refers to how well the researcher has “made it possible for readers to decide whether similar processes will be at work in their own settings and communities” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 113). Most importantly, transferability is strengthened by the inclusion of thick and thorough descriptions of the participants, their perceptions of select phenomena, and the physical and social environments and backgrounds in which they live and work. Miles et al. (2014) believe transferability is further strengthened by several other strategies and practices, which I attempted to integrate into this study. These include:

a) A detailed and honest discussion of the study’s limitations and delimitations.

b) Verification of the consistency between participant and reader experiences.

c) The findings connect to or confirm an existing theory.

d) A suggestion of settings where the findings could be tested in the future.

While credibility, dependability, and confirmability are no less important to the overall trustworthiness of the present research, I am especially interested in the transferability of the findings of this study to similar settings in the future. Many of the dynamics inherent in this study—such as teacher attrition, retention, and education “reforms”—are evolving rapidly. It is therefore likely that future research conditions may be quite different from those that existed while I was conducting research. This may challenge the transferability of the findings. Nevertheless, I am confident the research I conducted represents the
experiences of the participants in this study during the specific time frame during which it was conducted.
Chapter 5

The Setting

Introduction

In order to more fully understand the responses of the study’s participants to questions I posed to them in the interviews and focus groups, it is essential I provide a brief description of the various contexts in which they acquired and continue to apply much of their professional knowledge and expertise. In the sections that follow, I provide basic and relevant demographic information regarding the city, the district, and the schools that form the larger, as well as the more specific contexts that frame the teachers’ professional and personal lives.

The sources for the information I present below include city-data.com, where the city in which the four schools are located has stored much of its public data. I also found valuable information regarding school grading and teacher evaluations on the public website of the state Department of Education. The official public website for the school district provided useful information regarding the schools’ histories, program information, and other information specific to each school. Finally, an internal district research website, available only to employees of the district, was an important source of information related to student test scores, teacher evaluations, and other anonymized, aggregate data. Providing my district employee e-mail address and password was the only way I was able to gain access to the information on this site.

The City

The context for this qualitative, multi-case study is a large city in the American Southwest. In terms of ethnicity and language, the city is diverse. According to 2017 census
estimates and projections (www.census.gov), forty-eight percent of the city’s residents identify as Hispanic, forty percent as Anglo, and five percent as Native American. African American residents make up two percent of the population, as do Asian American residents. Spanish is the predominant primary home language other than English (PHLOTE) and is spoken in nearly thirty percent of the city’s households. Other home languages include a half dozen languages indigenous to North America, regional and indigenous languages of East Africa, as well as other world languages such as Mandarin, Arabic, and Russian. Ten percent of the population is foreign born. Thirty-three percent of the city’s residents twenty-five years or older have obtained a bachelor’s, advanced, or professional degree.

In economic terms, the major industries in the city include education, the military, aerospace, health care, nuclear science, solar energy development, information technology, film and digital media, and tourism. The service industry is sizable, as is small business ownership. The median household income in 2016 was approximately $48,000, with an per capita income of $27,000. Sixty percent of the city’s residents own and occupy their own homes, which average $185,000 in value. While there are areas of the city that are known for wealth or even opulence, nearly twenty percent of the city’s residents live in poverty.

The District

The public-school district in which the study’s four participants teach is among the largest in the nation, both in geographic range and in student population. While independent from the city, the district’s borders roughly correspond to those of the city, though its total geographic range stretches well beyond the city limits to unincorporated areas in the surrounding county. According to the most recent data available on the district’s website, over six thousand teachers and two thousand educational assistants teach the ninety-thousand
students in over one hundred forty schools, including several dozen public charter schools whose charters are approved by the district. Data supplied to the district by the federal government after the 2010 census show that, of the ninety-thousand students, forty-seven percent identify as Hispanic, forty-one percent as Anglo, four percent as Native American, and two and one-half percent for both African American and Asian-American students (https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/nm). The district reports that English learners\(^\text{14}\) make up seventeen percent of the student population. Almost twenty percent of the student enrollment attends special education classes, which service students with physical or cognitive needs or challenges. The district reported a graduation rate in 2016 of approximately sixty-seven percent. The national average at the same time was eighty-four percent (Ballingit, 2017).

Relevant to this study are the poverty rates within the district. A family of four with an annual income of approximately $38,000 or less is considered low income by the U. S. Department of Education (https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/incomelevels.html). Schools where forty percent or more of families are low income qualify for federal Title I funds. These funds provide supplemental financial assistance to schools with high rates of poverty. According to data available on the district’s website, of the one hundred seventy-four regular and charter elementary, middle, and high schools in the district, one hundred thirty-one (or seventy-five percent) receive Title I funds. This includes the four schools involved in this study, though the poverty rates among them vary. The schools that do not receive Title I funds also vary in terms of family income, but none attains the forty percent poverty threshold necessary to qualify for Title I funds.

\(^{14}\) I prefer Ofelia Garcia’s term “emergent bilingual,” since it recognizes the value and power of students’ home languages and implies that one of the responsibilities of public schools is to strive to develop these home languages alongside English. The district, however, uses the term English learners, so that is what I have used here in association with their data.
The Schools

Because of the size of the school district, schools within the district are distributed over a broad geographic area, ranging nearly twenty-five miles north-to-south and twenty miles east-to-west. The schools at which the participants in this study teach cover a smaller geographic area. They lie on a line near the geographic center of the district that stretches east-to-west for approximately seven miles, with “Mountain” Elementary, where Julie teaches, on the eastern end of the line and “Valley” Elementary, where Selene teaches, on the western end. “Zapata” Elementary, where Theo teaches, is located approximately two and a half miles west of Mountain, while “St. James” Elementary, where Fatima teaches, is located approximately three miles east of Valley.

The extensive geographic and demographic range of the district is such that it includes schools populated by poor or low-income students of color, on one end, to schools where wealthy, Anglo students predominate, on the other. The remaining schools in the district fall somewhere between, that is, varying percentages of Anglo students and students of color, along with students of a variety of cultural, linguistic, and economic groups. In general, St. James, Mountain, and Valley occupy the region of the range characterized primarily by poor to low-income residents of color, many of whom speak languages other than English at home. Zapata is more representative of the middle of the range, which is where, in general, the state and the school district reside. Finally, there is “Northside” Elementary. This school is not a part of this study. However, I present it here as representative of the end of the demographic range opposite that of St. James, Mountain, and Valley, that is, an overwhelming Anglo majority student population characterized by wealth.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>St. James (Fatima)</th>
<th>Mountain (Julie)</th>
<th>Valley (Selene)</th>
<th>Zapata (Theo)</th>
<th>Northside (comparison school)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Founded</strong></td>
<td>1908 (relocated 1949)</td>
<td>1938 (relocated 1947)</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Numbers of students &amp; staff</strong></td>
<td>S=550, T=39, EA = 11</td>
<td>S = 600, T = 37, EA = 14</td>
<td>S = 558, T = 37, EA = 12</td>
<td>S = 342, T = 32, EA = 14</td>
<td>S = 608, T = 37, EA = 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student race/ethnicity</strong></td>
<td>95% H, 2% Af, 2% Ang</td>
<td>86% H, 7% Nat, 4% Af, 1% As</td>
<td>92% H, 4% Ang, 2% Nat, 2% Af</td>
<td>54% H, 35% Ang, 6% Nat, 3% Af, 2% As</td>
<td>51% Ang, 29% H, 18% As</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English learners</strong></td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students receiving FRPM</strong></td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students in special education</strong></td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students in “gifted” program</strong></td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proficiency range on standardized tests: all students</strong></td>
<td>Low: 7% (4th Math) High: 22% (5th ELA)</td>
<td>Low: 8% (5th ELA) High: 26% (3rd Math)</td>
<td>Low: 11% (4th Math) High: 26% (3rd Math)</td>
<td>Low:18% (4th Math) High: 37% (3rd Math)</td>
<td>Low: 56% (3rd ELA) High: 80% (3rd Math)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proficiency on standardized tests: English learners</strong></td>
<td>10% (23/216 ELs)</td>
<td>9% (40/327 ELs)</td>
<td>14% (23/157 ELs)</td>
<td>6% (3/47 ELs)</td>
<td>52% (20/38 ELs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School grades (2011-2017)</strong></td>
<td>CCDCF-D-D</td>
<td>FFDDD-F-D</td>
<td>CCDAD-F-D</td>
<td>CBBCD-F-F</td>
<td>BCBAAM-A-A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher evaluation (Ineff—MinEff—Eff—HiEff—Ex)</strong></td>
<td>8-23-49-18-3%</td>
<td>5-35-43-11-5%</td>
<td>3-27-33-27-9%</td>
<td>0-28-48-24-0%</td>
<td>3-6-35-50-6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3. Basic demographic information for schools (2015-2016 school year).** Sources: District databases and city-data.com. Key: Af = African American, Ang = Anglo, As = Asian American, FRMP = Free or Reduced-Price Meals, EA = Educational Assistant, EL = English Learners, ELA = English Language Arts, Eff = Effective, Ex = Exemplary, H = Hispanic, HiEff = Highly Effective, Ineff = Ineffective, MinEff = Minimally Effective, Nat = Native American, S = Student, T = Teacher, X = no data.
A summary of the demographic data of all five schools, as well as data of the neighborhoods that constitute their attendance zones, is include in Table 3.

**Fatima’s school: St. James Elementary.** “St. James,”¹⁵ Fatima’s school, is one of the oldest schools in the district. It was founded in 1908 and incorporated into the school district in 1949. “Los Brazos,” the historic neighborhood in which it is located, is one of the oldest in the city. The school is located on a major north-south city artery on which there are numerous retail stores, a modern public library, and a community theater that hosts art, music, dance presentations, and other events. The school is near downtown and the railroad. Most of the residences near the school are older, single-family dwellings. According to city-data.com, the attendance area is over ninety percent Hispanic, with variations between two and three percent in various neighborhoods within the attendance area. The median age in the attendance area is thirty-four. The median income for a family of four is $40,000, which results in a poverty rate of twenty-two percent. Unemployment in the area is six percent. Twenty-four percent of houses in the attendance area are occupied by families. Average house value in the area is $105,000.

The student body largely reflects the school community. Of the approximately five hundred fifty students attending St. James during the 2016-2017 school year, ninety-five percent were Hispanic. Over forty percent of the families at St. James were enrolled in federal assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), the Federal Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), or the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Enrollment in such programs grants children in these families automatic (or “categorical”) eligibility for the Free or Reduced

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¹⁵ All school and other place names in this study are pseudonyms.
Priced Meals program (FRPM). The forty percent federal assistance threshold also grants eligibility for the FRPM to all other students enrolled in the school, regardless of whether the family receives federal assistance or falls within the federal definition of low income.\textsuperscript{16} Approximately forty percent of the students at St. James were designated by the district’s language proficiency assessments as English learners. Though Spanish and English were the most widely spoken languages in the homes of the students who attend St. James, American Sign Language (ASL) and at least two Native American languages\textsuperscript{17} were represented, as well. Approximately twelve percent of the students qualified for special education services. Five percent more qualified for the program for “gifted” learners.\textsuperscript{18}

The signing of the federal Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 reauthorized the federal government to require that every public-school student in the United States participate in high-stakes, standardized tests of English language arts, math, and science. In the state where St. James is located, the test was developed by publishing giant Pearson (parcc.pearson.com) in association with the small group of individuals who created the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which were initially adopted by over forty states. For reasons related to test reliability, validity, bias, costs, time consumption, content, curriculum narrowing, and more, the tests have always been and continue to be controversial.

\textsuperscript{16} Poverty levels for families are determined by family size and income. In the 2016-2017 school year, a family of four earning less than $25,750 was considered living in poverty. A family earning less than one hundred eighty percent ($44,955) of that amount qualified for reduced price lunch, while a family earning less than one hundred thirty percent ($31,590) qualified for free lunch. See https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/income-eligibility-guidelines for more information regarding the federal lunch program.
\textsuperscript{17} In the interest of confidentiality, I have not disclosed the precise names of the various Native American languages to which I refer in this section.
\textsuperscript{18} While it is true that the “gifted” program is classified and funded under the state’s special education program, statistics for gifted student services are calculated and disseminated separately by the district.
According to data made available to the district’s internal (employee access) website, third, fourth, and fifth graders enrolled at St. James during the 2016-2017 academic year scored from a low of seven percent on the fourth grade math assessment to as high as twenty-two percent on the fifth grade English language arts portion. The proficiency percentages for other grades and subject areas (e.g., third-grade science) were either less than twenty-two percent or greater than seven percent. Of the two hundred sixteen English learners enrolled in the school in 2016-2017, twenty-three, or approximately eleven percent, scored proficient or higher.¹⁹

Beginning in 2014, all public-school teachers in the state were subjected to an annual high-stakes, standardized teacher evaluation, fifty percent of which was determined by each teacher’s student test scores. As the result of an extended outcry from teachers, parents, unions, key policy makers, and some school districts, the weight of student test scores on teacher evaluations was reduced in 2016 to thirty-five percent. In addition to student test scores, the state Department of Education states that it includes planning and preparation, creating an environment for learning, teaching for learning, and professionalism as part of the teacher evaluation. the evaluation of this component is determined by brief visits to the classroom by an administrator, usually the school principal. Other parts of the evaluation are artifacts teachers are responsible for uploading to the evaluation website. These artifacts are intended as evidence of “effectiveness” on the part of the teacher.

¹⁹ Some of the English learners were students of Fatima and some may have received waivers from the state Department of Education in order to take the tests in Spanish. However, I was unable to determine the number of English learners in her class, or the number who may have received waivers. The school district does not report results of the Spanish version of the test separately from the results of the English version. This holds true for the other participants and their students.
Of the thirty-nine teachers at St. James in the 2016-2017 school year, forty-nine percent, or approximately twenty teachers, were deemed “effective,” eighteen percent “highly effective,” and three percent “exemplary” on the state’s controversial standardized teacher evaluation. On the other end of range, twenty-three percent of the teachers at St. James were classified as “minimally effective,” while three percent were deemed “ineffective.” Teachers in the latter two categories are required by the state Department of Education to follow an “improvement plan” until their evaluation scores are at least “effective.”

Just as teacher evaluations are partially determined by students’ scores on high-stakes, standardized tests, so are school “A-F” grades. The difference is that student test scores make up ninety percent of each school’s letter grade. This is one reason the standardized tests are referred to as “high-stakes.” Four test-derived categories determine the school grade: student performance, school improvement, improvement of higher-performing students, and improvement of lower-performing students. Accordingly, during the 2016-2017 school year, St. James received a grade of “D” (represented in bold type in table X). According to the website of the state Department of Education, during the five years prior to that year, the school had received two “Cs,” a “D,” another “C,” and an “F.” A school that receives three or more consecutive years of “D” or “F” grades is automatically placed on the

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20 For an in-depth discussion of how some teachers across the country interpret such evaluations, see https://networkforpubliceducation.org/wpcontent/uploads/2016/04/NPETeacherEvalReportCompress.pdf

21 Incidentally, information about teachers who are evaluated—such as ethnicity, languages spoken, degrees and endorsements achieved, or years of teaching experience—is not made available to the public or to district employees, such as me, who do not work in Human Resources. As a result, no correlations can be made between the results of a given teacher’s evaluation and data related to his or her personal or professional characteristics.
state’s lists of “priority,” “focus,” or “strategic” schools, the last designation of which can lead to “corrective actions” mandated by the state.22

Regardless of any test-dependent school grade assigned to St. James by the state Department of Education, the school has long been regarded as a good one.23 Families from around the district apply for transfers to St. James in order to attend its well-regarded dual-language program, which constitutes the majority of the classrooms at the school. The teachers in that program—as well as many other teachers, the school principal, office staff, and support staff—are fluent in Spanish and can communicate in the home language of all of their students. This helps maintain St. James as an important institutional resource for the surrounding neighborhoods.

Additionally, St. James has been a long-time leader in the dual-language education movement in the city. Indeed, in the mid 1990s, the school bused students, teachers, and parents to the state legislature to protest the fact that the state only considered the students’ standardized test scores in English, not in Spanish, in determining overall student achievement at the school.24 St. James was one of the first dual-language schools in the district. To this day, teachers at the school maintain a high participation rate at the popular dual-language conference held in the state each year.

22 In the 2017-2018 school year, St. James received a “D” grade, thus putting it at risk for “corrective action.” In 2019, immediately after the inauguration of a new governor, the A-F grading system was abolished.

23 Reputations are anecdotal and subjective. They are, therefore, open to interpretation and debate. However, I have taught in the school district for over thirty years. I have known St. James Elementary as a good to excellent school, both through my direct associations with it, as well as through what other educators and parents have said to me about it.

24 At the time, the school administered both the English and Spanish versions of the tests to their students. Because the home language of a large percentage of the student body was Spanish, the aggregate scores on the English version of the test tended to be lower than those on the Spanish version.
By nearly all measures, except perhaps those preferred by the state Department of Education, St. James Elementary is a good school, one in which Fatima chose to teach, and one she does not anticipate leaving anytime soon.

**Julie’s school: Mountain Elementary.** “Mountain” Elementary, where Julie teaches, was built in 1938. Two years later, it was moved a few short blocks east to its current location. The school lies in a neighborhood, approximately one mile square, which is bounded by four major city streets, each street at least four lanes wide and each hosting a variety of businesses, including car dealerships, car washes, and auto parts stores, restaurants that feature various world cuisines, and more. The nearest grocery story is one that caters to the international composition of the neighborhood. The residences that surround the school are mostly single-family dwellings or inexpensive, single-story apartment complexes.

According to data provided by city-data.com, Mountain is located in an attendance area whose neighborhoods are characterized by high concentrations of low-income and working-class residents, seventy-five percent of whom are Hispanic and whose average age is twenty-eight. Other ethnic groups that populate the neighbor are Anglo, African American, Native American, and immigrants and refugees from various countries in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Families occupy seventy-six percent of the residences. Houses in the area have an average value of $67,300. An average household income of $21,000 results in a poverty rate of thirty-three percent. The unemployment rate in the Mountain Elementary attendance area is approximately ten percent.

Data from the school district’s official website states that ninety-seven percent of parents identified their children as Hispanic on the school’s enrollment form, while fifty-five percent qualified as English learners on a standardized assessment of English proficiency.
administered by the district. Among these fifty-five percent were speakers of Spanish, Arabic, Vietnamese, several Native American languages, Kiswahili, and over a dozen indigenous languages (most from east and central Africa) spoken at home by students whose families were settled in the neighborhood as a part of a federal international refugee resettlement program. Because over forty percent of the families who enrolled their children at Mountain during the 2016-2017 school year were enrolled in one or more federal assistance programs, one hundred percent of its six hundred students, regardless of family income, were eligible for free breakfast and lunch. Students enrolled in special education classes constituted thirteen percent of the student body, while four percent qualified for “gifted” education.

Student scores from the annual high-stakes standardized tests, published on the district’s internal website, show proficiency levels in 2016-2017 for third, fourth, and fifth graders at Mountain ranged from a low of eight percent on fifth grade English language arts to a high of twenty-six percent on third grade math. (Science is the other subject tested.) Scores for other grades and subject areas—e.g., fourth grade math, fifth grade science, third grade language arts—were greater than eight percent and less than twenty-six percent. Of students designated as English learners, forty of three hundred twenty-seven, or twelve percent, scored proficient or higher on the high-stakes tests (see Footnote 4, above).

As stated above, beginning in 2016 the percentage of student test scores linked directly to teachers’ evaluations was reduced from fifty to thirty-five percent. Of the thirty-seven teachers at Mountain during the 2016-2017 school year, forty-three percent, or about fifteen teachers, were evaluated as “effective,” the middle of five hierarchical categories. On the “lower” end of the scale, thirty-five percent (or about twelve teachers) were evaluated as
“minimally effective,” while five percent (approximately two teachers) were evaluated as “ineffective,” the lowest category. “Minimally effective” and “ineffective” teachers are subject to an “improvement plan,” approved by the school principal. On the “higher” end of the continuum, eleven percent (or about four teachers) were evaluated as “highly effective,” while five percent (or about two teachers) were deemed “exemplary,” the highest category.

As with St. James Elementary and all other public schools in the state, ninety percent of Mountain’s annual school grade is linked directly to the results of the standardized tests administered to its students. According to data published by the Department of Education on its website, Mountain received a grade of “F” during the 2016-2017 school year. For the five years prior to the 2016-2017 school year, Mountain received two “F” grades and three “D” grades. Beginning in 2014, Mountain was listed on the list of the state’s public schools as a “priority” school, the first of three designations by the state that can lead to mandated “corrective actions” by the state Department of Education.

Mountain’s “D” and “F” grades belie its many positive qualities. Thanks to various services funded by state and federal agencies and located at the school, the school is an important focal point of social, educational, health, and nutritional support for the surrounding neighborhoods, especially those with high concentrations of recent immigrants. These government services, as well as those offered by religious groups and non-profit organizations, go a long way toward welcoming immigrants to the school and integrating them into a community that is sensitive to their needs and challenges. For these reasons, Mountain Elementary has found that it is not only indispensable to the people in its immediate vicinity, but to the entire district and the city, as well. Like St. James, many teachers and other staff at Mountain speak the home language of their students—Spanish
being the most common—which facilitates teaching and learning. All administrative staff and support staff (counselor, nurse, custodians) are fluent in at least two languages. All teachers are certified in ESL teaching strategies, which have as one of their main goals the consideration of their students’ home languages as assets rather than barriers to learning. Finally, Mountain is perhaps the only, or one of only two elementary schools in the district that offers classes to Native American students in their tribal languages.

Additionally, professors and graduate students at the local state university have for some time undertaken numerous research and direct service projects, nearly all of which have involved the cooperation and participation of the school’s faculty in an attempt to address the cultural, linguistic, and economic interests and needs of the students and their families. Each summer, an intensive ESL institute is held at the school whereby new and veteran teachers seeking ESL or TESOL certification take the requisite university classes while spending two hours each day teaching students and parents from the community enrolled in the institute’s summer “lab” school in order to maintain the academic progress students made during the previous school year.

Like St. James, Mountain Elementary is considered a good school by most of its constituents. It fulfills important roles in the community that other schools do not or will not. If student test scores did not constitute ninety percent of the school’s grade—and other, more qualitative measures were considered—Mountain would be earning higher letter grades from the state.

Selene’s school: Valley Elementary. Selene teaches at Valley Elementary, a school built in 1952 and located in a neighborhood of mostly single-family houses shaded by large trees, something of a novelty in the desert regions of the Southwest. It is located
approximately one mile southwest of downtown in a part of the city that juts out into the county and, consequently, is surrounded on the east, south, and west by county land. Furthermore, it is buffered from downtown and nearby businesses by other neighborhoods and some formidable geographic and natural barriers. The result is a school and its surrounding community that have a much more rural feel than most other schools located within the city limits. According city-data.com, the attendance area around Valley is approximately eighty-six percent Hispanic, with a median age of thirty. The median income for a family of four is $22,000, which contributes to a poverty rate of twenty-five percent. Ten percent of the adult residents are unemployed. Fifty percent of all houses in the attendance area are occupied by families. The average house value in the area is approximately $114,000.

The student population at Valley generally reflects the demographics of its attendance area. According to data made available on the district’s website, of over five hundred fifty students enrolled at Valley during the 2016-2017 school year, approximately five hundred ten, or ninety-two percent, identified as Hispanic on their enrollment cards. Like St. James and Mountain, over forty percent of Valley’s families were enrolled in one of several federal food assistance programs; therefore, all students at Valley, regardless of income, were eligible for free daily meals. Thirty percent of the student body qualified on the district’s English language proficiency assessment as English learners. Most of those students spoke Spanish as their first and home language. However, Valley listed American Sign Language (ASL), Vietnamese, and two major Native American languages as other home languages spoken by some of its students. Thirty-two percent of students qualified for some type of
special education, while an additional four percent qualified for the district’s “gifted” program.

As with other data specific to schools, results from the controversial high-stakes standardized tests administered annually to Valley’s third, fourth, and fifth graders are uploaded to the district’s internal, online databases. Test results from the spring of 2017 show that eleven percent of Valley’s fourth graders scored proficient or higher in math, while twenty-six percent of Valley’s third graders scored proficient or higher in the same subject. All other grade and subject combinations (e.g., fifth-grade math, fourth-grade language arts) produced proficiency scores greater than eleven percent and less than twenty-six percent. Relevant to this study and to Selene’s third-grade class is the fact that fourteen percent of Valley’s third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade English learners scored proficient or higher on the annual high-stakes tests of academic achievement (see Footnote 4, above).

Just as students are subjected to standardized tests of academic achievement, teachers are required to submit to an annual standardized evaluation, thirty-five percent of which is determined by the standardized test results produced by the teacher’s students. The remaining sixty-five percent is determined by classroom observations by the principal and artifacts provided by each teacher that offer evidence of effectiveness in planning and preparation, creating an environment conducive to learning, teaching for learning, and professionalism. Of the thirty-seven teachers at Valley during the 2016-2017 school year, thirty-three percent, or approximately twelve teachers, were deemed “effective.” Twenty-seven percent (approximately ten teachers) were deemed “minimally effective,” while three percent (approximately one teacher) was “ineffective.” On the other end of the scale, twenty-
seven percent (approximately ten teachers) received “highly effective” designations, while nine percent (approximately three teachers) were designated “exemplary.”

Valley’s history with the A-F grading system has been a whiplash. As with other schools, ninety percent of the annual school grade is determined by the school’s student scores on annual high-stakes standardized tests. From the 2010-2011 to the 2016-2017 school year, Valley received two consecutive “C” grades, followed by a “D” grade, an “A” grade, and another “D” grade, before receiving an “F” grade from the state Department of Education for the 2016-2017 school year. Valley therefore joined other schools around the state that were labeled by the Department of Education one year among the best in the state, only to be relabeled soon thereafter among the worst.

Whether publicly known as an “A,” a “C,” a “D,” or an “F” school, Valley abides. The families who live in the school’s attendance area have remained loyal over the years. The dual-language program, which Selene co-founded decades ago during her first tour at Valley, was one of the first in the city and continues to attract or retain both those who speak Spanish as their first language and those who speak English as their first language. Valley was and continues to be a leader in the dual-language school community in the city. As of the 2016-2017 school year, it was of few elementary schools that offered an elementary bilingual seal on students’ fifth grade “graduation” certificates. Valley hosts dual-language informational and entertainment evenings for the Valley community and sometimes for the school district. Soon after the conclusion of this study, Valley’s dual-language program

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25 The state offers a bilingual seal to high school seniors who can demonstrate academic excellence across the curriculum in two or more languages. The seal is affixed to students’ diplomas. The elementary version of the seal, which is available at Valley, is a portfolio of the students’ in-school and extracurricular work in two or more languages during the elementary years. The elementary version of the seal is designed to position students to obtain the high school version, as well.
received an award for excellence from the state legislature. Selene, along with the principal and two other staff members, traveled to the state capitol to accept the award.

**Theo’s school: Zapata Elementary.** Theo teaches at “Zapata” Elementary, a school built in 1949 near what used to be the edge of the city, before decades of growth “re-located” it in an area that is now considered nearer the center of the city. The school is surrounded by single family houses, townhouses, and apartment buildings. It is one block from a major city artery, on which are located many retail shops, restaurants, and a grocery store. According to city-data.com, the website to which the city refers requests for demographic information, Zapata’s attendance area reflects more closely, though not exactly, the demographics of the school district, which, in turn, reflects those of the state, where Anglos are outnumbered by residents of color, including Hispanics, African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans, among others.

A closer look, however, reveals that the demographics within Zapata’s attendance area vary widely, depending on the precise neighborhood in question. For example, the Anglo population of the attendance area ranges from fifty percent in one neighborhood, to eighty percent in another. The Hispanic population ranges from twenty to forty percent, and the Native American and African American populations from zero and six percent. Poor, working-class, middle-class, and upper middle-class households are all found in Zapata’s attendance area, which has an average poverty rate that ranges from ten to twenty percent and an unemployment rate of about six percent across the area. The median price for a single-family dwelling in Zapata’s attendance area ranges from $100,000 to $310,000, while median household incomes range from $20,000 to $80,000. The average resident is approximately thirty-eight years old.
The students who attend Zapata largely come from these diverse neighborhoods. Consequently, the school reflects their demographics.26 The families of approximately fifty-four percent of the students who attend Zapata identify as Hispanic, while thirty-five percent identify as Anglo. Self-identified Native Americans make up six percent of the student body, while African Americans and Asian Americans constitute three percent each. Zapata lists Arabic, Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese, and three distinct Native American languages as languages spoken at home by students and their families. The district website states that approximately half of the students at Zapata qualify for free and reduced priced meals (FRPM) and fifteen percent are English learners. Nineteen percent are enrolled in special education classes, while sixteen percent qualify for the district’s “gifted” program.

In addition to the students who live within Zapata’s attendance area, the school also enrolls a number of students from other parts of the school district. Families obtain transfers to Zapata for a number of reasons. One reason families transfer to Zapata is to attend its dual-language program. While a dual-language teacher at Zapata for nineteen years, I found that during any given year approximately half of my students, English speakers and Spanish speakers alike, lived outside Zapata’s attendance area. Another reason for transfers has to do with the program for the visually impaired, the only such program in the district. Still other students transfer to the school because their parents travel into Zapata’s attendance area in order to work in the many retail and restaurant businesses located nearby. During the day, working parents are near the school in the event they are needed by their children or want to attend events at the school. These and other transfer students bolster a student population

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26 The school district does not maintain statistics on the number of children who live in the school’s attendance area but nevertheless attend public, private, or charter schools elsewhere in the district.
that otherwise has been decreasing gradually, reaching a low of approximately three hundred fifty in 2016.

Each year, Zapata Elementary School, like all other public schools, administers federal-and state-mandated standardized tests to its third, fourth, and fifth graders. The most basic data produced by the tests is the percentage of students in each grade level deemed proficient in language arts, math, or science, the only three subject areas for which students are tested. Data retrieved by me from the district’s internal databases show that, in the 2016-2017 school year, the lowest proficiency level for any subject and for any grade at Zapata was eighteen percent on fourth-grade math. The highest proficiency level at Zapata was achieved by third graders, thirty-seven percent of whom scored proficient or higher on the third-grade math test. All other subject areas and grade level combinations—e.g., fifth-grade math, fourth-grade language arts, third-grade science—returned proficiency levels of greater than eighteen percent but less than thirty-seven percent. Relevant to this study is the fact that three of the forty-seven English learners (or six percent) in third, fourth, and fifth grades at Zapata scored proficient or higher.

The controversial state-mandated teacher evaluations were conducted at Zapata during the 2016-2017 school year, as they were at every school in the district. Again, thirty-five percent (formerly fifty percent) of a teacher’s evaluation is determined by his or her students’ standardized test scores. The remaining sixty-five percent is determined by administrative observations and teacher-provided artifacts that offer evidence of teacher effectiveness in planning and preparation, creating an environment for learning, teaching for learning, and professionalism. The results of the teacher evaluations at Zapata show that twenty-three percent (approximately seven) of its teachers during the 2016-2017 academic
year were deemed “effective,” fifty-eight percent (approximately eighteen teachers) received designations of “highly effective,” and twelve percent (approximately four teachers) were received “exemplary” status. Only eight percent of the teachers (approximately two teachers) were designated “minimally effective.” No teachers were designated “ineffective.”

Also linked to student standardized test scores is the school’s grade. Ninety percent of the school’s grade is determined by student standardized test scores. According to the state Department of Education website, Zapata received an “F” grade for the 2016-2017 school year. The grade was initially a “D” grade, but, due to the fact that the school did not meet the federally mandated ninety-five percent participation threshold, Zapata was automatically dropped from a “D” to an “F.” In previous years, Zapata had received a “C” grade, two “B” grades, another “C,” and a “D.”

Like other schools with “D” or “F” letter grades, Zapata’s arrival in the growing numbers of the district’s “F” schools is not necessarily reflective of its true nature. The school has a long history of parent involvement, multi-generational enrollment within families, and low teacher turnover. Its dwindling enrollment, due in part to transfers to other public, private, and charter schools, as well as to an aging neighborhood, is partially offset by those attracted to its special education programs, its dual-language program, its Indian Education program, and its gymnasium, the only such building in the district that was built with four additional classrooms, a small library, and a full-sized kitchen, which are used for various after-school programs and activities. Zapata’s classic brick main building, shaded by a large, historic sycamore, and the expansive, grassy city park adjacent to it, add “curb

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27 Zapata was one of several schools in the district where a vocal minority of parents organized on behalf of their children to legally opt out of the standardized tests. Although Zapata did not reach the 95% participation threshold in 2016-2017 and in two other years, its participation rate has always been greater than 92%.
appeal” to the school. In general, teachers, students, and families are pleased with what the school offers and do what they can to keep the school open despite years of under enrollment.

**Comparison school: Northside Elementary.** “Northside” Elementary is not a part of this study. I present it here solely for purposes of comparison, to illustrate the demographic diversity of the school district. If St. James, Mountain, and Valley lie on one end of a hypothetical continuum characterized by low-income families of color, some of whom are recent immigrants who speak languages other than English, Northside lies at the end of the continuum, the side characterized by middle- to upper-income Anglos. (For its part, Zapata lies somewhere between the two ends of the continuum.) Geographically, Northside Elementary is located in a newer, more affluent neighborhood of the school district, one block outside the city limits, and nine miles to the north of the east-west line that links the other four schools. According to city-data.com, seventy percent of the residents in Northside’s attendance zone are Anglo and twenty percent are Hispanic. The average age of the adult population is forty-two. Families occupy eighty-five percent of all residences. Houses in the neighborhood have an average value of $495,000. The average household income of $110,000 helps explain a poverty rate of four percent and an unemployment rate of two percent.

According to information supplied by parents and made available by the district on its internal website, fifty-one percent of the six hundred students enrolled during the 2016-2017 school year at Northside identified as Anglo, thirty-one percent as Hispanic, and eighteen percent as Asian-American. During the same year, seven percent of students qualified for free or reduced-price meals, and a total of four Northside students qualified as English
learners. Northside listed ASL, Arabic, Cantonese, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese, and one Native American language as home languages spoken by some students and their families. Students enrolled in special education constituted six percent of the student body, while students enrolled in the gifted program represented twenty percent.

The district’s internal data show that on the annual high-stakes standardized tests, proficiency scores at Northside during the 2016-2017 school year ranged from a low of fifty-eight percent in third grade language arts to a high of eighty percent in third grade math. Scores for all other combinations of grade levels (third, fourth, and fifth) and subjects (math, science, and language arts) fell within this range. These scores contributed to high numbers of Northside teachers who were deemed “effective” or above on the state’s controversial teacher evaluation, thirty-five percent of which is determined by each teacher’s student test scores. Of the thirty-seven teachers at Northside during the 2016-2017 school year, one was evaluated as “ineffective,” two as “minimally effective,” thirteen as “effective,” eighteen as “highly effective,” and two as “exemplary.”

Test scores are also important in understanding a school’s annual A-F grade. As with all state schools since 2011, ninety percent of Northside’s school grade for the 2016-2017 school year was determined by student test scores. The school’s grade for the 2016-2017 school year was an “A.” During the five years prior to the 2016-2017 year, Northside received a “B” grade, a “C” grade, another “B” grade, followed by two “A” grades in the 2014-2015 and the 2015-2016 school years.

In conclusion, the other eighty-five elementary schools in the district fall more or less within the demographic range delimited by St. James, Mountain, and Valley, on one end, and Northside, on the other, with exceptions and variations one would expect in a city of half a
million people. Within this demographic range, Zapata Elementary, and the attendance area with which it is associated, is located roughly mid-range. Table 4 provides side-by-side demographic comparisons of the neighborhoods serving the four schools in the study, as well as Northside.

![Table 4](image)

**Table 4. Basic demographic information for neighborhoods.** Information is for the neighborhood in which each school is located. Information for other neighborhoods within each school’s attendance area varies. Key: H = Hispanic, Ang = Anglo, Af = African American, As = Asian-American, Nat = Native American. Source: city-data.com.

**The Significance of Teachers’ Choice of Schools**

The demographic information presented here is relevant to the study because it contextualizes the sites where the four participants have chosen to teach. While it details characteristics the schools have in common, it also exposes essential differences among them. This is important, as the public, policy makers, and researchers sometimes consider
schools with similar demographic profiles as somewhat monolithic, which prevents them from perceiving the uniqueness of each school.

The information regarding Northside Elementary, in particular, lends an important perspective to the demographic information by demonstrating the variety and range of the demographics encompassed by this sprawling school district. It also highlights important discrepancies between schools such as those in which the participants teach—urban, New National Demographic schools with high percentages of English learners and with “D” and “F” school grades from the Department of Education—and schools in which they do not teach: “suburban,” Anglo majority schools with few English learners and that receive grades of “A” and “B.” These discrepancies are particularly important in light of the effect scores from annual high-stakes standardized tests have on annual teacher evaluations and the school’s annual grade.

Specifically, if a teacher chooses to teach in a school like Northside, which is populated primarily by affluent, Anglo students who produce high test scores, she is more likely to receive favorable marks on her annual teacher evaluation and enjoy working at a location that is known publicly as an “A” or “B” school. This is due to the fact that, since 2016, thirty-five percent of a teacher’s annual evaluation score has been based on her students’ annual test scores. From 2011 to 2015, the weight of students’ scores on their teachers’ evaluations was fifty percent. On the other hand, if a teacher chooses to teach in a school populated primarily by low-income or working-class students of color who historically have produced lower test scores, she is less likely to receive favorable marks on her annual teacher evaluation. In addition, she risks experiencing the professional humiliation of being associated with a location that is known publicly as a “D” or “F” school.
Significantly, all four teachers who participated in this study made deliberate decisions to teach in schools with historically low standardized test scores and “D” and “F” school grades and where, consequently, they risked receiving less favorable annual evaluations than those they may have received had they chosen to teach in an “A” or “B” school with historically high standardized test scores.

Recent student achievement rates at St. James, Mountain, Valley, and Zapata have occasioned teacher “effectiveness” rates of seventy, fifty-nine, sixty-nine, and seventy-two percent, respectively. This contrasts sharply with Northside, where student achievement scores were much higher than at the four other schools, resulting in a teacher “effective” rate of ninety-one percent. Are the teachers at Northside more effective and their students more intelligent? Or are the standardized tests aligned more to the knowledge bases, learning styles, language uses, and cultural capital possessed by the students at Northside, which are subsequently reflected in students’ test scores and, ultimately, in their teachers’ annual evaluations?

While lower teacher evaluation scores have little effect on teachers’ salaries, they have real and lasting effects on teacher morale, institutional and parent perceptions of teacher quality, teachers’ ability to move between schools, and perhaps even teachers’ desire to continue teaching (Network for Public Education, 2016). Furthermore, schools with lower student test scores, low teacher evaluations, and low school grades are often the target of “reform” or “turn-around” efforts by the state’s Department of Education, efforts that can further restrict teacher autonomy and narrow the curriculum. Under such conditions, it is understandable that some teachers might choose to exercise the professional option to either transfer to a school where they would be able to exercise greater professional autonomy,
receive more favorable annual evaluations, and generally feel better about themselves and their profession—or leave teaching altogether. Indeed, many teachers have left teaching. However, the teachers who participated in this study, as well as many others, decided not only to continue teaching, but to continue teaching in environments that might appear to others as less than desirable. How and why they arrived at this decision is the focus of this study.

**Conclusion**

This study is about four teachers and their work; it is not about the schools or districts in which they work. However, in order to better understand the teachers and the work they do, I believe it is important to consider the specific contexts in which they spend their professional lives. This is what I have attempted to accomplish in this chapter.

Lastly, there may be cities, districts, and schools in other parts of the Southwest or the United States with demographic profiles similar to those I present here. There are none that are identical. Therefore, I urge others conducting research in the area of veteran, dual-language teacher retention in the age of education “reform” to decide whether the demographic and programmatic information provided in this chapter is adequate for purposes of comparison and transferability to similar contexts.
Chapter 6

The Participants

Introduction

The question that is the primary focus of this research is: how do veteran, dual-language teachers in new national demographic (NND) urban public elementary schools in the American Southwest explain their decision to continue teaching despite education “reforms” that have led to increased rates of resignations or retirements among similarly situated peers? In this chapter, I present profiles of the four teacher participants in light of this question. The profiles are based on analyses I conducted of the data collected from the participants during a series of interviews and focus group sessions. These analyses revealed personal histories and patterns of personal and professional growth that were instrumental in the participants’ initial decisions to become teachers, to become advocates for their students, and to continue as such in what many educators consider an era of public education openly hostile to public school teachers and students.

The analyses also produced several distinct and important categories that I concluded were relevant to the research questions. The following case study profiles are organized around these categories: childhood, personal traits, independence from one’s family of origin, significant experiences and events, the path to becoming a teacher, most challenging “reforms,” the teacher-advocate, resilience, and resistance.

In this chapter, I present the participants as individual cases. In the presentation of each case, I include information and data that are relevant to the research question. I discuss features of their personal lives prior to teaching: their childhoods (parents, education, cultural-linguistic geography), relevant personal traits, independence from their families of
origin, and important personal events or experiences. These personal categories establish a context for understanding the participants’ professional lives: their reasons and motivations for becoming teachers and advocates for their students and their families. I then identify the education “reforms” each participant stipulated as the greatest impediments to their teaching and the impact the “reforms” had on their teaching. In the sections on resilience and resistance, I address how the participants reacted to or confronted these “reforms.” Finally, I discuss each participant’s “breaking point,” or what they believe might be the single factor most likely to drive them prematurely from the teaching profession.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FatimaQ</td>
<td>Fatima’s responses to online questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatima1, November 19, 2016</td>
<td>Fatima's responses to and date of first interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatima2, March 18, 2017</td>
<td>Fatima's responses to and date of second interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FatimaFU</td>
<td>Fatima’s responses to follow-up questions posed, usually via e-mail, after conclusion of interviews and focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG1, March 1, 2017</td>
<td>Focus Group 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG2, April 19, 2017</td>
<td>Focus Group 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Table 5. Abbreviations for verbatim excerpts from bulk data.*

I have abbreviated the references to data sources, as per Table 5. I use Fatima’s data sources as examples. Where I divided a session into two parts, I have identified the parts as 1a, 1b (e.g., Fatima1a, Fatima1b, FG2a, FG2b, etc.).

**Fatima**

**Childhood.** Fatima was born in a large city in the United States near the border with Mexico. She identifies as Mexican American and as a balanced bilingual. Fatima’s mother was a single parent, also born in the United States, who recently completed a long career as an elementary school teacher in northern Mexico. She spent most of her summers with her
father’s relatives in the Mexican state of Nayarit. When asked about her family’s socio-economic status as a child, Fatima does not offer a label; however, she explains that her mother had a master’s degree and had attained the highest levels of professional advancement and salary available to teachers. Noting that a $30,000 annual salary is relative to the country in which one earns it, Fatima suggests that her mother would be considered a member of the middle class in Mexico, where she worked, but maybe not so in the United States, where she lived.

Each day during Fatima’s childhood, as Fatima’s mother crossed the border into Mexico to teach, Fatima remained in the United States, where she was enrolled in a dual-language program through fourth grade in a public elementary school where “my teachers were a reflection of who I was” (FatimaFU, February 4, 2018). Fatima states that her enrollment in a such a program was virtually inevitable. According to Fatima, her mother never became fully bilingual, but was determined her daughter not suffer the same fate. Invoking her mother’s voice, Fatima states:

“I never got to learn English and I want my daughter to. That’s why I have sacrificed my salary in pesos and live in [the U.S.] and have my mortgage in dollars so that she can be bilingual. I don’t want her to lose the Spanish.” (Fatima1a, November 19, 2016)

Fatima’s bilingual education, however, was not limited to the school day. Because she was bilingual and a teacher, Fatima’s mother was able to reinforce Fatima’s formal and informal skills in Spanish and in English when she returned home from school each day. Fatima recounts:

My mother surrounded me with books in both languages at a very early age. She had very high expectations of me when it came to speaking, reading, and writing in Spanish. She wanted me to be educated in at least two languages. (FatimaQ, November 6, 2016)
Just as Fatima’s mother did not interpret the end of a school day as the end of that day’s bilingual education, she did not interpret Fatima’s early exit from the district’s elementary dual-language program as the end of Fatima’s bilingual education. She was aware of the adverse effects an early exit from a bilingual program might have on her daughter’s Spanish language skills in middle school and beyond. Therefore, she resolved to do her best at home to reinforce and extend Fatima’s bilingual education with the resources, knowledge, and experience she already possessed. “My mother’s unwavering desire for me to attain academic proficiency in Spanish allowed me to retain my high oral language skills and to develop my academic Spanish skills, as well, throughout my childhood” (FatimaQ, November 6, 2016).

Fatima’s mother was instrumental in Fatima’s overall education, regardless of the language in which it was taught. As a bicultural and bilingual mother and teacher who was raising a daughter on the U.S.-Mexico border, she was determined to include a critical, bicultural perspective into Fatima’s education even when the public schools did not. For example, in her high school history class, which was taught in English, Fatima learned how vast regions of northern Mexico ultimately were “acquired” by the United States. Upon recounting this new knowledge to her mother, the latter responded: "Oh! Well, tell me what their version is, and I'll tell you what the Mexican view is!” (Fatima1a, November 19, 2016). The critical education skills and perspectives instilled by her mother were permanent and would influence Fatima’s education throughout high school, college, and graduate school.

**Personal traits.** Fatima describes herself as “very stubborn.” She demonstrates *stubbornness* in various ways, including her insistence on teaching key academic units she otherwise might have discarded in order to compensate for the large amount of time lost
annually to high-stakes standardized tests. Her stubbornness is fueled by her ability to perceive obstacles as learning opportunities instead of obstacles to her primary focus or plan.

[W]hen I want something, when I like something, when I’m passionate about something, there’s really very few things that get in the way. And that’s across the board, whether it’s professionally or personally. So, I think, of course, that my personality has a lot to do with the fact that I have decided to stay in the profession in these hard times because yes, I agree, that these are hard times. (Fatima2, March 18, 2017)

Fatima is patient. Patience includes endurance and stamina, as well as the ability to see beyond current circumstances and imagine a different reality. She describes how her mother taught her patience in the teaching profession by explaining and demonstrating how adverse political climates are often replaced by more favorable ones—if one has the patience to endure them. Says Fatima’s mother, “[Teaching] is a political job. It’s always going to depend on what’s going on. Be patient. I went through that. I taught for thirty-four years. I went through many ups and downs . . . It’ll be OK” (FG1a, March 1, 2017).

Fatima is focused. Focus implies the ability to prioritize, recall original motivation, and suppress distractions. Fatima continually reminds herself and others to remember who they are serving, to not forget why we teachers are here, to not get lost in the obstacles, and to keep teaching’s ultimate goals in mind. Frequently, she has reminded discouraged colleagues that if they do not lose sight of “the right reasons that we should be in education in the first place” (Fatima2, March 18, 2017)—which are to teach students and advocate for them and their families—they will be better able to teach through more difficult times in order to continue to teach and advocate successfully for their current and future students.

Fatima is dedicated. Dedication includes loyalty, commitment, allegiance. It also includes the notion of a vocation or calling (Gu & Day, 2007). Throughout the interviews and the focus groups she refers to teaching as her calling, as if she were put on Earth for a
singular purpose. She offers the similarity between her childhood community, to which she still feels dedicated, and the one in which she now teaches, as an explanation for her dedication and commitment to teaching. Because of her continued dedication to the community in which she grew up, and because that community so closely resembles the one in which she teaches, she finds it logical and effortless to commit herself to her job, specifically, to the students and families of her current school community.

Finally, Fatima is adaptable. She believes she and her colleagues need to be able “to change your teaching so that you can feel at least like you’re doing what you are meant to do” (FG2a, April 19, 2017). In the education “reform” era, adaptability often includes a degree of reluctant compliance. For example, despite Fatima’s aversion to high-stakes standardized tests, she strives to instill enough confidence and competence in her students beforehand such that they give their best effort on the tests. But this minimal compliance has not diminished her resolve to one day witness the end of high-stakes standardized testing in our schools.

Independence. After graduating from high school, Fatima attended the local state university for one semester. During that semester she became pregnant. She married and moved north with her husband to the city where her husband had a business and where she still lives. Her daughter was born soon thereafter. Like her mother before her, Fatima interpreted her new role as both mother and teacher. And, like her mother, as she taught her daughter about the world into which she had emerged, Fatima spoke to her only in Spanish until her daughter was three years old, at which point she spoke to her in Spanish and in English.

When it came time for her daughter to go to school, Fatima was determined to do for
her daughter what her mother had done for Fatima; that is, assure her daughter was surrounded by Spanish literacy at home and at school so she would grow up bilingual and biliterate. However, what the local “English-only” public school offered in terms of instruction in Spanish was an itinerate bilingual teacher who rotated in forty-five-minute segments between classrooms to teach what amounted to superficial, rudimentary Spanish, such as colors, numbers, songs, seasons, and holidays. “I found this school . . . [as] just a maintenance and I even told them, ‘You know what? Please don’t do that, because she knows the colors, she knows the numbers.’ It was so basic. It was a waste of time” (Fatima1a, November 19, 2016).

While Fatima’s daughter was enrolled in the maintenance program at the local school, Fatima was enrolled in a court reporting program in the local community college. During this time, she met a student in the college’s teacher education program who worked in a well-reputed dual-language program at a nearby public elementary school. This school bore a striking resemblance to Fatima’s own elementary school, where the dual-language program, albeit transitional,28 maintained equal status for both Spanish and English and where all four language domains were addressed (speaking, listening, reading, writing). It was not long before Fatima, despite her ex-husband’s objections, enrolled her daughter in the school and, through a series of events and decisions I explain below, Fatima became a teacher in the school’s dual-language program.

**Significant experiences and events.** Without a doubt, Fatima’s mother’s efforts to provide a high-quality bilingual education for Fatima at school and at home represent a

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28 Transitional dual-language programs are those where students’ home languages, if other than English, are used in varying proportions in the early grades, but which are gradually replaced by English in the later elementary grades or middle school.
major, extended “event” in Fatima’s life. This event had powerful implications for Fatima throughout her young adult life, but especially in her professional life, as she strove to provide her students with the same high-quality bilingual education her mother provided for her. Says Fatima:

I was lucky to have a mother who had the knowledge and ability to instill the value of being educated. However, not all my students have the same opportunity. They need teachers who promote the value of an education and someone who is willing to nurture and appreciate the heritage and language they bring into the classroom. (FatimaQ, November 6, 2016)

Fatima’s mother’s influence over both Fatima’s personal and professional lives speaks to the power of this influence in Fatima’s life.

Even more significant, however, was an event that occurred when Fatima was only eighteen, recently married, pregnant, and a new resident of a city she was just beginning to know. Her mother-in-law had taken Fatima to a medical clinic where she expected to be seen by the obstetrics staff in a reasonable amount of time. Instead, she was obliged to wait for over an hour. Many other patients had come and gone while she waited. Ultimately, Fatima decided to leave the clinic.

On the way home, however, she had second thoughts, and asked her mother-in-law to take her back to the clinic. Careful observation during her initial wait had led Fatima to conclude that the patients who had been seen by the staff in a timely manner were those who had presented themselves in English. Fatima concluded that language discrimination—if not racism—was the reason she was not being seen.

After waiting a total of three hours, she approached the front desk again, this time resolved to speak only in Spanish. The Spanish skills of the woman at the desk were minimal, but Fatima persevered in Spanish “and let her struggle” (Fatima1a, November 19, 2016).
The woman began to fill out a medical information form for Fatima. Under “ethnicity,” the woman wrote “Mexican.” Fatima switched to English and explained that she was from north of the Rio Grande, i.e., the United States. Noting Fatima’s objection to “Mexican,” the woman instead wrote “Spanish.” Fatima explained that she did not cross a river (the Rio Grande) nor an ocean (the Atlantic) to arrive at the clinic. Finally, Fatima insisted the woman write “Mexican American” or “Hispanic” for ethnicity. Fatima related that the woman was in shock after witnessing Fatima’s English skills and assertiveness. The woman could no longer look Fatima in the eye. Fatima threatened to file a discrimination report on the woman, then left the clinic.

Fatima was stunned by this experience. She explained that the city she was from originally was ethnically and racially diverse, multilingual, and international. She insisted the discrimination she had just suffered in her new city would never occur in the city of her birth. She concludes:

So that was my first experience with discrimination, because of my language. But instead of shutting down and hiding that I spoke Spanish, I went the opposite way. I [thought] “Why? Why should I? I’m just as American as anybody else.” So now I continue, because I have many other instances where I was speaking Spanish with my mother-in-law . . . they blocked the door. They said, “I’m going to call INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] on you.” I mean, many, many, many times . . . I know that I have the right to speak whatever language I want. And so, I tell that to my kids . . . And it’s on a daily basis, you know. If I’m speaking English, I think I’m fine. It’s when I switch to Spanish that people treat me differently. (Fatima1a, November 19, 2016)

As I continued to get to know Fatima, this event in her young adult life became more representative of who she was as a teacher and an advocate. It also explains much of why she has been able to withstand the pervasive pressures of education “reforms.”

**Becoming a teacher.** Despite the fact that her mother, father, and various aunts, uncles, and cousins were teachers, Fatima was reluctant to become a teacher. The struggles
her family members endured as public-school teachers discouraged her. Fatima simply was not interested in following in their footsteps. However, her growing awareness and confidence in informal teaching experiences involving younger family members helped her realize her talents.

I think it was just something that I was born with . . . I was inclined to sitting down with kids . . . and I enjoyed it. I could just feel that I enjoyed sitting down with kids and guiding them. And I . . . started looking at myself and my qualities and my strengths. (Fatima1b, November 19, 2016).

Her incipient teaching skills were more evident after her daughter was born and Fatima began to read to her and engage her in activities that enhanced and stimulated her learning. Fatima refers to this period in her daughter’s early life as her “little experiment.”

It was therefore not surprising when, one day, she decided, “to [not] waste my time in court reporting anymore, because that’s not for me. I quit the program . . . I didn’t see myself enjoying this. I’m just going to do what I love. So, that’s what brought me back” (Fatima1b, November 19, 2016). She felt she had been called to teach; it was time to answer the call. She enrolled in the college of education at the local university and never looked back.

Not long after receiving her degree in education, Fatima accepted a long-term substitute position at her daughter’s school. The position became available after Fatima’s friend from the community college decided to take maternity leave. Fatima encouraged the school’s principal to observe her as she taught. Soon thereafter, Fatima enrolled in and passed the required courses in teacher education at the local university, fulfilled her student teaching responsibilities, and passed the state’s rigorous bilingual teacher literacy skills test. These steps earned her a state teacher’s license, a bilingual teaching endorsement, and a position in 2006 as a fourth grade dual-language teacher at St. James Elementary, where she has taught ever since.
Teaching in the era of “reform.” To Fatima, the term “education reform” carries very negative connotations. It is associated with the use of large amounts of money to coerce schools into engaging in education practices that may be harmful to students. The result is a punitive approach. “It’s all about money, it’s all about money. They use [it] in several ways to [bring] about those reforms” (Fatima1b, November 19, 2016). What is worse, the reforms are designed and implemented by “people who have never been in the classroom and are trying to dictate how education should be. Just because you’ve been in a classroom doesn’t mean that you have the knowledge” (Fatima1b, November 19, 2016). Fatima explains that the “reforms” that most impede her work as a teacher are standardized testing, teacher evaluations, the reduction of teacher autonomy and professionalism, the complicity of administrators and policy makers, and the imposition of a business model on schools. It was next to these categories Fatima placed two stickers on the “most onerous reforms” chart I brought to the second focus group. These were also the “reforms” she spoke most about when asked about “reforms” in the one-on-one interviews.

Fatima characterizes high-stakes standardized testing with words such as “useless,” “excessive,” and “a waste of time.” She believes they are unfair and punitive in nature. She states that testing is taking over public education, so much so that it is becoming its main focus. She believes testing occurs at the expense of the recognition of students’ multiple intelligences, funds of knowledge, and cultural skills and talents. It is being used to punish and humiliate students and teachers and to characterize schools with poor test scores as “failing.” Because this occurs more in low income, new national demographic schools like hers, Fatima fears the tests are increasing the opportunity gap (access to education-related resources and opportunities) between her students and more affluent, Anglo students. This is
the very gap many of the parties to “reform” purport to be addressing. Furthermore, because only math, language arts, and science are tested, Fatima believes the curriculum is becoming dangerously narrowed, as teachers succumb to the pressure to devote more time and effort to subjects that are tested, and less time to everything else.

Fatima believes annual teacher evaluations are to teachers what high-stakes standardized tests are to students. Indeed, the unfair and punitive effects of the evaluations may be amplified for teachers, since student test scores in the state where Fatima teaches initially represented fifty percent (and later thirty-five percent) of teachers’ evaluation scores. This reality has exerted pressure on Fatima and her colleagues to place more emphasis on the tested subjects of language arts, math, and science than on other subject areas, and to cede valuable instructional time to test preparation.

Fatima’s objections to the evaluations do not end there. Factored into the state’s teacher evaluations are the number of days a teacher is absent. With few exceptions, every teacher’s absence, including staying home to take care of a sick child, results in one point being deducted from the total evaluation score of one hundred. Fatima concludes, “You’re punished for being absent, being with your family, being a good parent!” (FatimaFG1a, March 1, 2017).

Furthermore, Fatima believes that test-based evaluations are fundamentally and inherently unfair to teachers like her, whose lower-income, English-learning students of color are disadvantaged by the tests in ways that Anglo, middle-class students are not. Therefore, she knows that, despite her efforts, her students’ scores will be lower than those of teachers

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30 This rule was dropped once a new governor took office in January 2019.
in more affluent schools, where the students’ linguistic, cultural, and social class identities and experiences align more closely to the tests.

They’re lumped into the same group as everybody else who is also already fully English proficient. My kids are still getting there . . . And they’re learning in two languages, so why are you going to judge them in the same ways that other kids who are learning in only one language are? That’s just obviously not fair. I still teach what I think is what they need, but I’m still going to be evaluated, and that’s . . . frustrating. (Fatima1b, November 19, 2016)

Indeed, Fatima believes there is a role for annual teacher evaluations; she just wants them to be fair. “I’m not opposed to being evaluated. I think everybody should be accountable for their work and what they do. Yes, I agree with that. But it’s not done correctly. It’s not done appropriately” (Fatima1b, November 19, 2016). In the meantime, Fatima considers the current teacher evaluation “junk” and continues to feel demoralized each time her hard work and successes, as well as those of her colleagues, remain unacknowledged and unappreciated in their annual evaluations.

Fatima considers lack of professional autonomy as a major obstacle to teaching. She states that teachers’ freedom has been taken away as they are held accountable through their annual evaluations to the use of curricular pacing guides, boxed and scripted curricula and materials, obedience to and compliance with education “reforms,” and more. She finds it “ironic that they require a teacher to be highly qualified . . . but don't allow you to use your professional judgment and knowledge and training to actually teach” (FG2a, April 19, 2017). Fatima’s language choices sometimes reflect the depth of the lack of autonomy, as she exhorts administrators and “reformers” to “allow” teachers to have a voice in education and “give” them a chance to show what quality dual-language education can do for student achievement. As will be evident elsewhere, however, Fatima is capable of asserting her
professional autonomy, challenging some of the “reforms,” and employing her teacher voice to confront administrative shortcomings.

Importantly, education “reforms” for Fatima would not be nearly as onerous were it not for the cooperation and compliance they received from school and district administrators. In fact, Fatima believes many administrators retain their positions to the degree they can successfully implement “reforms” at their school sites. Fatima concludes this has led to the development of a rift between administrators, on one side, and teachers, parents, and students, on the other, as administrators increasingly perceive resistance to “reforms” as proof that teachers, parents, and students constitute one of the main problems the “reforms” were designed to solve. Because of this rift, Fatima experiences administrative support only when she is perceived to be complying with “reforms,” not when she is engaged in practices that may be more beneficial to her students’ education than those promoted by “reforms.”

Finally, she has witnessed how administrators’ focus on “reforms” has alienated them from teaching and learning, thus rendering them less knowledgeable regarding the very domain in which they are supposed to be experts and on which they purport to accurately evaluate teachers. Fatima goes as far as to say that the administrative ignorance and incompetence created by “reforms” threaten to destroy the very programs and practices administrators historically have supported.

The only people concerned with public education whom Fatima identifies as possibly less competent and less knowledgeable than administrators are the policy makers who create and mandate the “reforms.” Fatima points out that most are non-educators whose “reforms” demonstrate thinly veiled disdain for public education, suspicion of the competence and dedication of teachers, and disregard for the educational and social needs of students. She
detects a condescending attitude in many policy makers when they assume that, just because they attended third grade, they are experts in how it should be taught. Fatima responds with her professional credentials: “You went to school to be something else . . . I couldn’t be an architect, so how could you be a teacher? Just because you’ve been in front of [a teacher] and you’ve been in a classroom doesn’t mean you can teach” (FatimaFG1a, March 1, 2017). She concludes that, since most policy makers have no credentials in education, they are poorly positioned to make high-stakes decisions regarding education.

The public shaming and blaming of teachers by politicians, the press, and taxpayers is another “reform” related phenomenon that Fatima feels is not only not conducive to effective teaching—it is not based in fact and wholly undeserved. She believes teachers are convenient high-profile targets for policy makers whose goal is to disempower and marginalize teachers because they believe teachers are the last obstacles impeding the implementation of “reforms.”

Finally, Fatima’s lifelong relationship with education in Mexico has made her aware of and concerned about the global reach of the GERM. She refers frequently to the ways in which many of the “reforms” in the United States are being exported to Mexico, to the point where Mexican teachers are not “put on a pedestal” and respected by students and parents, as they were in the past:

When I was in Mexico this past summer, they’re trying to implement the same reforms. They’re copying. Exactly. The same evaluation, everything . . . I was in the car and I heard on the radio how . . . all the teachers that have been protesting. And so, the government puts . . . all this propaganda against teachers. And the radio was [saying], “These teachers, they should be teaching your child!” So, [the students] are hearing this. And I [think], “Oh, my God! So, that’s why this happens!” [The students] don’t have the same kind of respect. We see that when [the students] come here. [Their parents say], “No, the teacher doesn’t know more than you, than I do, so they should do this.” And so we’re stuck with the same behavior. (FatimaFG2b, April 19, 2017)
Fatima recognizes that when the “reform” movement’s anti-teacher propaganda reaches the ears of students, the challenges the movement presents to teaching could not be greater.

The teacher-advocate. To understand Fatima as a teacher-advocate, first one has to understand the strong and very close correspondence between her identities and those of her students. She speaks repeatedly about how her students reflect her, how she has been in her students’ shoes, how she was once who they are and essentially still is. “When I decided to become a teacher . . . I wanted my students to be a reflection of who I was, a child whose roots are still deeply influenced by their Hispanic heritage” (FatimaQ, November 6, 2016). Therefore, when choosing a school in which to teach, the options were clear. “I would never go and teach anywhere else, because that's not my place. I went to school not to be just a teacher, but to be a teacher to a certain group of students” (FatimaFG1b, March 1, 2017). This resolve amounts to a lifelong commitment to teaching that is centered on advocacy inside and outside the classroom.

She understands, however, that many of the cultural, linguistic, and social class facets of her students’ identities that she values may not be valued or rewarded so easily outside the school community. This is where teaching and advocacy converge. If her students are to succeed outside the community, her students need advocates who possess expertise in succeeding in a world constructed primarily on values and rewards established long ago by Anglos of America’s middle and upper classes. Though there may be individuals and agencies outside of the school who advocate for her students, Fatima realizes this might not be always true for all her students. She feels compelled to respond on their behalf to sociopolitical issues they encounter outside of class. Therefore, “we [need] to advocate for
these children . . . because . . . there’s nobody there to advocate for them but us” (Fatima2, March 18, 2017).

What does the advocacy look like in Fatima’s classroom? Empowerment. Fatima applies knowledge gained from personal and professional experiences, as well as from her master’s degree in sociocultural studies, to render the approved curriculum more inclusive and more reflective of the lives and experiences of her students. This means including overt instruction and references related to racism, “linguicism” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1986), and classism, the effects they may have on the students’ lives, and what students can do to confront them. It means teaching students how to reflect critically on history, science, literature, and the arts. “I think through curriculum, through our teachings, we can change . . . that is our way of impacting students’ minds. That’s the power we have that they can’t take away” (FG2a, April 19, 2017).

These efforts are made all the more meaningful due to Fatima’s affinity with her students. In the days following the 2016 presidential election, Fatima witnessed pronounced fear and anxiety among some of her students. They were aware of what Donald Trump had said about undocumented immigration to the U.S. and what he planned to do about it. Since some of her immigrant students were undocumented, they were afraid for themselves, their families, and their friends. “Those kids are the targets” she asserted, then added, “But I am a target, and my [own] kids are, too” (Fatima1b, November 19, 2016), thus acknowledging the fact that, even though she, her own children, and many of her Hispanic students were born in the United States, their resemblance to immigrants arriving from the south might expose them to undeserved scrutiny, harassment, and discriminatory treatment. Therefore, she feels an obligation to respond positively and productively not only to the experiences of her
immigrant students, but to those of all her students. For Fatima, empowerment is personal, and therefore all the more urgent, necessary, and effective. This is evident in the way she sums up teaching and advocacy as dual callings in life:

As a teacher, I’m not there just to teach. That’s not my only reason . . . It’s the social justice reasons. And so, I feel like if I’m going to teach, I might as well do it for kids that need me and that I understand, because they are me. (Fatima1b, November 19, 2016)

**Resilience. Traits.** An important assumption in this research is that the personal traits described above are accessible by the participants in their professional lives and are important and effective sources of resilience to education “reforms.” Resilience, as I define in Chapter 1, includes “a personal characteristic that enables individuals to ‘stay the course’ despite difficulties they encounter.” In fact, these traits may be foundational and instrumental in the participants’ abilities to continue teaching in adverse times.

For Fatima, these traits are *perseverance*, or adhering to a culturally relevant, social justice-oriented curriculum, regardless of pressures from various “reforms” to teach the recommended curriculum; *patience*, or knowing the winds of “reform” will change if she can remain teaching long enough; *focus*, or reminding herself of her original motivations to teach; *dedication*, or remaining aware of teaching as a calling; and *adaptability*, or temporarily changing the way she teaches in order to survive the “reforms” and later returning to her original plans. All these traits represent ways in which Fatima is able to endure the “reforms” that contribute to the resignations or early retirements of others.

In the sections below, I address ways, in addition to employing select personal traits, in which Fatima is resilient. These include institutional and professional strategies she employs in order to continue teaching despite “reforms” that presented various degrees of pressure on her to consider leaving the profession. The strategies generally fall into four
categories: intra-career *change*, peer *mentoring*, dedication to *program and population*, and what I call *EECK*, or experience, education, credentials, and knowledge. Here, I will address each category briefly and provide some examples as to how she created and employed each strategy.

**Change.** Fatima defines change as a “break” from daily classroom teaching while remaining in the school in another capacity. The goal is to give herself a breath of fresh air by eliminating the daily stress she experiences as a classroom teacher. Consequently, Fatima pursued and eventually acquired a half-time position as an instructional coach (IC) in her school, a position she ultimately was able to convert to full-time. She explained it this way:

> I love the classroom, too. I feel like that’s my place and that’s probably, if you’re in education, that is the most powerful way of reaching students: in the classroom. You have the most power than anybody else. However, I need that break. And I needed it probably for some time, I mean, not for some time, maybe just last year . . . [so], I think you need to step away from the classroom for a little bit, at least once in your teaching career, so you can see how other things function and how important, you know, the difference you make in the classroom. (FG1b, March 1, 2017)

This new position provided Fatima with the opportunity to mentor both beginning and veteran teachers on a full-time basis.

**Mentoring.** Mentoring defines the position of instructional coach Fatima has accepted, though she states that she has been mentoring teachers unofficially for several years already. “To be a teacher, I understood that I had to have the willingness to be a mentor, a counselor, a friend, and an inspiration to those who lack a strong educational model in their life” (FatimaFU, February 4, 2018). As a mentor, she feels she has gained considerable insights into strategies that could help teachers remain in the profession. She has been where they are going; thus, she can serve as a guide as they make their way through more advanced stages of teaching. Furthermore, by striving to retain others in the profession,
she is indirectly striving to keep herself in the profession, as what works for others likely works for her. She invokes the personal trait “focus” as a way to frame the professional path they are following.

I still know the struggles of teachers, and that’s my motivation, to say, “Now I’m on your side. Now I can help you cope with the things that are going to be coming your way. I’ve already done that. So, let me remind you what your ultimate goal is and . . . the reason why you’re here.” (Fatima2, March 18, 2017)

This guidance recently came into sharp focus as she was advising the teacher who had was hired to teach her class when Fatima accepted the IC position. The newly hired teacher was having a difficult time with Fatima’s former class, a class Fatima admits was challenging, both academically and behaviorally. Fatima encouraged the teacher to remember why she had originally chosen to teach in an urban, low-income, dual-language, new national demographic elementary school that enrolled students whose cultural and linguistic identities largely reflected those of Fatima and of the new teacher: to improve the lives of children of color who suffered most from systemic cultural, political, and economical inequities. Fatima explained that the two of them had come to this school to work for “us”—oppressed people of color—not “them”—the Anglo-dominated cultural, political, and economic power structures largely responsible for harmful education “reforms.”

It is important to point out that, unbeknownst to me, fellow study participant Selene had been a mentor to Fatima when Fatima was a beginning teacher and the two taught briefly at the same school. The two mentioned this fact briefly prior to one of the focus groups. Other than this divulgence, Fatima does not mention other times when she was mentored by others. However, her passion for mentoring others may be a result of the importance of mentoring impressed upon her by Selene and other mentors earlier in her career.
**Programs and populations.** The academic program to which Fatima is undeniably and inextricably dedicated is the dual-language program at her school. Commitment to students, school, or program can be a strong component of resilience. The program is similar—but not identical—to the program in which she participated as a student and in which she enrolled her own children. Consequently, her dedication is life-long and includes the student, parent, and teacher perspectives. Dual-language programs are essentially her life and her profession, her calling. Her dedication is so great that that any threat to dual-language education would be tantamount to a threat to her teaching career. The program serves as much of her reason to teach. This is especially true in light of recent rumors of federal and state threats to dual-language education. However, the more frequent the rumors, the stronger Fatima’s dedication to the program.

As for population, the program serves low-income, language minority students of color. This is the very population, albeit in a different city, from which Fatima emerged and with which Fatima identifies. “I grew up in a place, in a very similar community where I work . . . and I went through the same experiences that they went through” (FG1a, March 1, 2017). This population represents the balance of the motivation for teaching. As a product of a community very similar to the one in which she teaches, Fatima feels a responsibility to “carry the water back” to the broader community that contributed to the formation of her identities and launched her success. “I think it’s my turn to, to give back to the school [and community] that gave me so much” (FG1b, March 1, 2017).

For Fatima, the connection between program and population is strong and serves as an effective response to state and federal sponsored “reforms” that have created conflicts between her personal and professional beliefs and expected classroom practices. The
connection essentially resolves the conflict. “What, who am I trying to serve? I'm not trying to please the state, that’s for sure! I'm trying to please and serve my community and the kids that need me” (Fatima1b, November 19, 2016).

**Education, experience, credentials, and knowledge (EECK).** Beltman, et al. (2011) identify the personal growth and reflection accrued through one’s EECK as an important individual factor for teacher resilience. For Fatima, this is very much the case. She worked hard for her undergraduate degree and equally hard for her graduate degree, which, because of the critical, social justice orientation of the department, reaffirmed she was on the right path while exposing her to new directions she could pursue in social justice advocacy as it applies to public education. As she has become more educated, experienced, and knowledgeable, and accrued more professional credentials, she has become increasingly aware of the gaps and barriers her EECK has created between her, on the one hand, and administrators and policy makers at all levels, on the other, many of whose ill-conceived and misinformed policies Fatima considers harmful to students. “It’s got to be us against them, the people that don’t have a solid knowledge about what education really is about” (Fatima2, March 18, 2017), because “we’re the ones that went to school. *We* know what this is all about. *We* know the struggles” (Fatima1b, November 19, 2016). Ultimately, Fatima perceives her EECK as “shields” she wields in defense of her students, in hopes they can create their own:

> As a teacher with a master’s degree in [education and sociocultural studies], I have the knowledge and power to choose curriculum that empowers my students to create that shield against the discrimination they will undoubtedly experience sometime throughout their life as members of a minority group. (FatimaQ, November 6, 2016)

**Resistance.** As I suggest in Chapter 1, whereas resilience consists of discovering or developing ways to essentially survive adversity, resistance involves taking concrete steps to
confront adversity, reject its various manifestations, and promote alternatives to it.

Furthermore, acts of resistance do not necessarily exclude acts of resilience; in many cases, they may be logical extensions of them. I identify two key elements of resistance to “reforms” demonstrated by the participants: modifying the curriculum, and confronting or challenging policy makers or administrators. At times, the two are one and the same.

In a general sense, Fatima feels more comfortable resisting what she believes are harmful practices than she does coping, adapting, and engaging in other forms of resilience.

**Resistance through curriculum and instruction.** Fatima recognizes that many of the ways she teaches are not conducive to education “reforms.” She believes high-stakes standardized tests, punitive teacher evaluations, school letter grades, inadequate funding (especially to poorer schools), standards and assessments that do not meet her students at their academic starting lines, and culturally unresponsive and insensitive curricula support a “reform” agenda that reflects and further empowers white political and corporate power structures. She believes these power structures are, in turn, deliberately designed to fail students of color in order to justify more of the same, all for the price of increasingly scarce public education funds. In a word, she believes the corporate “reformers” have successfully turned the massive education-industrial complex against her students. Therefore, virtually her entire teaching practice can be interpreted as an act of resistance. Much of this resistance lies in the simple act of teaching in a language in which the corporate powers are not competent. Teaching in Spanish serves to free her and her students, if even a little, from the closer scrutiny they would suffer were she to teach entirely in English. And because everything in education is accomplished through language, the resistance Fatima demonstrates through language permeates all facets of her practice. She puts it this way:
I identify more with resistance than resilience. I’m very persistent. That’s just part of who I am, to many things that are unfair. And so, as a teacher, and as a teacher that decides to work frequently with oppressed people, I think that’s one of the purposes why I went into education, and dual-language education in particular, because in itself it kind of promotes that resistance against the norm and against the one-size-fits-all education. (Fatima2, March 18, 2017)

As long as dual-language education remains a viable teaching strategy for Fatima, resistance to harmful education “reforms” remains viable, as well.

Resisting administrators and policy makers. In additional to resistance through curriculum, Fatima also demonstrates resistance through confronting or challenging policy makers and administrators. One such example occurred recently when Fatima acted on what Kanpol (1991) refers to as “intersubjectivity,” where, through daily interactions, alliances between teachers form around forces they perceive as harmful to their practice. Kanpol’s research at “Hillview” Middle School demonstrated how a group of eighth-grade teachers allied to confront institutional abuses of authority on the part of the school principal. At St. James Elementary, where Fatima teaches, the alliance against abuse of authority extended beyond teachers to parent groups. Fatima led a school-wide effort of parents and teachers to rid the school of a principal they concluded was essentially an incompetent, capricious, and abusive tyrant. “He was attacking our program, attacking teachers, attacking children directly—and parents!” (Fatima1, November 19, 2016). Fatima and the teacher-parent coalition followed district protocols to have him removed and replaced by a principal who was, at least in a relative sense, more competent, thoughtful, and caring. Once again, Fatima invoked her EECK to demonstrate how resistance speaks to the very core of her identity:

“I went to school and I’m not going to let you just come in and in one year destroy what we’ve done in twenty. No!” . . . If you let the oppressor continue and you’re neutral, then you’re letting him destroy something and be successful. But no, that’s not who I am. (Fatima1b, November 19, 2016)
Fatima’s resolve to resist bad administrators is evident in the way she informs them that her resistance will not weaken. Recalling her response to the departed principal’s inquiry into the possibility Fatima might leave the school, thus making life easier for the principal, she responded, “Let me tell you one thing: before you got here, I was here. And when you leave, I’m still going to be here!” (FG1b, March 1, 2017).

The breaking point. As with the other participants, I asked Fatima about a hypothetical situation where resilience and resistance to “reforms” were simply not enough to retain her in the profession. She replied that a debilitating salary reduction, one that prevented her, a single mother, from adequately providing for her two teenaged children, might lead her to stop teaching. Elimination of dual-language education might also force her hand. “It would hurt me, hurt my soul, if they took away dual-language, but I would still try to . . . [advocate] for those students who are not allowed to get it” (FG2b, April 19, 2017).

However, she emphasized that any better paying job she acquired outside of dual-language education would have to be in the area of social justice advocacy for school-aged children of color and their families, thus underlining the importance advocacy has in her current role as a teacher and instructional coach. “Until that happens, I will remain in the system in order to resist the disempowering force that is attacking students from cultural and linguistic minorities” (FatimaFU, February 4, 2018).

Julie

Childhood. Julie describes herself as “white and not Hispanic.”\(^{31}\) This distinction is important in a part of the country where some highlight their Spanish (European) ancestry in an effort to differentiate themselves from those whose ancestors include greater numbers of

\(^{31}\) In the Southwest, whites are often referred to as “Anglo,” a term that implies cultural and linguistic links to the Anglo-Saxon people of Great Britain. However, Julie did not use this term.
indigenous and mestizo groups from Mexico and who may have come to the United States more recently (Gómez, 2007). Her husband is from Mexico, so their children often identify as bicultural and bilingual. “It's been really important for us to make sure that our kids are bilingual and that they're familiar with [the Mexican] part of their culture and . . . heritage” (Julie1b, November 22, 2016). Biculturalism and bilingualism through marriage adds a crucial dimension to Julie’s perspectives on racial and ethnic identities.

Julie was born in the city where she now teaches. However, when she was two years old, her family moved to a ranch in a rural part of the state, and that is where she spent her childhood. The ranch was purchased by her grandparents after her grandfather retired from the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission. Her grandparents and her uncle lived nearby. In addition to ranch work, Julie’s mother had worked as a teacher, a cartographer, a realtor, and a postmistress. Her father supplemented the family ranch income with work in the satellite TV and solar energy sectors. Julie recalls,

We lived in a trailer. We didn’t have fancy things. But I know that my grandparents were always there. And if my parents were having a rough time, they could always lean on my grandparents. We always had that structure in place, to sort of lean on each other. (Julie1a, November 22, 2016)

In terms of her language identity and development, Julie recounts that Spanish, English, and various combinations of the two could be heard frequently in her community. In fact, Julie remembers her parents employing ranch workers from Mexico on a short-term basis and speaking with them as best her parents could in Spanish. Though she did not speak or understand Spanish fluently as a young child, the existence of the language in her community piqued her interest and sowed the seeds for her formal acquisition of Spanish, first in middle school, then high school, college, and beyond.
Julie attended a rural elementary school so small that there were only about five students in each grade. She traveled forty-five minutes each way to her combined junior and senior high school, where Spanish was one of her favorite subjects. Her graduating class consisted of twenty-five students. She remembers that “school was always very easy for me in grades K-12. Spanish was fun and challenging, and I wanted to become as fluent as possible and to learn about different cultures and places” (Julie, November 8, 2016). Where Spanish would ultimately take her, she was soon to find out.

**Personal traits.** Perhaps the most pronounced trait in Julie’s responses to interview and focus groups questions is *focus*. Focus includes the ability to prioritize, remember one’s origins, or suppress distractions.

[I just try] to focus on what I need to do, what I need to teach my students, learning what the standards are and what we need to learn. Focusing on that helps me just stay the course with what I need to do and not worry about the outside problems or issues. (Julie2a, March 15, 2017)

This trait is evident when she considers how her students’ test scores may affect her annual evaluation. She relegates the evaluation to the back of her mind and simply resolves not to worry. Elsewhere, her ability to focus is evident in her ability not to become overly distracted or overwhelmed by education “reforms.” “I’m just going to keep teaching . . . just focus on my teaching and . . . just really home in on . . . that profession” (Julie2a, March 15, 2017). Her response to the often confusing and contradictory curricular directives issued by district personnel, principals, and instructional coaches, is also illustrative of focus.

“Oh sometimes I’m fine with it, and I just I say to myself, ‘I need to do what I need to do. Just do what I need to do. And not worry about anything.’” Though she admits, “sometimes it’s hard to sort of put the blinders on and do what I need to do without worrying about all these other things” (Julie1b, November 22, 2016). Julie fortifies her ability to focus by continually
reassessing her original intentions to teach. She concludes, “I'm still on track. This is still what I want to be doing” (Julie2a, March 15, 2017).

*Dedication*, which includes loyalty, commitment, and allegiance, is another of Julie’s salient traits. She refers to teaching as her “calling,” which implies a binding and enduring connection to her job, her students, and, ultimately, her life (Gu & Day, 2007). She explains that teaching “just fit” (Julie1a, November 22, 2016), that it was “what she was meant to do” (Julie, November 8, 2016), that it is part of her core identity. Julie explains that she teaches by choice, not by default or necessity. Therefore, she has a sense of purpose and “is in it for the long haul” (Julie2a, March 15, 2017). Julie entered teaching with a sense of dedication; her dedication has only increased each year as a result of the meaningful relationships and experiences she has developed with her students, colleagues, and schools.

Finally, Julie is *adaptable*. This can mean flexible, accommodating and, as in the case in the examples that follow, sometimes compliant. While adaptation can mean creating one’s own design, for Julie it often means adapting to the designs of others. When confronting district mandates or guidelines she opposes, she implements them before criticizing or abandoning them. “Last year, I tried to follow our instructional coach’s guidelines. I tried to do what the instructional coach told us to do, and I just tested my students way too much. It was so frustrating” (Julie1b, November 22, 2016). Regarding the annual preparation for standardized testing, she states, “At the beginning, I tried it. I tried to follow the rules. I tried to do it. And then I started realizing how much instructional time was being lost, and I realized it wasn’t worth it” (Julie2a, March 15, 2017).

Being adaptable sometimes means resigning oneself to forces or beliefs to which one is opposed. For example, Julie strives to understand the forces that underlie what she
believes is objectionable student behavior that did not exist even ten years ago. She seems resigned to the cultural forces that created these changes in behavior and has concluded she must accept them.

So, maybe adapting to that is required to stay on in the profession. Just sort of adapting to that and understanding things are going to be different. I don’t know. That seems like part of it, maybe. Not thinking about what it was like ten years ago, but, “OK, this is the reality we’re in right now.” And either dealing with it and finding solutions, or deciding, “OK, this is not for me.” (Julie2b, March 15, 2017).

**Independence.** After high school, Julie left to attend college in a neighboring state. While a student, Julie spent spring break one year in an elementary school in Monterrey, Nuevo León, México. “I loved being able to talk to the students and see how much we had in common. I loved being in a different country and experiencing their culture” (JulieQ, November 8, 2016). Julie also spent her junior year abroad in Santiago, Chile. She graduated with a degree in political science. After graduating, Julie applied to be a VISTA volunteer with Literacy Volunteers for America (LVA), an organization dedicated to adult literacy. In that capacity she organized ESL classes, coordinated volunteer trainings, and matched students who wanted to learn to read with tutors. When my VISTA year ended, and I transitioned into a job with LVA, I worked more in their main learning center location. . . . There I managed the student intake evenings, registering students for ESL, GED, and basic literacy classes or tutoring, and served as temporary director when the director was let go. I worked both with people from the U.S. that were illiterate and immigrants that wanted to learn English and/or take the GED. (JulieFU, April 13, 2019)

As I describe below, her tenure with LVA led directly to her decision to become a teacher.

**Significant experiences and events.** Several events or experiences stand out as influential in Julie’s personal and professional lives and as relevant to the research. Many of them have to do with racism or other forms of discrimination. The first involved a situation where she was more of a witness or bystander than a participant. It related to her awareness
as a child of the existence of, and friction between, two distinct Hispanic communities in the rural area of the state where she lived. She noticed that the community that had settled in the area generations before was not entirely friendly or welcoming toward recent immigrants from Mexico. The former described themselves not as Mexican, but as Spanish, as their ancestors settled in the Southwest when it was still ruled by Spain.

The people I grew up with in [my small town], there was sort of a distinction between people from Mexico and people that have lived here their whole lives. And that sort of divide seems . . . interesting to me . . . Because they shared so much of the same heritage. But it was looked at so differently. “We’ve been here. We came from Spain. We’re Spanish.” And then there were immigrants coming in from Mexico, and that idea that they weren’t at all linked. It was interesting to me . . . It just seemed to be a shame . . . the way they looked at others. (Julie1a, November 22, 2016)

Though Julie eventually moved away from that particular cultural context, the experience established a starting point for interpreting other experiences as she travelled among Hispanic populations in South America, Mexico, and the Southwest United States.

Like the experience above, an event that occurred when her daughter was three years old was one that Julie experienced only vicariously but nonetheless had a profound effect on her. Julie’s daughter had accompanied Julie’s husband to a small store. Their daughter was wearing a hooded sweatshirt with pockets. “When they went up to the counter to pay, the cashier wanted [our daughter] to take her hands out of her pockets to make sure she wasn’t stealing anything. I know that my husband has had many more similar experiences” (JulieFU, April 13, 2019). Julie seems to imply that, because she identifies as white and her husband as Mexican American, her chances of witnessing such racist incidents are slim. Indeed, her very presence may prevent them. But not experiencing racist incidents directly does not mean they do not affect her. Julie knows that if her own children suffer such
discrimination, so do her students of color. This affords her a degree of empathy toward them she might not otherwise possess.

The final significant event involved Julie more directly. It occurred during a professional development session at her current school, after becoming a teacher. A student from the university engaged the staff in racial and cultural sensitivity training. The student body at Julie’s school is overwhelmingly Hispanic, mostly Mexican immigrants, with a growing population of immigrants and refugees from Africa and the Middle East. The university student emphasized the fact that many of the racial or cultural identities of the staff did not correspond to those of the school’s students.

As a white teacher, Julie felt targeted. She felt his presentation suggested that perhaps white teachers were not an appropriate choice for such schools. “And it just sort of hit me. I wasn’t sure what his message was: whether we need to look like our students and be teaching the same type of people” (Julie1a, November 22, 2016). It was the same feeling she had each time she moved to a new school and felt pressure, as a white teacher, to prove herself. “They see this white girl coming in. ‘Why is she in the dual-language program?’ And I sort of have to prove myself, that I can speak the language and that I understand the program” (Julie1a, November 22, 2016).

For a white teacher who had married a man from Mexico and whose two young children had already experienced various degrees of racial profiling and aggression, such experiences hit Julie squarely in the gut. Rather than striking out in overt defense or indignation, however, she elected to integrate the experiences into her personal and professional identities in ways that ultimately fortified her relationships with family, colleagues, and students.
**Becoming a teacher.** Julie’s first impulse regarding teaching as a career was to reject it out-of-hand. It was the one career she was determined not to pursue:

My grandmothers were teachers, my great-grandmothers were teachers, like most of the women. And my mom was a teacher. Most of the women in my family were teachers, have been teachers. So, I think I sort of resisted that, in a feminist sort of way, that I needed to do something different. (Julie1a, November 22, 2016)

Julie reports that her husband’s mother and father, as well as many other members of his family, were also teachers. For Julie to become a teacher, she would have to overcome her reluctance to continue a family trend she perceived was fueled in large part by gender stereotypes.

While working after college as a VISTA volunteer for Literacy Volunteers for American (LVA), however, she began to change her mind. Though none of her official duties at LVA included teaching, she often substituted for teachers and tutors. She recalls these periodic teaching roles as the most enjoyable of all the experiences she had while at TVA. It was during this time she began to consider converting teaching experiences that were part-time and periodic to full-time and permanent. She decided to pursue this option within the context of the public schools, but only if she could continue to teach children whose families were the same or similar to those she was already serving.

When I looked into my options, [the local public school district] was in desperate need of bilingual teachers, and they pointed me in the direction of the [regional] service center, where I could take classes to get my teaching license while working with a waiver in the school district. The fact that I was fluent in Spanish opened this door for me. My experience working with immigrant families through LVA helped me understand how hard these families worked to get here and how focused they were on ensuring their children had the opportunity to get an education and make a better life for themselves. (JulieFU, April 13, 2019)

Eventually, through her teaching experiences at LVA and a growing awareness of her own privileges, Julie concluded that “teaching was what I was meant to do. I think that
because I have been fortunate in life to have many opportunities, I see the need to give back” (JulieQ, November 8, 2016). Importantly, she was able to overcome her previous reluctance to teach only after arriving at the decision on her own terms and for her own reasons. She was not teaching because others had taught, nor was she avoiding the profession because of the gender stereotypes associated with it. She was teaching because the arc of her own life led her to teaching. She owned the decision to become a teacher and was determined to embrace it.

After teaching for several years in dual-language programs in the public school district that had granted her a teaching waiver and facilitated her licensure, Julie and her new family moved back to her state of origin, to the city of her birth, where she began teaching in an elementary school with a similar program. She taught in that school for several years before transferring to the school where I found her teaching third grade in another dual-language program and where I invited her to participate in this study.

Teaching in the era of “reform.” Julie’s perspective on “reforms” is not positive. She states that the word “reform” itself has become a bad word among teachers. The word makes her “think of people outside education coming in and trying to change things based on what they think is best, without the experience, without the understanding of how education works . . . It seems to be very punitive” (Julie1b, November 22, 2016). High-stakes testing, teacher evaluations, the reduction in teacher autonomy top Julie’s list of harmful “reforms.” These are either the “reforms” next to which she placed two stickers on the “most onerous reforms” chart I brought to the second focus group, or those she spoke most about when I inquired about “reforms” that impeded her ability to teach effectively. These “reforms” are
accompanied by several by-products of “reforms,” including complicit administrators, misguided policy makers, and the marked increase in negative student behavior.

Julie refers to high-stakes standardized testing as “excessive” and “inappropriate.” She states that everything in education is now based on students’ scores on high-stakes standardized tests: teacher evaluations, school grades, which subjects are taught and to what extent, and whether or not the school is held accountable for certain “corrective actions” deemed necessary by the state Department of Education. Moreover, the test results are used to determine school budgets, which Julie believes amounts to punishment. She feels under constant threat. “We’re going to lose money. It just seems like a lot of threats . . . not a lot of constructive changes, but things that sound good in sound bites . . . but it doesn’t really mean something beneficial for students” (Julie1b, November 22, 2016).

Moreover, being forced to administer the tests each year elicits frustration from Julie. The tests are not the same from year to year. The written test administration directions do not match the test. Worst, the state’s insistence that almost all students, including English learners, take the tests in English undermines the purpose and goals of the school’s dual-language program, especially the development of literacy in Spanish and other languages. “The [program] model is evolving based on the testing and the language of testing, and that just seems foul. It’s not based on best practice; it’s based on what the state says the testing is. So that’s frustrating” (FG1a, March 1, 2017).

Julie considers teacher evaluations, thirty-five percent of which is now based on students’ test results, as punishment directed at teachers. It “[stamps them with] a letter, a label, that doesn’t really mean a lot” (Julie1b, November 22, 2016). She sees little to no connection between her successes with students and the teacher effectiveness label applied to
her each year. To Julie, the evaluation seems inconsistent: it often stamps a different and seemingly arbitrary teacher effectiveness label each year to an individual teacher who, from year to year, teaches similar groups of students in similar ways. Julie attempts to assume a posture of indifference to the teacher effectiveness labels. Still, she acknowledges that a negative evaluation hurts and a positive evaluation is not necessarily something to celebrate, as a “good” score might suggest a teacher’s increased compliance with testing practices.

Julie believes the pressure to comply with testing practices and protocols is one way in which teachers’ autonomy and professionalism is threatened. Other ways include pacing guides and boxed and scripted curricula. These and other federal, state, and district mandates have gone a long way toward converting teachers into human conduits for “reforms” designed by private interests and mandated by state and federal law. This makes life as a professional demoralizing. “When you’re just being told [slaps one hand into other for emphasis], ‘You have to do this,’ it's just miserable” (FG1b, March 1, 2017). She remembers having to be on the same page or lesson as all the other teachers and being held accountable by the principal. “We had to do it b-y t-h-e b-o-o-k [slowly, with emphasis]” (FG1b, March 1, 2017). However, Julie sees much of the lack of teacher autonomy remedied by the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS is a major education “reform” created by private and political interests (e.g., the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, David Coleman’s Student Achievement Partners, Democrats for Education Reform) and adopted by more than half the states. Though Julie considers the CCSS imperfect, she states that, due to its suggestive rather than prescriptive nature, it has “sort of let us teach again. It’s hands off. We can teach and create more than we could before” (FG1b, March 1, 2017).
Related to testing, evaluations, and diminished teacher autonomy are school administrators in charge of compliance and accountability. Julies believes administrators reflect the fast and often incomprehensible pace of the implementation of education “reforms.” She perceives their actions as misinformed, confusing, inconsistent, and lacking in clarity. In the face of all the “reforms” and mandates, one of Julie’s principals simply seemed to give up as she instructed Julie and her colleagues to “‘just do everything’ . . . if [you] want to cover [your]selves on the evaluation, just do everything” (Julie1b, November 22, 2016). Julie responded, “[but] if I did every piece of paperwork and every test they've mentioned, maybe even want to do, I would never teach” (Julie1b, November 22, 2016).

The choice between being a good teacher, on the one hand, and complying with “reforms” and mandates, on the other, presents a real dilemma to teachers like Julie. They know how to teach and want to teach, but feel impeded by the actions of administrators, whose own positions have been gradually redefined as enforcers of “reforms” instead of advocates for effective teaching practices. Though not a “reform” per se, school administrators loom large for Julie as a cog in the machinery of education “reform.”

Though more a response to “reform” than a “reform” itself, a marked increase in negative student behavior has compounded the challenges to teaching in the age of “reform.” Ten years ago, Julie had virtually no behavior problems in her classes, which were composed almost entirely of immigrant children from Mexico and Central America. The behavior problems seemed to be limited to what Julie refers to as the “monolingual” classes, or the classes taught in English only. Now, she has one to several severe behavior problems each year, and the behavior of the entire class has deteriorated. Julie believes cell phones, laptops, and tablets are to blame, as they afford students access to inappropriate internet content that
encourages behavior inconsistent with the behavior expected in school and at home. Both teachers and parents seem to be unaware of exactly what students are accessing, but Julie suspects it is not good. “American culture . . . and celebrity . . . all of that has changed. Just social media and everything . . . All my students are on YouTube and they’re watching all kinds of things. Their parents have no idea what they’re watching” (Julie2b, March 15, 2017).

Julie links negative student behavior to changes in parenting practices she has witnessed over the years:

Just some of the cultural shifts as far as students having more freedoms . . . And it just seems like . . . maybe it’s economics, as well. Maybe the parents are so overwhelmed that the students are raising themselves more than in the past. Or the parents aren’t as hands-on as in the past. Or maybe it’s just cultural norms, that we’re all addicted to our screens. And the students don’t have a set bedtime, they don’t have a set time when they all eat together, they don’t have these things that seem to be more . . . structured. (Julie2b, March 15, 2017).

Importantly, Julie does not make an explicit, causal link between negative student behavior and education “reforms.” However, she addresses negative student behavior in response to questions about harmful “reforms” and notes that the trend toward increased negative student behavior coincides with the implementation of “reforms.”

Finally, Julie believes that teacher “blaming” or “bashing,” a by-product of the “reform” movement, is one of the movement’s most harmful and insidious characteristics. Those who blame teachers for the perceived shortcomings of public education include policy makers, corporate powers, the press, and school administrators, all of whom Julie believes are dangerously uninformed about public education. Making matters worse for Julie is the fact that the blaming is accompanied by threats and consequences. “[There is] a lot of blame on teachers . . . if our students don’t succeed, we have consequences. If our students don’t
pass tests, we have consequences . . . we’re [constantly] threatened. (Julie1b, November 22, 2016). In fact, teacher blaming is one of few by-products of education “reform” that, if it worsens, could drive Julie from the profession. “You talk about the culture of teachers, [that] we’re bad, we’re terrible. I mean, if that were to get a whole lot worse . . . maybe that would make me decide that this is too much” (Julie1b, November 22, 2016).

The teacher-advocate. Julie did not decide to become a teacher so she could teach anyone, anywhere; she became a teacher so she could teach children whose first language was Spanish. Her experiences with adult learners at LVA had demonstrated to her that teaching and learning are more effective when undertaken in the students’ dominant languages, even when the acquisition of another language is a major goal. Her subsequent training in elementary bilingual and dual-language education courses reinforced this strategy by exposing her to relevant research and affording her opportunities for practice.

In addition to making teaching and learning more effective, Julie believes dual-language education has the potential to reduce and even prevent the erosion or loss of first languages, cultural heritage and associated tradition, and links to family and community. “Growing up in [the Southwest], I saw the value of people keeping their language and heritage alive” (JulieQ, November 8, 2016). As a parent raising bilingual and bicultural children, these concerns strike close to her heart.

I think one way that dual-language programs are important is so they can keep that heritage alive, that identity alive, because learning English is important and is a goal, but I think it’s sad when they lose their home language and that connection to relatives and grandparents. (Julie1a, November 22, 2016)

For Julie, therefore, being a teacher means advocating for the inclusion of students’ home languages so all children, not only those whose first language is English, can experience a more seamless linguistic and cultural transition between home and school each day.
Julie’s advocacy is not limited to her students’ linguistic and cultural needs. Students of Spanish and other home languages are often members of immigrant families with low incomes and lack of access to basic and material resources. Indeed, many of Julie’s students and their families live in poverty, which means they may not have the resources necessary to succeed in modern America. She has long noted their determination to succeed despite what they are lacking. “With Literacy Volunteers of America, I worked with many recent immigrants from Mexico and Central America, and I saw how hard these people were working to make a better life for themselves and their families” (JulieQ, November 8, 2016). She feels her current students and their families are striving to do the same. However, she recognizes that those who succeed are often those who know how to effectively access community and governmental resources. She attempts to inform her students and their families of such resources.

Still, the precarious situations in which many of her students live contrast with Julie’s own childhood and associated privileges. For Julie, this contrast has served as a motivating force for advocacy:

Recently, I have had a moment or two where I have thought about my identity and my role in the classroom. I have become more aware of the differences between myself and my students. I sometimes feel additional pressure to do everything I can to help my students succeed or [I] feel a need to prove myself, because sometimes people may look at me and feel like I shouldn’t be in the position I am in. (JulieQ, November 8, 2016).

Julie believes advocacy in the classroom includes responding positively and productively to the experiences of her immigrant students. This means empowering students to see beyond their current circumstances and embracing education as a means of achieving upward mobility and personal and collective success. When she asks students what they might want to be when they grow up, they often mention jobs that are low paid and
physically taxing, “you know, ‘cleaning houses like my mom does’” (Julie2a, March 15, 2017). “They know what their parents do . . . So just helping them realize what’s possible. What they can do if they get a good education is part of it . . . just helping students make a better life for themselves and their families” (Julie2a, March 15, 2017). Julie considers education not just a method for learning new things and becoming more intelligent; it is a way of improving one’s circumstances. She is there to make that happen.

Julie is acutely aware of how this strategy might be interpreted as playing into the myth of meritocracy, which holds that people can overcome their circumstances—many of which are the result of historical, systemic, and institutional inequalities—if they simply try harder. Julie believes an important part of advocacy in education is helping students discover the political and economic powers that are responsible for hierarchical racial, linguistic, and economic stratification in the first place. If students know what forces perpetuate inequalities, they are more likely to confront them, thus addressing the causes as well as the products. Helping students become aware of these inequalities was never more urgent than in the days just before and after the 2016 presidential election.

[The] Monday before the election, one of my students came to me and said, “If Donald Trump wins tomorrow, my family’s going back to Mexico. My whole family’s leaving.” And so I realized I can’t avoid this issue anymore . . . We needed to talk. And I had students in tears. I had students saying that they were born here, but . . . the whole family’s going to move back to Mexico if Trump wins. Day after the election, same thing. My students were depressed, and some were in tears. (Julie1b, November 22, 2016)

Some of the students’ parents were also afraid their children’s right to attend school would be jeopardized. She was faced with the possibility that if she did not advocate for their rights, no one would. Julie’s response was to contact a local immigrants’ rights agency and invite them to the school to engage students and their families in workshops and
activities designed to inform them of their rights as U.S. residents and to “make sure they have the tools they need to get through this next four years” (Julie1b, November 22, 2016).

These and other actions are not those undertaken by a person who simply chooses to teach; they are undertaken by someone who perceives teaching as a means of advocating for the rights of her students and empowering them through critical and meaningful advocacy.

**Resilience. Traits.** Julie’s personal traits form a foundation for resilience in the face of education “reforms” that challenge her will to continue teaching. Key to her resilience is her ability to muster the will to shut out the “reforms” and focus on her teaching. Her dedication to the profession, which Julie interprets as a calling, is such that it can relegate larger issues, such as national education “reforms,” to temporary annoyances or distractions that will never acquire the magnitude necessary to negate her calling. Adapting her teaching to accommodate or comply with district, state, and federal “reform” mandates is an important way Julie survives them, even as she sometimes uses her compliance later as leverage for changing them (Patterson et al., 2004).

**Change.** Actual change, such as changing schools, job descriptions, and grade levels, has been instrumental in keeping Julie in the profession. However, she has not sought change so much in order to deal with the ill effects of education “reforms” as to manage the inherent physical and mental toll the profession takes on teachers, “reforms” or no “reforms.” She says, “I mean, I did change schools and I did change grade levels. So, I think that does make a difference” (FG1b, March 1, 2017), as if to make clear that she would not be where she is today had she not made those changes.

For Julie, getting a master’s degree was the more substantial change she needed in order to continue teaching. Although she did not leave her teaching position while pursuing
her master’s—which would have constituted real, physical change—it nonetheless resulted in a break from routinized teaching. Julie stated that the master’s had multiple positive effects on her teaching: it was therapeutic, it reminded her of why she had decided to teach in the first place, and it provided her with more ways in which she could advocate for her students. Most importantly, it pulled her back from the brink during what was essentially a turning point in her career; it provided her adequate professional growth and reflection in order to continue teaching.

I went back and got my master’s degree because I was just at that point where I was like, “What am I going to do?” I was really frustrated. So, I went back [to school]. I felt like if I knew more, and if I had a stronger foundation, then I could advocate more for my students . . . That was sort of therapeutic. Getting my master’s was . . . enriching that foundation so I could say, “Yes, OK, this is what I’m doing. This is why.” And just sort of convincing myself of that again. That really helped. Going back and getting my master’s. (FG1b, March 1, 2017)

Whatever the nature of the change, Julie believes change within the profession is important for professional longevity.

**Mentoring.** Julie reports that she was mentored as a beginning teacher and that the first few years would have been more difficult had she not been mentored. More relevant to her current career stage is the desire to mentor others. As an experienced teacher, she has found that “helping new teachers has been a positive experience that has helped me reflect on my own teaching, which does, I think, contribute to longevity” (Julie, personal communication, June 8, 2019).

**Programs and population.** Julie is dedicated to the dual-language programs in which she has taught. She believes such programs are the best way to value the cultural and linguistic heritages of the students. She is acutely aware of home language loss among her
students and believes the school’s dual-language program is the primary force working to preserve home languages.

So, I think one way that dual-language programs are important is so they can keep that . . . heritage alive, that identity alive, because learning English is important and is a goal and everything, but I think it’s sad when lose their home language and that connection to relatives and grandparents and things like that. (Julie1a, November 22, 2016)

She is also aware of the increasingly chronic shortage of qualified bilingual teachers to fill vacancies in dual-language classrooms across the district. Language loss among her students and a growing bilingual teacher shortage provide urgency for Julie. This urgency increases her dedication to the dual-language program, despite pressure from other sources that might make it more difficult to stay. Leaving the profession is a response that would only exacerbate the problems she is attempting to solve.

Julie’s devotion to her dual-language program is equaled by her dedication to the student population enrolled in it, one whose demographic profile does not match her own. That is, Julie is acutely aware of the fact that, unlike her students, she is white and privileged. She states that the 2016 presidential election has made this more evident.

“With the political climate right now, it’s become more apparent to me how much I take for granted . . . how much my students are feeling things in the political climate that I hadn’t really, really realized, how deep that went. (Julie1a, November 22, 2016)

This reinforced in Julie a moral responsibility towards others she had already been cultivating. She concludes, “I think that because I have been fortunate in life to have many opportunities, I see the need to give back, and teaching in low-income areas, including [this school], has been a way for me to do this” (JulieQ, November 8, 2016).

*Education, experience, credentials, and knowledge (EECK).* For Julie, pursuing a master’s degree in education represented more than a change in the form of professional
growth and reflection. It was decisive in terms of withstanding the pressures of “reform” and remaining in the profession. “I needed to just find a way to get through this era, this difficult time, I guess. And I went back and got my masters. That was sort of my way of kind of dealing with it” (Julie1b, November 22, 2016). Julie considered the process of obtaining a master’s a way of arming herself with knowledge that would afford her greater authority when confronting potentially harmful policies and practices while simultaneously reminding her of why she decided to teach in the first place.

Educating myself more on being a better teacher . . . so that I could have a little more behind me, sort of a little more backing me. This is why I’m doing what I’m doing, because this is the research. Just to have a little more of a leg to stand on. (Julie1b, November 22, 2016)

In other instances, Julie used what she had learned through her professional experiences, as opposed to formal education, as a way of continuing to do what she knew was right in the face of what sometimes seemed to be an onslaught of federal, state, and district mandates. Reminding herself that most of those behind the mandates possessed far less EECK than her was incentive enough to either disregard the mandates or implement them only in the most superficial and perfunctory ways so as to avoid administrative scrutiny.

Resistance. Kanpol (1991) differentiates between resistance to cultural and political practices outside the school and institutional practices within the school. Julie considers both forms important if they are to be effective. That she believes this is a necessary part of her job is evident in the following:

I do like a challenge, and I think that each time the “reformers” try to destroy public education or make things that much more difficult for students and teachers, I feel like I must meet the challenge and not let them win. This has become even more pronounced with our current administrations—both at the state and federal levels. I
think that we have to push back and continue to do what’s right for our students, because if we don’t, who will? (JulieFU, April 18, 2018)

In-school resistance for Julie has largely consisted of organizing parents and teachers in an effort to reject the aforementioned implementation of a 50-50 dual-language program, deliberately disregarding administrative directives related to testing and accountability, and openly challenging the misinformation and rumors associated with immigration issues that target the families of her students. Julie has also demonstrated resistance outside of school. As a representative from her school to the local teachers’ union, she has supported resolutions and initiatives that have supported some school principals and district administrators—and even the district superintendent herself—when they have challenged the state Department of Education on what they believe to be policies spiteful to teachers or harmful to students.

**Resistance through curriculum and instruction.** Julie’s resistance to education “reforms” is evident in several ways, including through the curriculum. One example of curricular resistance occurred when Julie and her colleagues were instructed by a principal not to teach science or social studies because the two subjects would not be included on the high-stakes standardized tests promoted by “reformers.” Instead of complying with the directive, the teachers quietly disregarded it and continued to teach the “prohibited” subjects.

For Julie, continuing to teach prohibited topics also meant redesigning and reprioritizing the social studies curriculum such that it focused on social justice issues, specifically, her students’ constitutional, educational, and citizenship rights. Julie believes that a curricular shift that focuses these rights will help the students resist challenges to their rights in the future, including the right to continue their education free of interference from harmful corporate and political “reforms.”
**Resisting administrators and policy makers.** Julie’s resistance to “reform”-minded administrators is evident in her successful efforts to challenge the district’s attempt to convert her school’s 90-10 program into a 50-50 program.\(^{32}\) This policy was promoted, at least ostensibly, to fast-track English acquisition so more students would be labeled proficient in English before taking the mandatory high-stakes standardized tests in English in third grade. These tests are the foundation and justification for much of the “reform” movement’s designs. Julie was confident that if her colleagues and her students’ parents became familiar with the current research on bilingual education, they would arrive at the same conclusion as most researchers: that the 50-50 program for students at her school was less effective in all respects than the 90-10 model.

> We really worked at making sure, as a staff, we were educated about this: what we’re doing, this is why. [And that] the parents understood the program—this is why we’re doing what we’re doing—so that we could push back effectively. (Julie2a, March 15, 2017)

The well-informed resistance mounted by Julie, her colleagues, and the parents was successful. They were able to resist the implementation of the 50-50 dual-language model in order to maintain the 90-10 model, which they knew from experience and research would lead to greater academic success among the program’s students. Like the teachers at Kanpol’s (1991) “Hillview” Middle School, Julie and her colleagues recognized potentially harmful “reform” pressures emanating from outside the school (aligning instructional language to the language used on high-stakes standardized tests) and resisted the specific implementations of them from within the school.

\(^{32}\) In a 90-10 program, kindergarten students receive 90% of their instruction in the minority language, first graders 80%, second graders 70%, and so on, to fourth grade where a 50%-50% language ration is reached and maintained from that point on. A 50-50 program is one where the instructional languages begin at 50-50 in kindergarten and remain at that ratio through high school.
In yet another instance of resistance to the initiatives of policy makers and administrators, Julie convinced the school’s instructional coach that a state-mandated test, a result of a wave of accountability “reforms,” was excessive, redundant, and inappropriate for PHLOTE students. Julie resolved to “not [do] it if I felt it really was inappropriate . . . just doing what I needed to do and make sure I could back myself up if I’m ever questioned . . . just not doing every piece of testing they’re throwing at us” (Julie2a, March 15, 2017). Julie’s resistance was sparked by testing policy created by forces outside her classroom. Julie not only challenged these forces, but proposed and constructed viable and seemingly unassailable alternatives, in this case, reestablishing valuable instructional time that would have been lost had she agreed to administer the test.

The breaking point. Brunetti (2006) identifies commitment to one’s students and making a difference in their lives as two key elements of teacher resilience. When I asked Julie what would make her leave teaching, her response was simple and direct: “I think that if I truly felt I was no longer contributing and no longer making a difference to students living in difficult circumstances, I would leave the profession, but I don’t think I would leave for any other reason” (JulieFU, April 18, 2018). Given the fact that she has been able to contribute and make a difference to students and their families even during the darkest years of “reform,” it does not seem likely Julie’s career will end any time soon.

Selene

Childhood. Selene is the only participant born and raised in the city where the four participants now teach. Her father is from northeast Mexico. Her mother is Hispanic, born 33 Selene used a different term. However, in the interest of confidentiality, I felt it necessary to change it to “Hispanic.” It bears mentioning that many of Selene’s mother’s relatives prefer the term “Spanish” to “Hispanic.” This preference may reflect a long-held practice in the state to make explicit
in the state where Selene was born and raised where her ancestors had settled centuries ago. Therefore, Selene identifies as Mexican on her father’s side and Hispanic on her mother’s side. Selene makes a distinction between her “Mexican” and “Hispanic” identities:

I see myself as part of both a Mexican culture and Hispanic-American culture. At times I have felt like I wasn’t a part of either. When I am with my Mexican family, I don’t feel fully like them and when I am with my Hispanic family, I don’t feel fully like them. I exist in a world that includes both, even though to some both are considered [the same]. (SeleneQ, November 28, 2016)

Indeed, as distinctive as Mexican and Hispanic cultures were to Selene as a child, even more distinctive was the broader Anglo culture that surrounded her. “What we did was [not] . . . based on any part of my culture, whether it was Mexican or Hispanic. It was based mostly on the American culture, [the] Anglo experience” (Selene1a, November 29, 2016).

Ultimately, Selene’s childhood was characterized by continual efforts to acculturate to what she perceived as three distinct cultures.

The acculturation efforts became more pronounced and confusing after Selene entered public school. “Due to the negative experiences my parents each had as initial speakers of Spanish, they made a conscious decision not to teach their daughters Spanish, which they later regretted” (SeleneQ, November 28, 2016). Still, Selene was pulled out of class once each week in elementary school to attend special Spanish language classes designed as language maintenance classes for children who spoke Spanish, which Selene did not. She was also placed in a program known as “Chapter One,” designed to help children with literacy skills. Unlike Selene, many of the students in this class spoke Spanish as their first language. Consequently, she believes this class served as a sort of default ESL class for immigrant students, with several non-immigrant, English-speaking students like her mixed one’s family’s links to the earliest Spanish settlers of the 17th and 18th centuries (Gómez, 2007), so as to differentiate oneself from more recent immigrants from modern Mexico.
in. To this day, she wonders how and why she was placed in the class. After attending these special classes in English and Spanish, she returned to her “mainstream” class, which was taught entirely in English, often by an Anglo teacher. This further complicated Selene’s efforts to acculturate to the various cultural contexts to which she was exposed. In sum, Selene’s entrance into the public school system initiated a life-long process of acculturation to various cultural contexts and the cultural identities associated with them.

The balance of Selene’s public school experience remained complex but was ultimately positive. Two important factors made it so. First were the aforementioned special classes and tutors that helped her achieve academic excellence. Second was her extraordinary dedication to her schoolwork. Not only did she complete hours of daily homework, but she did it so well that, while in high school, one teacher routinely marked her weekly homework packet A++. Selene explains that she liked this teacher and other K-12 teachers so much that she “always wanted to be at school. I loved school” (Selene1b, November 29, 2016). Because of her love of school, and also because going to college was a parental expectation in her family, Selene took advantage of an academic scholarship and Pell grants to transition straight from high school to the state university where, despite spending her childhood wanting to be a lawyer, she majored in education.

Selene does not characterize the socio-economic status of her family of origin with a label. She relates that, though not “dirt poor,” her family’s economic status was precarious. “We had a three-bedroom house and sometimes we had one car, sometimes two, but always a jalopy, always breaking down, always something” (Selene1a, November 29, 2016). Selene remembers the numerous times she, her sisters, and her mother climbed into the family’s
only car to drive the nearly thirty miles to the small airport in a nearby town to pick up her father when he had finished giving flying lessons.

Interestingly, labeling her family’s economic status was rendered more complex each time the family traveled to Tijuana, Mexico, where Selene was able to compare her family’s status to that of her paternal cousins. When she compared dwellings and cash-on-hand, Selene’s family seemed to belong to a higher economic echelon. When she compared cars and clothes, however, her status seemed to belong to an equal or lower echelon. Finally, when she compared schools, there was no doubt her cousins’ private school education was of higher quality than Selene’s public school experience in the U.S. Selene concluded that one’s economic condition, like one’s cultural identity, can be interpreted differently, depending on one’s geographic or social circumstances.

However, Selene defines the economic status of her family of origin, she does not remember it as negative. She concludes, “As a child, we struggled financially, but I didn’t know any other way, so I lived a very happy childhood” (SeleneQ, November 28, 2016).

**Personal traits.** It is clear that *perseverance*, which includes persistence and stubbornness, is a marked personal trait for Selene. She describes herself as “very terca. I can be very, very stubborn . . . I will put my foot down . . . if I feel something is unjust or . . . I believe in this cause, or whatever this situation is, I will push in my heels really hard.” (Selene2, March 30, 2017). This trait was especially pronounced during Selene’s public-school education. Although she loved school, she reports she was not good at it. If a classmate took one hour to read a book, Selene took three. If a classmate spent one hour on homework, Selene would often spend four. Many times throughout her public-school education she felt like giving up, and each time she would admonish herself: “Don’t give up,
don’t back down, push forward, and move on” (Selene2, March 30, 2017). Her perseverance resulted in a student—and later, a teacher—who was “an extremely hard worker” (Selene2, March 30, 2017).

For Selene, the origin of this personal trait is no mystery. She repeatedly gives her parents credit for modeling it throughout her childhood. Though ultimately successful, Selene’s parents faced financial challenges throughout her childhood. Nonetheless, they persevered to successfully raise three daughters and send them all to college. “My mom was a nurse for forty-five years, and my [dad’s] experience with being a farm worker. Whatever he did . . . one opportunity is gone, then he'd start something new” (Selene2, March 30, 2017). She concludes, “What my parents always showed, no matter what, was hard work and perseverance” (Selene1a, November 29, 2016). The lesson of perseverance was learned by their daughter, who incorporated it as a defining trait in her core identity.

*Dedication* is another strong trait possessed by Selene. It is evident in the way she expresses her relationship with the students and families she has come to know over more than two decades as a teacher. “Those are *my* kids. Those kids who came with me and sat with me for that entire [year], those are *my* students. Those families, those are *my* families” (Selene2, March 30, 2017). These sentiments are more profound in light of Selene’s strong and positive relationships with her mother’s and father’s families of origin, her own family of origin, and the extended family she has created with her husband, which consists of the two of them, various nieces and nephews, and five godchildren. The distinction between her dedication to her own family and to students’ families is often negligible, a reality that serves to exalt the status of the families whose children she teaches.
Selene expresses her dedication in other ways, as well. For example, in response to why she abandoned a non-classroom, support role after only one year: “I’m a classroom teacher . . . that’s what I’ll be. That’s what I love!” (SeleneFG1b, March 1, 2017). Or, in response to teaching exclusively in schools with demographic profiles similar to those at Valley, where she currently teaches, she states, “this is where I’m intended to be, and it’s what I’m going to do . . . I [have] never considered leaving” (SeleneFG1b, March 1, 2017).

Selene is hopeful. She defines hope as the difference between what students perceive they may not be capable of being or achieving, on the one hand, and what she as a seasoned teacher knows they are. She believes the modeling she received from her parents and teachers gave her sufficient hope to propel her to academic and professional success. She is confident such modeling on her part engenders hope in her own students, only in a more powerful way, since her identities correspond more closely to those of her students than did her teachers’ identities to hers.

So, I think a big part of it is that idea of wanting to . . . give kids hope . . . If you see somebody who looks like you, who talks like you, who acts like you, you kind of think, “Hey, well, if they did it, I think, you know what? Maybe I can, too.” (Selene2, March 30, 2017)

Selene expresses hope in another way. When times are hard and teaching is challenging—a state of affairs much more common than not during the “reform” era—she looks for ways to respond to the resulting negativity with positivity. She believes doing so will instill hope for better times. She describes this strategy as one of offsetting actions. If she cannot get rid of the negativity, such as high-stakes standardized testing, she will at least attempt to add positivity, such as a field trip she otherwise might not have organized. In this manner, Selene attempts to keep hope alive.
Adaptability is the fourth of Selene’s salient traits. In response to her experiences teaching in three different schools, she says, “I can make an impact in many places, not just in the one place. I’m adaptable!” (Selene2, March 30, 2017). Adaptability includes the ability to adapt to curriculum mandates while compromising only minimally her teaching practices. For example, she recently convinced her colleagues to work with the district’s boxed-and-scripted reading program so long as the teachers retained the power to adapt the series to their social studies and science units.

Independence. Selene transitioned from high school into the college of education at the state university. She took courses that would not only earn her a degree in education and a state teacher’s license, but courses specifically oriented toward bilingual education. Selene hoped the courses in bilingual education would help her pass the state’s Spanish language exam for bilingual educators, which, in turn, would earn her a bilingual endorsement on her teacher’s license. The bilingual teacher’s endorsement would allow Selene to teach core content in English and in Spanish in a regular education classroom. This was her dream.

When it was time for her student teaching experience, however, she was informed by her advisor that there were no bilingual classrooms remaining for student teacher placement. Therefore, she was placed in a classroom at a school near her home that was taught in English. As it happened, however, the daughter of a prominent professor in the College of Education was an itinerate bilingual resource teacher at the school. Says Selene, “She kind of took me under her wing, [so] I had that bilingual resource model experience. I got to work with her for a little bit in addition to the second-grade class that I worked in” (Selene1b, November 29, 2016).

Selene remembers the missed opportunity in student teaching as “sort of sad.”
However, she did not let it affect her original plan to become a bilingual teacher. After graduating, receiving her teaching license, and passing the Spanish language exam for bilingual educators, she began applying for teaching positions in schools across the district. She applied only to schools that were seeking to fill positions for bilingual teachers in dual-language classrooms. One of the schools she applied to was Valley Elementary—where, interestingly, she teaches again after over a dozen years at two other schools—and was offered a position. She accepted the offer, thus fulfilling her dream.

**Significant experiences and events.** The cultural, linguistic, and economic experiences of her parents are undoubtedly some of the more meaningful experiences in Selene’s life. She was conscious from an early age of the various social and economic obstacles her parents had overcome, as well as some they had not. Through extremely hard work and perseverance, both her parents were able to move upwards on the economic scale, if only incrementally. They did this in a larger socio-economic context that favored Anglos from the American middle class.

While giving birth to and raising three young girls, Selene’s mother managed to attend nursing school and become a nurse, which, like teaching, is often considered an admirable and noble profession, despite historically poor salaries. Her father was able to overcome a childhood of extreme poverty as a migrant farm worker to join the army, become a pilot and, eventually, a flight instructor. To do this, he had to forgo many of the weekend diversions in which his fellow soldiers engaged. “When the other guys asked him to party on the weekend, he was known to be a study worm” (SeleneQ, November 28, 2016), and would remain in his bunk and study.

Selene was not only aware of her parents’ successful efforts to improve their
economic status but of the primary mechanism for doing it: education. Now, as a teacher, Selene sees her mother’s and father’s faces in those of her students. She repeatedly emphasizes the ways in which she strives to instill hope, faith, confidence, and resilience in students who, like her parents, are starting their lives with significant economic disadvantages. She insists that if her students can achieve what she has achieved, they will have achieved what her parents achieved. “If they can see themselves in me, then hopefully that will take them to another level” (SeleneFG1a, March 1, 2017).

Equally significant for Selene were the experiences her parents had in their early education, especially concerning language. Both her parents suffered admonishment, humiliation, and punishment for speaking Spanish at school. The nuns at her mother’s Catholic school would strike the students with rulers if the students spoke Spanish in school. Selene recounts, “Even though Spanish was her [mother’s] language, the language she went into school with, she learned to leave it at the door, check it as she came into the school setting” (Selene1a, November 29, 2016). Her father attended dozens of schools throughout the Southwest as his family traveled from farm to farm as migrant workers. In most of the schools in which he enrolled, instruction was routinely conducted in English and students were scolded for speaking Spanish. In one Southwestern state in particular, the language and racial discrimination his family experienced was so severe, he resolved to “avoid it like the plague. [He was] not going to even be there or go there because there’s just so much racism” (Selene1a, November 29, 2016).

Because of their negative experiences with language, Selene’s parents decided to spare their daughters similar misery by establishing English as the language of the home. A K-12 education conducted almost exclusively in English rendered the dominance of English
complete. Still, Selene never forgot the stories of her parents’ negative experiences with instructional Spanish. When a positive change in the educational and political climate coincided with the beginning of Selene’s teaching career, she wasted no time in mastering her heritage language and establishing it as a co-equal language of instruction throughout her career.

**Becoming a teacher.** Selene knew of no teachers in her extended family. The only teachers she knew as a child were the Anglo, mostly female teachers to whose classes she was assigned in elementary, middle, and high school. Therefore, there were few if any teacher role models for students like her who might consider teaching as a career. In an interesting twist on the usual interpretation of cultural role models, however, Selene was inspired to be a teacher not because of who her teachers were, but who they were not.

I was inspired by past teachers to become a teacher. I wanted to help children as I was helped. However, most teachers I had were not from either of my cultures, which was an additional reason for wanting to work with children from a similar cultural group. I believe that when you see someone like yourself succeeding, you tend to feel more confident and believe in yourself. (SeleneQ, November 28, 2016)

Having no Mexican American or Hispanic teachers did not mean Selene did not have good or inspiring teachers. She remembers Ms. Berman in third grade as a teacher who inspired her. She recalls her experiences in high school with Ms. Mulroney as particularly inspiring. Selene took a class with Ms. Mulroney both her freshman and junior years. Ms. Mulroney would enter the class and proclaim, “My people!” then proceed to make learning challenging and fun. It was in Ms. Mulroney’s class that Selene would “knock out” the weekend homework packet for which she would receive an A++++ with myriad positive comments from her teacher.

[Ms. Mulroney] was so encouraging . . . I was just very motivated and excited by that.

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34 Ms. Berman and Ms. Mulroney are pseudonyms.
class and by her and the excitement that she had . . . And she just really connected, I connected to her. And it just made me excited about wanting to be like Ms. Mulroney, to do something, and to excite somebody in a way about learning that was just really amazing. (Selene1b, November 29, 2016)

Despite the lack of identity correspondence between Selene and Ms. Mulroney, Selene seemed to be fully capable of emulating her teacher, with one important exception: Selene would be for her students of color the amazing and inspirational teacher of color she never had.

**Teaching in the era of “reform.”** On the “reforms” chart I presented to the participants prior to the second focus group, teacher evaluation was the only “reform” next to which Selene placed three stickers. She marked several other “reforms” with one or two stickers. She describes evaluations as unnecessarily time-consuming for both teachers and principals. She believes the time spent preparing for and conducting them three times each year encroaches on the limited number of hours allotted for critical instruction. She points out how teacher evaluations are inconsistent, as some of the state’s districts, such as hers, penalize teachers for days absent, while other districts do not. Lack of consistency is also evident in the fact that a teacher’s evaluation can change from year to year, even though virtually no essential variables have changed. “I’ve had three different scores in three different years. And, I don’t know how that shows how I’m doing, working at the same school, with basically the same groups of kids. So, I don’t really know what [to expect]” (Selene2, March 30, 2017).

Selene’s criticisms of teacher evaluations do not stop there. She explains how the evaluations are unfair to teachers who teach high numbers of lower-scoring special education
students, dual-language students, or both. Since thirty-five percent of teachers’ evaluations are linked directly to their students’ test scores, Selene’s students’ scores have the potential to decrease her annual evaluation.

Selene considers it “ridiculous” that her school considered—though ultimately did not approve—allocating a considerable amount of money to hire an assistant principal simply to decrease the teacher evaluation “load” of the head principal. The school’s first priority could have been to allocate the money for instructional materials, or even for hiring another teacher. Selene believes that if a principal were determined to decrease his or her evaluation load while not increasing the school’s budget, she could reduce the number of evaluations required for highly credentialed, experienced, and accomplished teachers like Selene. This would allow more time to evaluate beginning or struggling teachers.

Though she did not discuss A-F school grades extensively, Selene marked school grades with two stickers on the “reforms” chart. She explains that a friend’s husband is an engineer and works in an environment where quantitative data is the rule, yet neither he nor his firm is evaluated on a quantitative scale.

He doesn’t get a letter grade for his performance. But . . . I think a lot of it, too, is because of [teaching] mainly [being] a woman’s profession. And so, people over the years have really taken advantage of that, [and have concluded], “Well, you know, they deal with grades. Let’s give them a letter grade.” It’s just very demoralizing. (SeleneFG1a, March 1, 2017).

35 The historically lower scores of these two groups of students are not due to the same factors. For special education students, cognitive issues are the intervening factors. For dual-language students whose first language is not English, language proficiency issues often intervene. This is especially true when the students are forced by the Department of Education to take the tests in English.

36 The three-times-per-year teacher evaluation is mandated by the Department of Education. Since the mandate, however, teachers have often asked why schools could not or should not ignore the mandate and do what they believe is more ethical and feasible, such as evaluating experienced teachers less often.
Especially demoralizing for Selene is the awareness that she is teaching at a good school where she, her colleagues, and their students are doing their best, only to be labeled an “A” school, a “D” school, and finally an “F” school in the three years prior to Selene’s participation in this study. Convinced there were no appreciable changes in the school staff or the student body, Selene and her colleagues could only conclude that the school grading system is capricious and arbitrary.

The other “reform” that received two stickers from Selene, but on which she did not dwell in the one-on-one interviews, was lack of teacher autonomy and input, i.e., de-professionalization. She is frustrated with mandated curricula, such as the reading program the district expected principals to require teachers to implement in a certain way, even when teachers report that doing so would compromise the quality of reading instruction in their classrooms. Selene points out that she and other teachers feel pressure to teach certain subjects instead of others simply because those subjects appear on the progress report or on the standardized tests.

Annual high-stakes standardized tests are a “reform” to which Selene assigned one sticker but spoke about extensively. She describes them as excessive, both in terms of how much testing is required, as well as the number of different tests required. And, because she is often required to test the same skills with different tests or in two languages, she believes the tests are unproductive, needlessly redundant, and ultimately a waste of instructional time. She also considers the tests intrusive, as they interrupt, delay, reduce, and even cancel important instruction each year. They unnecessarily narrow a formerly broad and rich curriculum, as subjects such as social studies, art, music, theater, and cooking are squeezed out of the school for weeks at a time each spring to accommodate the tests. Selene laments
the fact that long-term projects and field trips associated with them are also reduced, thus eliminating much of the fun and real-world relevance schools can provide to less privileged students. Referring to the “reform”-minded administrators at her previous school, Selene recalls:

Field trips were really looked down upon. And I just always thought, “No, this is an opportunity for some of these kids who don’t get those experiences, because of financial reasons, and time, and many [other] reasons.” I still try to maintain [them] a little bit, but it is hard to hold on to. It really is. (FG1a, March 1, 2017)

Charter and magnet schools are the final “reform” that Selene believes is responsible for more recent problems with which traditional schools have had to deal. Selene has witnessed students from families of “means” leave her school to attend a high profile dual-language charter school and an equally high profile dual-language magnet school. When these students leave, they essentially take their higher test scores and family incomes with them. Selene believes this exodus has increased the school’s poverty rate and decreased its test scores, school letter grades, and appropriate student behavior.

There are “reforms” and, as I describe in Fatima’s and Julie’s cases, there are by-products of “reforms,” which are often the forces teachers feel the most. They represent the flash points where “the rubber meets the road,” where “reforms” are transformed from theoretical threats into real and imminent danger.

Among the by-products Selene considers most oppressive are the aforementioned “reform”-minded school-based and district administrators. Selene has little positive to say about the behavior these administrators display as they narrow their focus to testing and other “reforms.” Relative to the practice of teaching, she describes them frequently as ignorant, incompetent, and inconsistent. She describes administrators as generally unsupportive, disrespectful, and demeaning toward teachers. Although they do not make the policies, they
agree to enforce them, and that is why Selene holds them accountable for any harm the “reforms” might do to her students.

If administrators can be seen as the enforcers of harmful education “reforms,” policy makers can be seen as the creators of them. Among those Selene holds responsible for misguided and harmful education policies are successive presidents of the United States, U.S. secretaries of education, governors, state secretaries of education, and elected officials at all levels who defer to professionals in the business community for advice on public education, instead of consulting with and listening to education professionals.

Selene believes this deference to professionals in the private sector results directly in distrust of and disrespect for teachers, which, in turn, is conveyed to and reflected by other political and economic spheres of influence. This disparagement is often manifested in the ways teachers are blamed by policy makers, corporate entities, and the press for the very processes the teachers spend their days striving to improve: teaching and learning. According to Selene, these groups believe teachers are just “in the way, and we’re holding them back from progress . . . I think people such as [U.S. Secretary of Education] DeVos don’t have any idea of all the hard work, sweat, and tears that go into what we do” (FG1a, March 1, 2017).

Exacerbating this trend is the fact that teaching is a profession long dominated by women, who have been a subjugated class of citizens throughout history. It is as if being a woman in a female dominated profession such as teaching or nursing constitutes an automatic disqualification from professionalism. Selene believes that U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, though a woman, exemplifies this animosity toward teachers in general and, by extension, to women in particular. The main message Selene receives from
DeVos is that if these women would just get out of the way, “real” educators, i.e., men, would be able to make public education great again.

Selene interprets this reasoning as chronic and almost universal hubris: having been a third-grade student does not make one an expert on third grade, much less on the field of education. “I think that's a frustrating [thing]. [Just] because people were students, they feel like they can talk about teaching and education. And that has always been a very frustrating thing for me to witness” (SeleneFG1a, March 1, 2017). Yet these are the credentials Secretary DeVos and other policy makers bring to the table when making critical decisions about public education in America.

**The teacher-advocate.** The composition of one’s family of origin and memorable childhood events and aspirations are often instrumental in a teacher’s decision not only to teach, but to advocate for her students. It is therefore understandable that, when asked what she wanted to be when she grew up, the younger Selene consistently answered “lawyer.” During this same period, however, she was awed by a series of great teachers throughout her K-12 education. Therefore, it was not long before “teacher” became the dream occupation. Although Selene ultimately became an awe-inspiring teacher herself, she never completely abandoned the childhood dream of becoming an *abogada*, which in Spanish means both “lawyer” and “advocate.” For Selene, becoming a teacher is essentially synonymous with becoming an advocate.

Selene is ever conscious of the disadvantages from which her mother and especially her father struggled in order to achieve what they had defined as lives more economically successful than the ones in which they were raised. She is also aware that many of her students are members of families who are facing similar disadvantages. Therefore, as a
teacher-advocate, Selene has assumed a quasi-parental role that involves doing for others’ children what her parents did for her, a way of giving back to her parents and her community. This involves serving as a role model while establishing a learning environment that, combined with hard work and determination on the part of her “children,” has a good chance of leading them to “another level” in education and to a successful life, however they wish to define it. Selene’s brand of advocacy for her students is reflected in the words of Maria Rosario, a teacher of Puerto Rican descent profiled in Nieto (2015) Why we Teach Now. Ms. Rosario invokes the work of Lev Vygotsky as she describes this role model-based relationship as an “inter-psychological connectedness [between teacher and student] to help them see themselves as capable of success in testing and in school” (p. 199).

The scope of Selene’s advocacy, however, is not limited to her students’ generic education. It specifically targets their bilingual education. Selene is keenly aware of the ways in which the broader and more powerful Anglo-dominant culture increases the possibility many of her students will suffer various degrees of degradation or loss of their first and home language of Spanish, and, by extension, their cultural and linguistic identities. “It's a sad thing to see how that language gets lost out of family. I mean, that’s like a part of your identity” (Selene2, March 30, 2017). Selene has not just observed this phenomenon in her students; she has lived it as a member of her mother’s side of the family. This is the “Hispanic” side, where only the older siblings in her mother’s generation grew up speaking Spanish or establishing Spanish as the home language when they created families of their own. “And so that, to me, is a big part of why I teach, why I’m a dual-language teacher: because I want for families to preserve that. And it breaks my heart when [they cannot]” (Selene2, March 30, 2017).
Selene’s advocacy does not begin as a theoretical construct she later transforms into practice; it is more a practice she articulates as theory. Theory and practice converge to form the academic, cultural, and linguistic advocacy she undertakes on behalf of her students. That her advocacy is inextricably linked to the meaningful connections in her own life makes it all the more powerful and beneficial to those who find themselves within her spheres of influence.

**Resilience. Traits.** Perseverance is a large source of Selene’s ability to continue teaching in the face of adversity. She says she is very *terca* (stubborn), refuses to back down, and simply will not give up. *Dedication* is also a source. She refers to her students as “my kids” and their families as “my families.” As a very family-oriented person, this level of dedication is profound, leading her to “work really hard. I work way beyond my hours” (Selene2, March 30, 2017). Selene’s ability to *focus* on what she believes needs to be accomplished is another trait that helps explain her longevity in a challenging teaching environment. She “keeps her eyes on the prize”—the prize being academic success for her dual-language students—and uses the attainment of the prize to ward off distractions and challenges to her teaching. Selene also *adapts* to and *complies* with new policies and practices, even those with which she disagrees, in an effort either to outlast them, or to change them so they better fit her practice and her students’ learning styles. Later, she may use her compliance and experience with these policies as leverage in making arguments to no longer implement or practice them. Finally, Selene is *hopeful*. An important motivating force in her practice is to instill hope, confidence, and faith in students who are like her.

**Change.** Change for Selene comes in two forms: site change and professional change. Selene has taught at three different schools. She is currently teaching at her first
school for the second time, an experience so different from the first it feels as if she is teaching at a fourth new school. She says, “I’ve gotten different experiences and I’ve grown in different areas from being at the three different schools” (Selene 2, March 30, 2017). Site changes have also helped her avoid stress related to conflicts with administrators. She left her first school due to irreconcilable differences with a principal. Knowing that site change leads to professional growth or to decreases in job related stress has demonstrated to Selene how she can renew her career in a relatively simple way. This is especially true given the number of site options in the very large district in which she teaches and the shortage of dual-language teachers.

Professional changes have also contributed to her ability to continue teaching, specifically professional development and reflection. Recently, Selene studied for and passed the rigorous process to become a nationally certified teacher. Although she left neither her classroom nor her school, she felt it was a welcomed change to her routine, one that rejuvenated her practice. However, the certification process was so rigorous and demanding that she felt she needed a full year’s vacation in order to recover from it. Australia crossed her mind. Instead, she accepted an academic support position in her school for one year. This position did not require daily lesson plans, the burdensome planning for substitutes, and most of the other stresses that challenge classroom teachers on a daily basis. Though it was not Australia, she interpreted it as her “little ‘not’ vacation . . . what God’s bringing to me in the form of a vacation” (FG1b, March 1, 2017). Being absent from her classroom for a year afforded her valuable insights into the experiences of classroom teachers, insights that ultimately enhanced her practice as well as that of others.

*Mentoring.* Selene refers to mentoring as the principal manner in which she has dealt
with adversity in her practice. By mentoring, she means mentoring others as well as being mentored by others. She defines mentoring further by stipulating that: a) mentors need a broad skill set; b) mentors must establish a high degree of trust with their mentees; c) mentors should act as models for what they believe and do as teachers; and d) it is more important for mentees to choose their mentors than vice versa. Choosing one’s own mentors is, relatively, a rare practice, but doing so over the course of her career is why Selene has been able to report with confidence and satisfaction that, after twenty years of teaching, she still believes being mentored by others is at least as valuable to her longevity, if not more, than mentoring others.

Selene identifies and articulates three distinct types of mentoring, all of which she seeks and cultivates, whether she is mentoring or being mentored by others. At any given time, the types of mentoring and the teachers associated with the types often intertwine and overlap. The first mentoring type is associated with commiseration and consists of teachers with whom Selene can simply vent about the trials and frustrations of classroom teaching. The second type is focused on the craft of teaching, specifically, the sharing and borrowing of curricular materials and strategies. The third layer moves beyond the classroom and into the academic and theoretical, where teachers question or reaffirm the purpose and meaning of what they are teaching. Selene suggests this layer is more likely to exist between veteran teachers.

Regardless of which layer Selene employs in a given situation, she believes each has value in terms of helping her withstand the various challenges of the “reform” era. Together, they create a “teacher's circle around me, [which] kind of protects me from, or kind of helps me cope with, the different things that come up” (Selene2, March 30, 2017). Given Selene’s
view that teachers need to continue to mentor and be mentored, this circle is one she invokes when she needs support, as well as when she is in a position to lend support to others.

Programs and population. Perhaps because Selene’s parents decided not to teach Spanish to their daughters, Selene is particularly sensitive to students who are in a similar situation, or students who learned Spanish at home but are losing it due to strong social influences that favor English. “It just seems like such a shame . . . when I think about my own family, or about . . . students I’ve seen over the years who’ve been in dual-language for at least up to fifth grade, who have lost . . . that language” (Selene2, March 30, 2017). The link between her own experiences and those of many of her students results in Selene’s strong support of dual-language programs, in general, and the program at her school, in particular.

Her dedication to such programs is also related to the fact that, some twenty years ago, she led the school’s campaign to start a dual-language program from scratch, during a period when such programs were relatively new and the research nascent. Since that time, her work in developing and supporting dual-language programs has moved beyond her classroom and her school. Selene has been an active member on key committees of a local, teacher-led, non-profit organization that sponsors what is now an international conference on bilingual education. Her work on these committees has afforded her valuable insights into the status of dual-language programs in other states, as well as applicable laws and regulations in her own state, that have rendered her dedication to dual-language programs even stronger. In fact, Selene’s devotion to dual-language education is so strong that its dilution or demise, through whatever means, would be the only circumstance that could compel her to leave the teaching profession.
As for student population, Selene is deeply dedicated to teaching students who reflect who she was as a child between distinct cultural groups:

In the past twenty years I have worked in three schools with populations of children with cultures similar to mine. These have been intentional decisions. At times, I have felt more connected to my students than to either of my cultural groups. The vast majority of them exist within two cultural groups, as well. It has been a very positive experience for both myself and my students. (SeleneQ, November 28, 2016)

She believes strongly that if her students can see themselves in her, they can achieve at least what she has achieved. This is significant in light of the fact that she achieved success even though she had few if any teachers who reflected her linguistic, cultural, or social class identities. As described above, Selene believes her dedication to this student population is as strong as if each student were her own child.

*Education, experience, credentials, and knowledge (EECK).* Selene frequently invokes her EECK to justify her practice. For example, Selene’s experience and knowledge are evident in her response to “reformers” who blame her that all her third graders are not reading at grade level by the end of the year, as if grade-level reading proficiency is not her goal:

Don’t you think that that’s what teachers do? We’re the ones sitting there everyday, pulling up our sleeves, working hard, staying late, and trying to figure things out. And so, yes, we want [all students at grade level], but this is not a way to measure how they’re reading. We’re making unfair judgments. (Selene1b, November 29, 2016)

Selene knows from experience that students often make outstanding gains in reading achievement throughout the year, but because their gains fall short of what others have defined as grade level reading, the students, their teachers, and their schools are often regarded has having failed.

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37 See the section Childhood, above, for a description of the two cultural groups to which Selene belongs.
Selene knows differently. Because of her EECK, she detects success where others, with far less EECK, detect failure. She explains that the results might not be those desired by “reformers” and reflected in their expectations for high-stakes standardized tests, “but man, when you see those reading scores from the beginning of the year to the end on [individualized, performance-based reading assessments], it’s like, wow!” (Selene2, March 30, 2017). It is success like this that keeps Selene going.

The example above addresses a truth of which Selene has become aware over time: that accumulated EECK are often the best defense against opposition to what she knows are best practices. Therefore, she often finds herself in the position of gathering evidence that shows that the opposition’s stance is erroneous. Sometimes, as in the situation with reading scores, she finds it necessary to invoke the “hard,” quantitative data promoted by “reformers” that she dislikes and believes is so harmful for students. If it such data provides the evidence Selene needs to keep the “reformers” at bay, however, she will pursue it. That is resilience.

It is interesting that Selene refers more often to her experience (E) and knowledge (K) than to her education (E) and credentials (C). This may be a result of an assumption that the other participants and I already knew that she, like the rest of us, already had a master’s degree, a state teacher’s license, and various license endorsements related to bilingual education. Nonetheless, it is clear her EECK result in confidence that allows her to withstand many of the forces of “reform.”

**Resistance.** Selene feels so grounded in her teaching that resistance to “reform” initiatives seems part and parcel of what it means to teach during the current era of education “reform.” Importantly, however, she believes resistance must follow initial compliance with the “reforms” in order to demonstrate their shortcomings and, in some cases, the harm they
cause. Without initial compliance, resistance is not as informed or effective as it must be in order to effect durable change. In a sense, Selene participates in what amounts to “compliant resistance,” a symbiotic and rather paradoxical relationship where the two concepts cannot exist apart from each other.

I’ll do anything for a year. I’ll do it how it’s intended to be used because then I feel like that gives me data or information to then be able to . . . say, “This is how I would like to change it and these are the reasons why.” (Selene2, March 30, 2017)

This strategy positions Selene squarely within the constraints of the system against which she ultimately exercises resistance. Nevertheless, she has found it to be an effective strategy, one that is relatively insulated from administrative retaliation due to an initial establishment of compliance.

**Resistance through curriculum and instruction.** Selene demonstrated “compliant resistance” during the implementation of the district’s “mandatory” reading program. Like other boxed-and-scripted literacy initiatives since the signing of NCLB in 2003, Selene’s district preferred that all teachers use the same reading program and follow its calendar and pacing guides, unaltered, so that all teachers were teaching the same lessons on the same day of the school year. Selene objected to how much instructional time would be consumed by such compliance, the lack of teacher autonomy, as well as how unrelated the reading series was to other parts of the curriculum. Furthermore, Selene, like many other elementary teachers, teaches thematically, preferring to align all facets of the curriculum to themes on which the class focuses for four to six weeks at a time.

While there were teachers in the district whose reaction to the reading series and its

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**38** The program was not actually “mandated” or required. However, the district, through its site administrators, consistently worded its directives to teachers in such a way that they could easily be interpreted as mandatory.
restrictions and requirements was simply to refuse to use it, Selene’s reaction was to reject its requirements and restrictions and refashion it so that teachers—not the district, not teacher’s guides, not pacing guides—had control over it. She convinced most of her colleagues of her plan. She then worked with them to use the reading program only to the extent that it corresponded to other parts of the curriculum. Regardless of their location in the lesson calendar or pacing guide, they selected the parts of lessons that best suited the science- and social studies-centered thematic units in which the students were engaged. Selene and her colleagues complied with what they perceived was a district mandate to implement the reading series, while simultaneously rejecting large parts of it so that what remained corresponded to the thematic units they had created on their own.

**Resisting administrators and policy makers.** One example of resistance to administrators and policy makers relates to test preparation. Selene, like all teachers in the United States, is required by law to administer the high-stakes standardized tests so reviled by public school teachers nationwide. The explicit teaching beforehand of anticipated test items and specific test strategies and behavior is another matter, one that is strongly encouraged by administrators and “reformers,” but generally not required. Nonetheless, in an effort to raise the school’s letter grade from a “D” to a “C,” the principal and instructional coach at Selene’s former school spent $2,000 on test prep materials and required two hours of test prep weekly in third, fourth, and fifth grades. Additionally, the principal required teachers to revoke recess privileges from students who had not memorized their multiplication tables.

At first, Selene and her colleagues complied with the directives. Later, they rebelled. After having experienced the resentment and indignation of both students and their parents
due to the recess deprivation scheme, Selene wrote a two-page e-mail to the principal and instructional coach wherein she detailed her objections to recess deprivation and test prep. As a result, all but two other teachers in the third through fifth grades dropped the recess punishment and either dramatically reduced or eliminated the amount of time they spent engaging their students with the test prep materials. When the $2,000 worth of test prep materials came up for renewal later that year, the staff was successful in voting down its inclusion in the school’s testing budget. Although the result was a return to what had previously existed, I argue this act of resistance is nevertheless consistent with the “resist and replace” definition of resistance.

Selene’s resistance to district administrators extends to the district’s diagnosticians, who operate under the auspices and approval of district and site-based administrators. In a recent interaction with a diagnostician, Selene asserted that the diagnostician was operating from an over reliance on what Selene believed was superficial, quantitative data, the type of data elevated above all others (e.g., qualitative data) during the current era of “reform.” Selene concluded that this over reliance on quantitative data had led to an erroneous “diagnosis” of a student’s language proficiency. Selene recalls the way she addressed the diagnostician:

“You don’t even know anything about him other than what you did on this test. You should not be making any recommendations such as that.” I said, “Do you have any experience with children who learn two languages? No. Do you know anything about biliteracy? No. Well, then, you shouldn’t be making those recommendations. You have no idea.” (Selene2, March 30, 2017).

These examples demonstrate how Selene works within the system to resist elements of education “reform” she believes are harmful to her students, her colleagues, and her school community.
The breaking point. Selene’s response to the question “What would make you leave?” is straightforward:

I guess I might consider leaving if . . . the state came in and wanted to make . . . drastic changes that really didn’t make [dual-language education] “dual-language” [anymore] . . . or either . . . in a fake form, just for show . . . or just fundamentally changing [dual-language education]. (FG2b, April 19, 2017).

To illustrate the urgency of this statement, Selene shared an e-mail she had received from the state Department of Education. The e-mail announced that enrichment and maintenance bilingual programs, two of the state’s five types of bilingual education programs,39 would no longer be available to students who were native speakers of English. Selene wondered if this policy change might portend similar or more dramatic changes that would lead to the gradual and piecemeal demise of bilingual programs. Ultimately, however, Selene stated she might find ways to continue teaching, even in non-bilingual programs. She might “just stay for the kids. I know that there are kids who need help. I know that I can help them and I can really push them to a level of success for who they are as an individual” (FG2b, April 19, 2017).

Theo

Childhood. Theo was born and raised on a ranch and adjacent farmland in the southern part of the state where he was born and where he teaches, approximately twenty miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border. It is on this land that successive generations of his family have raised cattle, cotton, barley, sorghum, and alfalfa. He identifies as Anglo, as all the maternal and paternal relatives of whom he is aware are white and English speaking, the sole exception a great-grandmother on his father’s side, who was from Mexico and had the last name of Benavides.

39 The five types are: 1) Dual-Language Immersion Model; 2) enrichment model; 3) Heritage Language Model; 4) Maintenance Model; and 5) Transition Model. See Glossary in Appendix A for details.
Due to its proximity to the border, travelers from Mexico often passed through the ranch on foot. Theo recalls his parents and grandparents instructing him and his brothers “to always give them water (we kept empty milk jugs for this purpose) and feed them (we kept extra bologna and bread in the house for this purpose too)” (TheoQ, October 23, 2016). Those not continuing north were often in search of seasonal work. Theo’s father and grandfather were among the local ranchers who employed them, often year after year. However, Theo is emphatic in his characterization of the family’s partnership with the Mexican workers, especially those who worked regularly with his grandfather and, later, with his father. “After [my family] bought the farms, these same men came back, working with my dad, [who] worked with them . . . I mean, we weren’t sitting on the porch sipping iced tea while we watched them work . . . We were working with them” (Theo1b, November 17, 2016). It is therefore logical that Theo characterizes his childhood as working class.

I grew up in . . . a very blue-collar upbringing. I started contributing labor at our farm and ranch from about the age of nine. By ten years old I was operating farm equipment, feeding, caring for and helping with the slaughter of farm livestock. I helped my father maintain and repair all of the farm equipment that we owned. I routinely helped extended family gather (on horseback), brand, vaccinate, dehorn, and castrate cattle that were part of an extended family ranching enterprise. (TheoQ, October 23, 2016)

As if to underline his family’s working-class status, Theo adds that, when the ranch and farmlands were not generating enough income, his father would find temporary blue-collar work as an itinerate heavy equipment operator for the highway department or as a welder in the nearby copper mines.

Though relatively oblivious to his working-class status while on the farm, Theo became acutely aware of it each time he went into town for ranch related errands. There, he
encountered residents engaged in what he refers to as “the extras” available to those with “spare time.”

I mean, when I went to my rural school, the kids that I went to school with, we were all in the same boat. But when I went into [town], which was all of the big city to me, then it was like, “Oh, OK, this is what it looks like when your family has a profession!” They may have just been a teacher; they may have even been a plumber. But they had a paycheck job as opposed to a rural farm job. (Theo1b, November 17, 2016)

Although Theo remembers his childhood on the ranch fondly, he knew at an early age he did not want to make it his life. He reports that he worked hard enough in high school to earn a full academic scholarship to study anthropology and linguistics at one of the state’s public universities, a decision that eventually propelled him into the middle class. However, he never forgot his rural, working class origins, or the lessons he learned from them. When he applied to be a Peace Corps volunteer, he states he was accepted and assigned to a post in rural Paraguay not because of his degree in anthropology, or even his ability to speak Spanish—though that helped—but primarily because of his rural farm and ranch background.

Theo identifies as a native speaker of English. He also identifies as multilingual. He describes himself as an elective speaker of Spanish and French, a one-time speaker of Guaraní (one of the two national languages of Paraguay), and as possessing a traveler’s knowledge of Italian and Portuguese. It is Spanish, however, that best defines his language skills outside of English. Theo explains that, due to the border-area location of the family ranch, his grandfather was “fairly bilingual” and his father “somewhat bilingual.” He explains further that “my father insisted that my brother and I learn enough Spanish to be able to at least communicate basic information and farm/ranch vocabulary with the workers” (TheoQ, October 23, 2016). Theo maintained his Spanish in a sixth-grade Spanish program, throughout junior high, and for four semesters in college. Consequently, when he entered the
Peace Corps, he needed only to “brush up” on his Spanish before arriving at his post in Paraguay.

**Personal traits.** Because of Theo’s work in Paraguay, in the jewelry industry (discussed below), and for a short time in contract archeology, he came later than most to teaching. If it is true that patience increases with age, then it is possible Theo had cultivated more patience prior to teaching than many teachers. It may therefore not be surprising that *patience*, which includes perspective and endurance, is a salient trait for Theo. Patience is manifested in Theo’s assumption that, in regard to hard times, “this, too, shall pass.” In fact, that is exactly what Theo says as he assesses what he believes is a negative state of affairs in education. If negative political decisions can harm education, then positive decisions can improve them. All one needs is patience. Theo’s patience is further exemplified in a statement he made about how he had “made peace” with annual high-stakes standardized testing: “There’s ten hours of my life and their life that we’re never going to get back and just is taken over to the test, and be done with it. Once that test is over, we just continue on with school” (FG1a, March 1, 2017).

Theo is also *hopeful*, a trait that includes positivity, confidence, and faith. Theo characterizes teaching largely as an act of faith:

> You do your work and you hope that you’ve reached a kid inside and all for the betterment of us all. And I hope that’s happened, but I [have] no evidence that that’s been the case. But it gives me hope that that’s the case, and so I keep going with that. I guess if I ever thought the reverse, I don’t know, I’d fall into really serious despair. (Theo2, April 6, 2017)

No doubt the combination of patience and faith has much to do with the fact that Theo has

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40 I assessed this trait as patience, as opposed to adaptability, because his description is one of waiting out the testing period. Also, refusing to give the test is one of few actions that would constitute grounds for dismissal and losing his teaching license.
taught for seventeen years and cannot see himself retiring before reaching twenty-five years.

Theo is dedicated, an attribute that implies loyalty, commitment, and allegiance. In fact, Theo is so dedicated to teaching that he recently made a rare career move. In a profession where movement from teacher to administrator to retirement is almost always unilateral, predictable, and irreversible, Theo left his post as assistant principal after two years and, instead of retiring, returned to his former post as a full-time classroom teacher.

I’m very happy to be back in the classroom. I’m very happy for [teacher evaluations] to be the administrator’s issue to deal with. But I don’t have to do that. I get to be with kids. I get to teach. So very happy to be out of the administration. (Theo1a, November 17, 2019)

Whereas many teachers who move to administrative posts do so, in part, as a way of “escaping” the hectic daily life a classroom, Theo’s dedication to teaching was such that he perceived an elementary classroom as a refuge from what he had experienced as the unbearable and unethical demands of administration. Now, back in his own classroom, Theo’s dedication is manifested in part in his tireless support of special education inclusion and dual-language immersion education, two programs he believes will gain the recognition they deserve only if teachers like him dedicate their careers to them.

Probably more than any other trait, however, Theo is adaptable. When a draft of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) was adopted unilaterally by the state Department of Education and imposed on the state’s schools, Theo perused them and concluded he was implementing them already, only in different forms and a different chronological order. Slight alterations to the forms and calendars would amount to a relatively easy adaptation to the new mandate.

At his first school, when administrators demanded he and his colleagues comply with new curricular mandates or accountability procedures, Theo responded:
“I can do this . . . If you want me to, I can come up with something that’ll [please you].” And I did. I learned how to make things that made the consultants all smile and say, “Oh! Look at this! There’s change going on!” I can play the game. The things that seemed to be less intrusive, less damaging to kids and teachers, I was OK to sort of blow it off and just do it. It didn’t have any meaning for me, but I could play their game. (Theo2, April 6, 2017)

In an era of teacher accountability, the game often consisted of posting “stuff on the walls and in data folders. It’ll keep the administrators [happy], put a smile on their faces and the consultants’. But you can still do the work you know kids need to have in class beyond” (FG2a, April 19, 2017). Finally, when it comes to enduring high-stakes standardized testing and other onerous manifestations of education “reform,” Theo has learned to “give myself permission to do things that I think kids need and want and thrive under” (FG2a, April 19, 2017). In a sense, Theo essentially adapts by being his own administrator and granting himself permission to be the teacher he wants to be.

**Independence.** After graduating with degrees in anthropology and linguistics from one of the state’s public universities, Theo applied to the Peace Corps. Upon being accepted, he was assigned to Paraguay, a country he had not selected as a priority. He believes he was assigned to Paraguay for two reasons. First, because the country was seeking volunteers who already knew Spanish so that the language induction months could be spent learning Guarani, the other national language of Paraguay and the language spoken most often in informal situations and in all rural areas of the country. Second, because the country was seeking volunteers who had experience living and working in rural areas. Theo fulfilled both criteria.

Once Theo arrived on site, he became involved in a rural co-op founded by the Catholic Church and through which local farmers could, in Theo’s words, “practice democracy” after the fall in 1989 of the thirty-five-year Stroessner dictatorship. Later, Theo
joined a project initiated by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) whose goal was to liberate local sugar cane farmers from economic oppression by converting them into tomato farmers. By the time Theo arrived, however, the farmers had foresworn tomatoes and had returned to cultivating sugar cane, essentially asking themselves, “How can we free ourselves from economic oppression while remaining sugar cane farmers?” Because of the glut in the sugar cane market, the local rum producers could buy the farmers’ sugar cane-derived molasses at very low prices, while simultaneously holding the farmers hostage through lines of credit the producers extended to them for staple foods, school fees, and other necessary goods and services. Theo worked with the farmers to develop ways of storing the molasses for extended periods of time. The artificial shortages the storage plan created raised the price of the molasses and, consequently, the farmers’ incomes. Theo also helped develop ways of using the profits from the sales of molasses to subsidize the farmers’ incomes, so they no longer had to seek credit from the rum producers. As I explain below, these and other experiences in Paraguay had a profound impact on Theo’s later adult life, including his career as a teacher.

After the Peace Corps, Theo states that he “worked for a company that wholesaled jewelry around the country and a few foreign countries as well. I was drawn to this work because of the multicultural aspect and that I also got to work directly with . . . Native American artisans” (TheoQ, October 23, 2016). However, Theo recalls that, “after about ten years, I grew tired of the travel I had to do and cast about thinking of a new career” (TheoQ, October 23, 2016). I discuss Theo’s decision to become a teacher below.

**Significant experiences and events.** No doubt growing up on a ranch and farmlands near the U.S.-Mexico border and working alongside Mexican ranch hands and farm workers
had significant effects on Theo’s formative years. The effects extended to his first job out of college as a Peace Corps volunteer in Paraguay. His work as an advocate for sugar cane farmers was a natural extension of his boyhood ranch work and the material support his family provided to Mexicans traveling to and through their ranch. The effects were evident later in Theo’s life, as well. They were instrumental in his decision to become a teacher, his satisfaction with the profession, and his advocacy work with students and their families once he became a teacher. The seeds planted on the farmlands of the Southwest border bear fruit in Theo’s classroom today.  

Perhaps the most significant experience or event in Theo’s life, however, is actually a permanent feature of his identity. In the questionnaire on race, language, and social-class identity I sent to participants at the outset of the study, Theo voluntarily added a section on sexual identity. In that section, he stated, “I knew from a very young age that I was ‘different’ and came to understand and accept an identity of being queer/gay” (TheoQ, October 23, 2016). Although cultural, linguistic, and social-class identities continue to have profound influences on Theo’s life, sexual identity seems to be the most profound.  

Sexual identity has affected Theo wherever he has lived. Theo grew up in a sparsely populated but tight-knit ranching community where heterosexual machismo for boys and men was assumed and where any departure from the resulting cowboy archetype was evident. In such a context, it was therefore not surprising that Theo’s acceptance at a young age of being queer/gay made him the target of what he refers to as overt, institutional bullying. To illustrate this point, he recounted a story from the end of his fifth-grade year. The sixth graders at his school were moving on to junior high and were expected to “gift”  

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41 In September 2018, Theo left his post at Zapata Elementary to teach at a school in Costa Rica, thus bringing his experiences on the ranch, in the Peace Corps, and in the classroom full circle.
meaningful objects to their fifth-grade peers in an effort to imbue the latter with good luck in sixth grade. Theo believes he was intentionally “gifted” a doll:

I was gifted with a doll because I was, you know, I was a sissy. And I remember the community kind of laughing at that . . . and you had to march up there and get it from the person up on the stage and I—was fairly dismayed. That was the first time I’d really encountered the whole . . . public sphere. (Theo1b, November 17, 2016)

On the bus ride home that afternoon, Theo “re-gifted” the doll to a younger girl whose “family came from nothing. I was like, ‘Man! Great! You know, out of this shitty experience I’m going to give something to someone that’s going to really appreciate it’” (Theo1b, November 17, 2016). As I will discuss in Chapter 7, the connection between this gesture and Theo’s future advocacy work with children is strong.

As he grew older and experienced other social environments, he concluded that a more anonymous, urban environment would likely be a safer and more accepting community for a gay man than a rural environment, where anonymity is virtually non-existent. Therefore, other than the rural setting in which he lived in Paraguay, Theo has lived most of his adult life in relative anonymity in the state’s largest city.

Being a gay man also influenced what Theo studied at one of the state’s public universities, which was located in a much larger and more diverse city. This change in cultural and geographic contexts was instrumental in leading Theo to an understanding of how gay men and women in heterosexual-dominated social contexts often live as cultural outsiders. “This place of being the outsider, I think, led me to focus on anthropology” (TheoQ, October 23, 2016).” Theo explained how his training in anthropology and his identity as an outsider led directly to his post as a Peace Corps volunteer in Paraguay, as well as to his work as a bilingual educator with immigrant children.

Finally, being a gay man had a direct effect on Theo’s ultimate choice of teaching as
a profession. At first, however, it was a disincentive. Upon returning to the United States from Paraguay, Theo enrolled in a post baccalaureate teacher education program at the university where he had obtained his bachelor’s degree. At the same time, friends in California informed him of a potential “gay purge” of teachers in that state’s public schools. Though Theo did not live in California, he feared the gay purge might sweep across the political landscape in the Southwest. He recalls,

> Just that overt news was enough to put pause in me. You know, I’ve already dealt with shit like this. The last thing I need is somebody on some damn witch hunt. If I’m going to be a teacher, I’m just a teacher. Give me a break. I don’t know what being gay has to do with me being a teacher. (Theo1b, November 17, 2016)

Consequently, he worked for a short time as a contract archeologist before going into the jewelry wholesale business, where he remained for the next ten years. By the time he left the jewelry business, threats of a purge of gay teachers had disappeared in California and elsewhere. Theo was free to transition to a career in teaching without having to worry about how his sexual identity might affect it.

**Becoming a teacher.** One of the earliest and most direct inspirations for teaching was a secondary Peace Corps project Theo initiated while in Paraguay. This project consisted of designing and maintaining a garden with a third-grade class in a local school. Though Theo describes the experience as “very enjoyable,” he also describes it as a “one-off.” “I did it. I enjoyed it. [But] I still didn't think, ‘Oh! This is what I want to do’” (Theo1a, November 17, 2016). Nonetheless, the experience seems to have planted a seed that sprouted and grew to maturity after he began to tire of the jewelry business. He

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42 Theo’s friends may have been referring to the 1978 Briggs Initiative, or Proposition 6, which would have allowed for the termination of any teacher whose homosexual conduct became known to students or staff. The initiative was ultimately voted down by a 2-1 margin. For more information, see https://ccte.org/wp-content/pdfs-conferences/ccte-conf-sample-practice-proposal.pdf.
explains:

I really grew weary of the travel and reflected back on my Peace Corps. I really wanted to do something with Spanish, which I hadn't been able to do. And I [asked], “What can I do to help change the world?” And it was social work, medical field, or teaching. . . . And medical stuff never really interested me. And I don’t do well with blood and any of that stuff, so that one was sort of an out. But teaching seemed where it was at. I had relatives that I could identify somehow with the job. I mean, it was perfect. Once I started taking the classes, I never looked back . . . I knew it was for me. (Theo1a, November 17, 2016)

After returning to his home state and settling in the large city in which he now teaches, Theo made friends with “Rosa,” a teacher at a school in which one day he, too, would teach. Theo was intrigued by her work. He loved listening to stories she told about her life in her classroom:

It seemed very dramatic and interesting and she clearly had a love for what she was doing, but [she] talked about the issues and the concerns that her students came with. It just sounded like a great environment to work in. She was probably my very biggest influence. (Theo1a, November 17, 2016)

Almost inevitably, he found himself as a volunteer in her classroom. Soon afterwards, Theo re-entered the teacher education program at the local university and completed the course work, the bilingual teacher exams, and field experiences—including student teaching for one a year and a half as a full-time educational assistant—necessary to obtain a state teacher’s license with a bilingual endorsement. Since that time, Theo has taught in dual-language programs at four different schools, held a supervisor’s position for three years in a post-baccalaureate teacher certification program at the university, and served as an assistant principal at a fifth school before arriving at Zapata Elementary, where he was teaching in a fourth- and fifth-grade dual-language classroom while participating in this study.

Teaching in the era of “reform.” When Theo thinks of education “reforms” and their effects on public education, privatization (i.e., corporatization or the business model) is
of primary concern. This was one of four “reforms” next to which Theo placed two stickers when presented with a chart of education “reforms” mentioned by the participants in their interviews with me. While high-stakes testing, high-stakes teacher evaluations, and lack of professional autonomy also received two stickers from Theo, it is clear from the transcripts of the two interviews I conducted with him that he considered privatization the most onerous and potentially harmful “reform” in regard to students, teachers, and public education in general.

To Theo, the epitome of privatization is the Baldrige model. This model was designed by Malcolm Baldrige, President Reagan’s Secretary of Commerce. The Baldrige model initially intended to “enhance the competitiveness of U.S. businesses” (https://www.nist.gov/baldrige). It now purports to do the same in government, health care, and education. Whether the problem was the Baldrige structure itself, the way it was implemented, or both, was of little concern to Theo. He was certain it was not an appropriate model for public elementary schools. He believes it exalted quantitative data over people, which made it convenient to and consistent with the new focus of education “reform” after the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was signed by President Bush in 2003.

And that was probably the worst part of my career, the whole Baldrige thing, where we had to do number crunching, and the business community, and Plan-Do-Study-Act, and post all kinds of graphs and data on the wall. And kids had to have data folders and you had to talk about data, data, data. And I almost lost all love of teaching in that. There was a school that I was at [where] the principal, the only thing she seemed to know how to lead was . . . the grant [she had written]. And we had consultants living at our school 24/7. And we were meeting every other week with a half-day sub. And we were—God save us, it was horrible! (Theo1a, November 17, 2017)

The state teacher evaluations also received two stickers from Theo on the chart of most onerous “reforms.” Theo believes the evaluations are highly subjective and, therefore,
vulnerable to the whims and emotions of school administrators, who are usually the evalutors. Theo explains that teachers who have good relationships with their principals can generally expect good evaluations, while those with bad relationships often fear negative evaluations. Furthermore, many teachers, including Theo, often possess more credentials and experience in their areas of expertise than the principals who evaluate them. Negative evaluations from these administrators can be particularly traumatizing.

Especially troubling to Theo, however, are good teachers who receive bad evaluations. Theo is concerned about “Tom,” the talented and dedicated novice teacher across the hall, who receives evaluations of “minimally effective” year after year due to what Tom, Theo, and others believe is the high percentage of special education students Tom welcomes into his classroom each year.

Holy smokes! I don’t know what I would’ve been like if year after year I had gotten a piece of paper from [state capital] that said “You’re minimally effective. You’re minimally effective. You’re minimally effective.” I want to know how it affects his psyche. [Tom’s] my colleague. I want to be a steward, I want good people to continue, and I’m afraid for the kids that we’re going to be teaching in our country and our profession when I see very quality, dedicated people who are just being raked over the coals. (FG1a, March 1, 2017)

Theo believes he knows better than many teachers and administrators the harmful effects of the current evaluations. This is because he knows how beneficial and productive site-sensitive and site-based evaluations can be. He served as a supervisor in a high quality, national award-winning, post-baccalaureate teacher certification program at the university. The evaluations for that program, unlike those of the state Department of Education, were qualitative, formative, student-centered, and student-directed, and, in some ways, student-designed. This resulted is high levels of intrinsic motivation for prospective teachers to improve their practice while remaining positive and enthusiastic about teaching, instead of
becoming negative and demoralized, as Theo believes many teachers are today as a direct result of the current evaluation process.

Worse, still, is the connection between teacher evaluations and for-profit “education” entities. Theo understands the new, high-stakes teacher evaluations as simply another way to make money off the perceived “failures” of teachers.

When you’re deemed “minimally effective” in an area, they could say, “Oh, now, go to the training platform and watch these two videos, and then take the quizzes, which we can monitor because that information will flow back to us to prove that you’ve watched the video and you’ve taken the test. But somebody’s going to be raking in big bucks on the training component, too, when in reality, I can talk to my peers at my school. There are other ways to be trained, other than through this module, these video modules, that somebody’s desperate to make money off of. So, “reforms” equal money to me. (Theo1c, November 18, 2016)

Ultimately, says Theo, under the education “reform” movement, “if there’s no money to be made, [“reformers”] are not going to have anything to do with it, because somebody’s not getting their cut” (FG1a, March 1, 2017).

Annual high-stakes standardized tests also received two stickers from Theo on the chart of most onerous “reforms.” Theo’s criticisms of these tests include: a) the various and nefarious ways in which test scores are used, including as a large percentage of teachers’ annual evaluations; b) the amount of instructional time wasted on test preparation and on the testing itself; c) the ways in which increased use of computers for testing has impinged on the writing component of the test as well as on the quality and scope of the responses students can construct; and d) the lack of attention given to testing in languages other than English. Theo believes even the high quality, one-on-one (teacher-student) reading assessments, of which he generally approves, are administered excessively, especially when the expectation in dual-language classrooms is that they be administered in both instructional languages.
(English and Spanish), a practice that doubles the amount of testing one would conduct in a classroom taught in only one language.

Another area to which Theo assigned two stickers on the “reform” chart was in teacher autonomy, specifically, the lack of it. Theo describes how the school district rather quickly accepted the corporate interpretation of public education, where teachers are simply employees who implement what the corporate and political worlds have designed. “They started to go down a path of, ‘Here’s your textbook. Here’s your curriculum. Here’s your program. Teach it to the letter of the law’” (Theo1a, November 17, 2016). He says this is especially true at “D” and “F” schools, such as several where he used to teach, that are subject to “corrective action” after five consecutive years of “D” or “F” grades.43

There is still, I think, a big push by those administrators to have kids in very narrow bands. “Everybody is going to be on the same chapter, on the same week, on the same day, and you’re going to follow the teachers’ guides, and you’re going to do these materials as they are laid out, and we’re going to be checking on you.” (Theo1c, November 18, 2016)

Furthermore, Theo laments the lack of teacher control over curricular materials, how and when they are used, the standardization of curriculum through the adoption of the CCSS by a majority of states, and the ways in which the required use of quantitative student achievement data impedes rather than facilitates teaching and learning. He concludes, however, that recently things have changed for the better, at least at Zapata, where he believes, for reasons not entirely clear, he and other teachers have regained some of the autonomy they had lost.

Though Theo placed only one sticker on the chart next to policy makers, he addresses the topic extensively in the interviews. He believes policy makers at all levels are directly

43 The 2016-2017 school year was the second consecutive year of “D” or “F” grades for Zapata, where Theo teaches. In that year, it received an “F.” The year before, it received a “D.”
responsible for taking deliberate steps to create and implement education policy that is harmful to students, parents, and teachers. He reserves special animus for the two people serving as governor and state secretary of education during this study. Theo believes they, like President Trump and U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, possess no discernible experience in public education. Like Selene, Theo wonders why many policy makers believe that simply because they have passed through K-12 education, they are experts on it. He sums up their collective hubris this way: “I’ve been in a doctor’s office; that doesn’t mean I can be a doctor! I mean, I drive a car; that doesn’t mean I should engineer them!” (FG1a, March 1, 2017).

There are two areas of “reform” where Theo placed no stickers on the “reforms” chart but speaks about extensively in the one-on-one interviews. The first is school administrators, in most cases, site-based principals. Theo admits there are some good principals, but they are few and far between. According to Theo, bad principals, despite possessing administrative credentials, are otherwise unqualified for their particular positions. Consequently, they act capriciously to overrule teachers’ decisions, establish and maintain a harmful and stressful school climate, make uninformed decisions about teaching and learning, are unfamiliar with specialty programs (e.g., dual-language classrooms), are over-stressed and disorganized, apply policies inconsistently from year to year, and cause needless teacher vacancies, as teachers flee incompetent principals for schools where they believe a more competent principal presides.

Complaints about administrators are common among teachers. What makes Theo’s grievances more credible is the fact that he was an administrator from 2012-2014, peak years of the education “reform” movement. Although Theo is aware of the pressures on principals
to toe the line of “reform,” he is also aware of the ways that, despite the “reforms,” they can make schools better places for teachers and students to spend their days.

The second area Theo addresses extensively in the interviews but does not represent with stickers on the “reforms” chart is teacher blaming. He believes that if policy makers and the press succeed in convincing the public that teachers are the cause of all the perceived problems in public education, the public will not look in the direction of the true causes: bad education policy and harmful economic policies that have disproportional negative effects on the very students Theo teaches. He describes the phenomenon this way:

We don’t have leadership in this state that honors teachers, that believes that teachers are doing good things, that teachers are trying their best for the interests of kids . . . They see us as slackers or somebody that they’re going to catch being as bad as they think we already are . . . We’ve gotten into a culture of no longer honoring teachers . . . At the state level, it’s just, “You all are the enemy!” I mean, why would you get into a profession where you’re attacked in the news and in print and in politics? It’s tough. (FG2a, April 19, 2017)

The teacher-advocate. Researchers have identified indelible events in childhood as motivation for advocacy later in life as a teacher (Collay, 2010; Cahnmann & Varghese, 2001; Mawhinnney et al, 2012). If an advocate is generally defined as someone who takes action on another’s behalf, Theo has been an advocate most of his life. As a child, he and his family provided water and food for immigrants traveling north through their ranch and farmlands. As a Peace Corps volunteer in Paraguay, Theo interpreted his assignment as “very much a social justice issue for me, working to . . . help people with their own lives” by providing an “outside voice role . . . to do things [sugar cane farmers] couldn’t do internally” (FG1a, March 1, 2017). In his personal life as an adult, he has found it necessary to advocate in various ways for gay rights so that he and other gay and lesbian residents of the United States may one day live free of anti-gay discrimination.
While Theo has been an advocate for others, he has also been the beneficiary of advocacy by others, be they straight allies working for gay and lesbian rights or members of the teachers’ union who somehow find time to fight for teachers’ contractual rights so that he and other union members can focus on teaching. Experiencing advocacy from both sides may have afforded Theo a more profound and informed understanding of the nature and effects of advocacy.

Relevant to this study is Theo’s advocacy on behalf of his students and their families. The advocacy Theo undertakes in this regard is grounded in the linguistic needs of his students, specifically in his belief that one’s ability to access the district’s curricula and the state’s education standards in one’s home language is key to success. This is a reality he believes Anglo students and parents can take for granted, but one which speakers of Spanish and other languages cannot. By teaching in a language other than English for fifty percent of the school year, Theo believes he and other advocates of dual-language education are assuring access to the curriculum and standards for both his English-speaking and his Spanish-speaking students.

Theo reasons that, if native Spanish-speaking students can gain equal access to the curriculum, perhaps they will have a better chance of attending college and attaining economic success. This means more than simply aligning the curricular materials to students’ home languages; it means positioning them for success in middle and high school. As Theo makes clear, however, the immigrant families whom he serves from year to year are relatively unfamiliar with U.S. public schools. As a result, they are less likely to make the strategic choices necessary to enhance their children’s chances for future academic and economic success.
They come to me with questions. “How do I help my kid? What do I have to do? What are the things I don’t know that nobody’s going to tell me to get my kid into the advanced math class over at [the middle school]?” Or, “How do they get into the good science class where they’re going to end up in high school, you know?” Or, “What after-school program really is going to help my kid get better with reading?” They’re keen to know the answers to those things because they don’t know how it works. (FG1b, March 1, 2017)

Therefore, part of Theo’s advocacy work as a teacher includes interpreting for immigrant parents the U.S. public education system so they can make the best possible choices for their children.

The necessity of this form of advocacy was made abundantly clear to Theo in his second year of teaching, when the mother of one of his students attended a parent-teacher conference. The family had recently emigrated from Mexico to the United States and was still learning about U.S. public education. During the conference, Theo recommended to the mother that her son enroll in the enriched math class at the middle school because doing so would prepare him for similar classes in high school, which, in turn, would position him better for college. The boy’s mother looked at Theo incredulously and asked,

“Do you think Felipe could go to college?” And I said, “Yes, absolutely.” And I remember the tears sort of welling up in her, saying, “That's never—no one has ever—Felipe will be the first one in our family to even graduate from high school. And no one, where I had come from, was there even a remote possibility could ever go to the university.” And I realized that I had to be much more vocal always to both the kids and their families about the possibilities that their kids had. And if I didn’t vocalize it, they weren’t going to hear it from anyone. And that was a powerful lesson that I learned that second year that I’ve held dear [and] that I am very vocal about it. (Theo1b, November 17, 2016)

Theo realized that if he did not stand up for students like Felipe, perhaps nobody would.

Theo is aware that some if not all of his Anglo, middle-class students often hear talk of college from the time they are born. However, Theo was raised by Anglo, working-class
parents. Therefore, he seems to be in a better position than many teachers to identify and understand assumptions parents make about attending college.

I can’t—in my whiteness and my now middle-class privilege—I can’t presume. And I hear it from my kids in this class at Zapata [Elementary] who come from more privileged backgrounds. They talk about, “When I’m in college, when I’m in college, when I’m in college.” And I make sure that my kids who don’t come from college-educated families hear that as well: “This is what I expect of you.” (FG1b, March 1, 2017)

Finally, Theo considers role modeling an important facet of his advocacy. He understands that Spanish-speaking teachers of color—not Anglo teachers like him—would be more natural and perhaps more effective role models for his students. He has concluded, however, that what he does not model in ethnicity and native language, he models in other ways: acquiring the minority language, elevating its status relative to English, demonstrating that a working-class childhood is not necessarily a barrier to higher education, and being a man in a profession dominated by women, among others.

Theo’s ability to serve as a role model for his students, despite not sharing major identity features, was made clear to him while teaching at another school. One day, when Theo admitted aloud that he might be the only “gringo” in the classroom, one of his students exclaimed, “Mr. M—, you're a gringo!?” Theo thought, “Cool. He doesn’t see me as ‘the other’ . . . There are people who are allies” (Theo2, April 9, 2017). When the “ideal” role models are not present, Theo is confident allies work just as well.

**Resilience. Traits.** Theo’s patience, hopefulness, dedication, and adaptability have been instrumental in his ability to cope with the various challenges he has faced as a teacher, most especially the challenges presented by recent education “reforms.” One way in which he survives the weeks of high-stakes standardized testing each year is by waiting them out, enduring the three to four weeks until they have ended. His patience extends to waiting for
political trends to reverse so that high-stakes testing is eliminated, or at least much reduced. For Theo, *hopefulness* and faith, or what Mansfield, et al. (2012) refer to as positivity and optimism, are often linked with patience. Just as he has faith political winds will shift, he has faith his teaching practices are those best suited for his students’ academic and, more importantly, lifelong success. He maintains this faith even though he knows he may never know whether his students ever achieve as adults what they have defined as success. Theo’s *dedication* to teaching is so strong, he returned to teaching after a stint as an administrator, a rare move in a profession where the next stage after administration is usually retirement. Finally, Theo’s ability to use various strategies to *adapt* to a changing political and professional landscape—specifically, to a tidal wave of “reform” mandates—has served him well in an environment where such mandates are decreed or repealed on a regular basis.

*Change.* Change within the profession has been a key factor in Theo’s ability to continue teaching in the era of “reform.” Changing schools due to overly zealous enforcement of “reforms,” as was the case at the first school in which he taught, is a resilience strategy he endorses and has practiced. He states that the school district is very large and, therefore, has many options for those who would rather switch than fight. “You know, [this district] is a big place. . . there are plenty of other options. [This city] is a big company. You can just apply to a different branch. . . I’ve given that advice. I’ve taken that advice” (FG2a, April 19, 2017). After leaving his first school, whose “reforms” made him perpetually “angry” and were driving him “nuts,” he arrived at another school in the district, which he absolutely loved.

Theo has also changed positions *within* schools. He took three years’ leave from his school to serve as a supervisor in a district-university partnership that hosted an alternative,
post baccalaureate, teacher certification program. Theo relates that the supervisor role gave him a break from the stress of the classroom, as well as valuable insights into teaching he otherwise would not have had. While Theo does not specify occasions where he used a change of position to avoid education “reforms,” it stands to reason that, if one uses a change of school to escape a zealous enforcer of “reforms,” one could use a change of position, as well.

Ironically, several years after leaving one school to avoid “reforms,” Theo became an administrator at another where he was expected to enforce “reforms.” He learned the hard way that not only can a change of school or position help an educator avoid reforms, it can just as easily lead him directly toward them, to essentially become them. He learned that the nature of the change is as important as the change itself.

**Mentoring.** Theo believes having a mentor and mentoring others are both important in terms of remaining in the profession, especially in the current political climate. His first mentor was the teacher in Paraguay in whose classroom Theo undertook a garden project while stationed in the country as a Peace Corps volunteer. She planted the first teaching seed in Theo. His next mentor was “Rosa,” the teacher in the district in which Theo currently teaches. She was responsible for watering the seed. The seed grew as Theo “tried out” the teaching profession by volunteering in Rosa’s classroom. Later, after Theo obtained his teaching license, he was offered a position at Rosa’s school. Rosa served as an unofficial mentor to Theo as he worked through the first three challenging but crucial years of his career. Theo gives Rosa credit not only for guiding him toward teaching, but for demonstrating that teaching can be a very gratifying and fulfilling profession, if one perseveres.
Theo has found mentoring others as valuable as being mentored. He has served as an official mentor teacher in the post-baccalaureate teacher licensure program sponsored by the district and the university, again as a supervisor in the same program, once more as an assistant principal, and, finally, as an unofficial mentor to various colleagues, both new and experienced, over the years. One of the goals of teacher mentoring is to work through problems so the problems do not become so daunting that the mentored teacher decides to leave the profession. It stands to reason that the advice a mentor gives to those he or she mentors also benefits the mentor, leading to greater longevity for the mentor as it does for others. It also serves as a reason to continue teaching, one that is located outside the classroom.

[mentoring] was energizing. It was recharging. I learned so much from all the other mentor teachers, from the woman who ran the program... It gave me a break that I desperately needed, to just learn some more stuff in a real authentic way and see myself the steward of new teachers. I really love beginning teachers and I don’t think they get nearly enough support. (FG1b, March 1, 2017)

If new teachers are “energizing and recharging” for Theo, he is in luck, as new “batteries,” in the form of new teachers, graduate from colleges of education each year.

Finally, Theo’s experience as a mentor rescued him later from the clutches of “reform.” During his short tenure as an assistant principal (2012-2014), he was obligated to evaluate teachers by means of a standardized and inflexible evaluation devised by the state Secretary of Education, at that time an avowed enemy of most teachers in the state, but a friend of political and corporate “reformers” across the nation. As a result of his experiences mentoring beginning teachers, he concluded that the expectations embedded in the evaluation applied almost exclusively to veteran teachers and were, therefore, highly inappropriate for
use with beginning teachers. Yet, there was only one rubric Theo was allowed to use when interpreting and reporting the results of the evaluations online.

Theo agonized and reflected on what he had learned as a mentor about beginning teachers. Theo’s first impulse was to apply the evaluation differently to beginning and veteran teachers, according to each group’s unique profiles and needs. The principal supported this plan. But the online rubric through which he was obligated to report results was inflexible, rendering his plan useless. Theo describes his next move this way:

I logged one fifteen-hour spell on a Sunday where I sat at my computer at my kitchen table doing bureaucratic crap for somebody else, and I thought, “This is not what I signed up for.” And that was my exit out of administration. (Theo1a, November 17, 2016)

Leaving the administrative post and returning to a classroom teaching position was Theo’s way of remaining in the profession he loved after the most challenging encounter of his career with the apparatus of “reform.”

Programs and population. When Theo’s earlier interest in working in the jewelry industry wore thin, he considered three career options: medicine, social work, and teaching. Ultimately, he chose teaching. He was not interested, however, in simply teaching for teaching’s sake; he was interested in bilingual education and, specifically, the education of first language Spanish-speaking students in their home language. Theo is a native speaker of English. As an English-speaking child, he was well aware of the seamless access to the K-12 curriculum English afforded him. At the same time, he was aware of the barriers to curriculum access faced by his native Spanish-speaking classmates. Theo entered the teaching profession determined to use students’ home languages to level the playing field of curriculum access.

After Theo began teaching in a dual-language classroom, he encountered
unanticipated inequities within the program. He noticed that, in general, English-speaking students received more recognition for their modest efforts and progress in Spanish acquisition than did Spanish-speaking students for their impressive acquisition of English (Valdés, 1997). He explained it this way:

I’m a little dismayed to see that there’s a great deal of celebration when non-Spanish speakers learn Spanish, as opposed to my children who come from Mexico . . . [It’s] OK for the elites to become bilingual, but nobody wants to celebrate the fact that my students, whose home language is Spanish, are now fluently bilingual, as well. And they’re bilingual. [Their] bilingualism is every bit as valuable as anybody else’s bilingualism. And there is a little bit of a split, still. That’s just who we are as a country, sadly, it seems. (Theo1b, November 17, 2016)

Theo knew, therefore, that enlightening his few Anglo, middle-class students regarding their racial and linguistic privileges was as important as the social justice education he integrated into his teaching on behalf of his immigrant and working-class, Spanish-speaking students.

The more Theo taught in dual-language classrooms, the more of a dual-language and social justice advocate he became. His devotion to dual-language education allowed him in some ways to withstand the forces of “reform.” Interestingly, the same “reform”-minded governor who had made the lives of students and teachers nearly intolerable was, in general, a supporter of bilingual education. Her support helped create a fragile refuge for dual-language programs even as her broader support for education “reforms” harmed many of the students enrolled in such programs. Theo’s dedication to the program, combined with the governor’s tepid support, contributed significantly to Theo’s ability to remain in the profession during even the darkest days of “reform.” When asked how he would react if the state or the federal governments were to withdraw their support for dual-language education, Theo responded,

That might induce me to even stay for a more fierce reason . . . You’re not going to put these kids under even a worse thumb. Then who’s going to stand up for the kids
if it gets even worse? So, that would probably be the thing that would make me fight back and stay. (FG1b, March 1, 2017)

Programs and population are virtually the same for Theo. He understands that most dual-language programs were originally established for the benefit of PHLOTE students, not native speakers of English (Crawford, 2004; Valdés, 1997). English-speaking students are included in such programs ostensibly to model English for English learners. Since the 1990s, however, many dual-language programs have evolved into elite programs that attract white middle- and upper-middle-class families for whom participation in such programs serves to augment the cultural capital already possessed by the children (Pimentel, Soto, Pimentel, & Urrieta, 2008). Theo is well acquainted with this phenomenon. Accordingly, Theo incorporates awareness of privilege throughout the curriculum.

*Education, experience, credentials, and knowledge (EECK).* Theo is aware of the fact that his EECK are virtually unassailable: master’s degree in sociocultural studies in education, seventeen years’ experience as a teacher, two years as an administrator, three years in the Peace Corps, ESL and bilingual endorsements on his teacher’s license, and vast, critical knowledge of bilingual education policy and pedagogy. He is therefore resentful and indignant that, despite being so undeniably qualified for the job, he has to justify his EECK again and again to administrators.

It’s dismaying to have a master’s background in bilingual education and have to re-prove myself to every new administrator, over and over, [regarding] myself and my colleagues in the dual-language program. “Do you know what we’re talking about?” “[Yes], we really are the experts.” And we’re seldom consulted and not appreciated. I don’t need a parade or a dinner. (Theo1b, March 1, 2017).

Nevertheless, he believes his EECK are often a key factor in repelling scrutiny from “reform”-minded administrators, thus enhancing his resilience.

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44 Primary Home Language Other Than English (PHLOTE).
**Resistance.** Theo is clear as to the origin of what he refers to as his “resistance trait.”

[It] comes from being a young man that had to stand up and think about who he was in the face of a lot of discrimination as a gay man. I mean . . . I’m putting up with this bullshit . . . The world’s a bigger place than this and I don’t have to entertain small minds. (Theo, April 6, 2017)

Although sexual orientation discrimination within the teaching profession has been less intense for Theo, it is always present, to one degree or another. Nonetheless, the resistance to discrimination he has had to exercise as a gay man has served him well in teaching, whether it is derived from having pushed back on covert or overt anti-gay discrimination directed at him, or from the race, class, or language discrimination he has seen directed at his students.

In a school setting, Theo’s resistance trait is evident in the ways he resists the forces of “reform” embedded in the curriculum and in the actions of administrators, though it seems clear, through the examples below, that when Theo is resisting one, he is often also resisting the other.

*Resistance through curriculum and instruction.* The ways in which Theo resists through the curriculum are consistent with the definition of resistance established by de Oliveira & Athanases (2007): reject the proposed curriculum or changes and replace them with better ones, or retain those that were working. Theo’s first opportunity to do this was while teaching at his first school. Consultants representing the aforementioned Baldrige management model presented a comprehensive curriculum to the staff.45 The curriculum was imported from Florida, a state Theo and other teachers considered a “model” for supporters of education “reform.” The curriculum was sanctioned by the principal and the

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45 The fact that they were outside consultants is consistent with what Gitlin and Margolis (1995) refer to as a “first wave” strategy to overcome teacher resistance. This wave assumes teachers are less likely to resist initiatives if they are presented by outsiders, with whom they do not have long-standing, antagonistic relationships.
staff was expected to implement it. Instead, Theo and other teachers simply refused to use the materials provided to them. Later, at a meeting about the implementation of the curriculum, Theo voiced his objections to it by stating what and how he was going to teach instead. This brought the high-paid Baldrige consultant to tears. Theo was later reprimanded by the principal for speaking out. He responded to the principal with this recommendation for the consultant: “If you can’t stand the heat, you shouldn’t get in the kitchen” (Theo2, April 6, 2017).

Another way in which Theo demonstrates resistance through curriculum and instruction is by refusing to contribute to the narrowing of the content he teaches in order to increase test scores. A narrowed curriculum is a by-product of an excessive focus on test results. Instead of facilitating the narrowing the curriculum to only the tested subjects of language arts, math, and science, Theo attempts to broaden it. Prior to, during, and after the annual testing window, Theo considers the knowledge and skills that are being tested and consciously and deliberately goes “off script” to teach those that are not. He teaches art, theater, the social sciences, creative writing, and more. He considers resistance of this kind a way of offsetting the loss of instructional time caused by the tests. Theo essentially “flips the script,” redirecting the focus away from testing to the curriculum and thence to areas of the curriculum he believes are important but never tested.

In the times that we’re not testing children, my curriculum takes a big turn from [the testing window] ’til the end of the year, where I do a lot of really creative things [such as] theater . . . and art projects. I do a lot of things that I feel like, maybe, a principal wouldn’t like to see when they come in and observe me . . . when you’re [expected] to really push to get them so they can pass those [tests]. I give myself permission to do things that I think kids . . . need and want and thrive under. (FG2a, April 19, 2017)

One could argue that teaching these oft-neglected curricular subjects does not constitute an act of resistance. After all, they can be found in the approved curriculum. In the current area
of “reform,” however, where scores on annual tests of language arts, math, and science carry the highest stakes for teachers and schools (though, ironically, not for students⁴⁶), a teacher who refuses to prioritize time and energy only on the tested topics, and preparation associated with them, excluding those that are not tested, demonstrates a type of resistance that targets the very heart of the “reform” movement.

**Resisting administrators and policy makers:** Theo’s resistance skills were evident during the period when site-based and district administrators were attempting to implement the Baldrige management model at the first school in which he taught. Theo recalls more than three years of continuous resistance to the imposition of this model. “I provided a lot of push back, as much as I possibly could, especially when confronted with very formulaic, you know, ‘We're going to have data walls’” (Theo2, April 6, 2017). Ultimately, however, the time and energy Theo was committing to resisting the Baldrige model were too much to sustain. “The resistance . . . was giving me an ulcer and loss of sleep and it wasn’t going to stop” (Theo2, April 6, 2017). So, he packed up his classroom and moved to another school, one where the Baldrige model was not being implemented. Such a move could be interpreted as a victory for education “reform” and a defeat for Theo and the end of his resistance. However, that was not the case, at least in terms of how Theo responded to similar initiatives at other schools as the age of “reform” intensified in the ensuing years. It was more a retreat from a specific battle in order to cultivate greater focus and energy on the war.

You know, when [education “reform”] bubbles its little head up every once in a while, I try to whack it down and say, “No! We’re in charge here, not Central Office. We're the experts, not Central Office.” They don’t know us and they don’t

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⁴⁶ There are no direct institutional consequences for students who receive low test scores. However, students’ test scores have real consequences for teachers, as thirty-five percent (formerly fifty percent) of teachers’ annual evaluations are determined by their students’ test scores. Test results have real consequences for schools, where ninety percent of a school’s annual grade is determined by test scores.
know our community. We do. So, we tell them what we’re doing and that’s the way it is. (Theo2, April 6, 2017).

Another way in which Theo resists administrative initiatives is through his refusal, after years of compliance, to engage in what “reform”-minded administrators want teachers to believe is mandatory test preparation with their students. The district is so preoccupied with raising test scores, especially at “D” and “F” schools like his, that it exhorts teachers to spend up to an hour per day, for months at a time, drilling students on testing content and strategies. Theo no longer includes test prep in any facet of his teaching. When it became obvious he would have to reduce the amount of time he spent teaching science in order to prepare his students for the language arts and math portions of the high-stakes tests, he responded:

I knew I was right all along that I shouldn’t cut out science to do test prep, so screw it! I’m still going to do science. And I’ve given up test prep. I don’t do test prep anymore. I don’t. My kids never see a practice test. I don’t care about a practice test. We don’t talk practice tests. It takes up zero amount of my time . . . And that’s another place that I would push back if push came to shove. And it’d be like, “You know, according to data I’ve got, my students think that what helped them was the fact that we had science.” So far, nobody’s told me that they loved the test prep. (Theo2, April 6, 2017)

**The breaking point.** Theo cites the elimination of federal funding for bilingual education as the event that might break his resolve and lead him to leave teaching behind for another profession. However, as I mentioned above, an existential threat to bilingual education would likely result, perhaps ironically, in Theo remaining in the profession, not leaving it. He is confident that, faced with such a threat, he would stay and fight. Having survived the worst years of the education “reform” movement with the ability to clearly identify ways in which things are gradually getting better, there are virtually no signs Theo’s future in teaching is fading.
Chapter 7

Cross-Case Analysis

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented each participant’s case separately and within a conceptual structure guided by categories I identified during data analysis: Childhood, Personal Traits, Independence, etc. In this chapter, I compare and contrast the cases in order to highlight similarities and differences, as well as to apply a finer focus to some of the original themes that gave rise to the study and that have guided it throughout, namely, resilience, resistance, and advocacy. I organize the cross-case analyses here using the same categories as in Chapter 6. I conclude each section with a brief discussion of the implications of the cross-case analyses for this study.

To the extent possible, I present the cross-case analyses within the aforementioned categories and in descending order of correlation between participants. That is, I begin with areas common to all four participants, followed by those that are common to three, two, and, finally, one participant. For example, all four participants invoke the personal traits of dedication and adaptability in their efforts to explain why they have managed to continue teaching during challenging times. Therefore, I discuss these two traits first. However, I also discuss the personal traits in terms of how many are invoked by each participant: five for Fatima, four for Selene and Theo, and three for Julie. Whether discussing number of attributes per participant or the commonality of attributes across participants, I generally begin with the greatest in quantity or commonality and proceed to the least.

Before proceeding with the cross-case analysis, I believe two important points must be made. First, the absence of an attribute (trait, practice, experience, belief) for a particular...
participant does not necessarily mean the participant does not possess it. Rather, it simply means that when questioned about a particular phenomenon, the participant did not mention the attribute nor seem to demonstrate it otherwise in her or his responses. The “missing” attribute could well be evident in other facets of the participant’s life and might emerge later if the teacher elects to participate in a future case study with a different focus.

Second, the figures and tables that accompany the analyses represent one of the ways I organized the data in order to construct narratives about them. In most cases, they represent the incidence or frequency of attributes. I have included these figures and tables as graphic summaries that afford a brief overview of the data I collected and analyzed. The figures and tables are not intended as score sheets that pit one participant against another for the purpose of demonstrating who possess more of particular characteristic than others. They simply show which participants mentioned which topics in their responses. As for the qualities and details associated with the tables and figures, these are addressed in the accompanying narratives.

**Childhoods**

The purposeful, criterion-based participant selection strategy I employed in this study was based on a predetermined set of criteria, which I describe in detail in Chapter 4. With the exception of ethnicity and gender, which I included as secondary considerations in the selection process, these criteria applied to teachers as professionals and adults, not as children. They assured that, prior to the study, the teacher-participants shared certain professional and adult characteristics germane to the research. In other words, the criteria were oriented toward similarity, not diversity.

What I did not select for, but what I came to believe were also important to the study,
were attributes the participants acquired during childhood. These attributes proved to be more diverse than those I established as participant selection criteria. Consequently, they rendered what appeared initially to be a rather homogeneous professional group considerably more diverse. Still more interesting was the fact that, within the diversity created by different childhood attributes, I nevertheless identified yet more similarities between participants. This intricate combination of similarities and differences forms a useful paradox, one I believe contributes to and enhances the study. This paradox is evident in the analyses that follow.

**Geographic features of childhood.** In geographic terms, Julie, Selene, and Theo were born in the state where they teach. Fatima, however, was born in a neighboring state but near the state line that divides that state from the one in which all the participants live and work. Fatima and Selene grew up in urban settings, though in different cities several hundred miles apart. Julie and Theo, on the other hand, grew up in rural settings, but one hundred miles apart. Fatima and Theo grew up within one hundred miles of the US-Mexico border, where “border culture” often prevails (Anzaldúa, 2012; Bejarano, 2005), though Fatima’s border experience was decidedly urban in nature, while Theo’s was rural, oriented toward ranching. Julie and Selene were raised one hundred fifty miles or more from the border, where “border culture” is generally not a descriptor. However, Julie’s “non-border” experience was rural, whereas Selene’s was urban. All four participants grew up in areas where Anglo, Mexican American, and Hispanic residents abound.47 Because they grew up in large cities, however, Fatima and Selene experienced more frequent contact with other groups, such as African Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans, than did Julie

47 See Glossary at the end of Chapter 1 for definitions of these and other terms.
and Theo, who grew up in small towns where these demographic groups are small to non-existent. Fatima and Selene have extended family in Mexico and visited them frequently as children. Most if not all of Julie’s and Theo’s families of origin live on the U.S. side of the international border. Geographic and other characteristics of participants’ childhoods are summarized in Table 6.

Class, family, language, sexual identity. The participants’ childhood economic classes, family structures, language used, and sexual identities proved to be diverse. Fatima and Julie describe their childhoods as middle-class, whereas Selene and Theo describe more working-class upbringings. Fatima was raised by one parent, her mother, while the other three were raised primarily by their mothers and fathers.

In terms of language, Fatima considers herself bilingual since birth, while Julie, Selene, and Theo describe having achieved bilingualism as adults. Interestingly, Theo’s English-speaking parents encouraged him to speak Spanish as a child, mostly with itinerate Mexican farm workers. In contrast, Selene’s Spanish-speaking parents discouraged her from speaking Spanish in all domains except family gatherings in Mexico. They did not want Selene and her sisters to suffer the same punishments and humiliation for speaking Spanish they had suffered as children. Still, Theo and Selene experienced early exposure to Spanish and both had opportunities to speak it.

Though I did not ask about sexual identity on the narrative questionnaire, Theo voluntarily added a section where he identified as male and gay. Sexual identity has influenced virtually every facet of his life, including his decision to become a teacher. Because Theo essentially expanded the questionnaire, I inquired as to the sexual orientation of the other three participants. Fatima, Julie, and Selene identify as female and straight.
**K-12 education.** All four participants attended public schools. However, Fatima is the only participant who was enrolled in any form of bilingual education, and then, only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event, status, or characteristic</th>
<th>Fatima</th>
<th>Julie</th>
<th>Selene</th>
<th>Theo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Born in state where study takes place</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born out of state where study takes place</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican-American and/or Hispanic ID</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo ID</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural childhood</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban childhood</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Border childhood (&lt; 100 mi from border)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior childhood (&gt; 100 mi from border)</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual (Eng/Span) parents (m/f)</td>
<td>√ (m)</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√ (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monolingual parents (m/f)</td>
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<td>√ (Eng)</td>
<td></td>
<td>√ (m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent home</td>
<td>√ (f)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual education (K-6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>English only education (K-6)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle-class childhood (self ID)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working-class childhood (self ID)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family in Mexico</td>
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<tr>
<td>No family in Mexico</td>
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<td>√</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became bilingual as an child (self ID)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became bilingual as an adult (self ID)</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies as straight</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies as gay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6. Summary of childhood characteristics.** (m) = mother, (f) = father, (Eng) = English, Span = Spanish.
through fourth grade. Fatima cites her K-12 education as overwhelmingly positive and instrumental in her decision to become a teacher. Her bilingual education in elementary school, albeit transitional in nature and terminated too soon, was conducted primarily by Hispanic and Mexican American teachers, and was therefore relevant and beneficial to her identities and educational needs. Though conducted primarily in English, she remembers much the same dynamics in middle and high school. Much of her motivation to teach comes from her desire to emulate the good teachers she had and to assure that her students can benefit from bilingual education beyond fourth grade.

Julie attended a small, rural school district, so rural she had to travel by bus forty-five minutes each way to her combined junior and senior high school. Her elementary school had about five students per grade. There were about twenty-five students in her graduating class. She remembers taking her first Spanish classes in junior high. At the time, she was motivated more by what Spanish could offer her in terms of travel opportunities and cross-cultural relationships than career opportunities such as teaching and advocating for the needs and rights of others, as is currently the case.

Though Selene, like Fatima, discusses her K-12 education mostly in positive, even effusive terms, she was nonetheless struck by the lack of Mexican American or Hispanic teachers. She was also aware of what seemed like an inappropriate placement in remedial English and remedial Spanish pull-out programs—even though she did not speak Spanish. As a teacher, she is motivated by a desire to demonstrate to her students that Hispanics and Mexican Americans hold jobs in the professional echelons of the working world and that

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48 Transitional dual-language programs are those where students’ home languages, if other than English, are used in varying proportions in the early grades, but which are gradually replaced by English in the later elementary grades or middle school.
learning or reviving one’s home or heritage language, regardless of its imputed status relative to English or the stage in one’s life in which it is learned or revived, is a noble and valuable endeavor.

Theo describes the years he spent in a rural elementary school as rather non-descript. What he does remember is the difficulty of trying to fit in among the children of ranchers and ranch workers as a gay boy. He was also quite attuned to the different academic and career paths the school assumed for Anglo ranchers’ children and the children of Mexican ranchers or ranch workers. Instruction was conducted entirely in English, providing a distinct advantage to the Anglo students. To this day Theo is motivated to teach in part in order to honor individual identities as well as to use language as a tool that affords all students access to the standard curriculum.

**Discussion and implications.** One could argue that the differences between the participants’ childhoods are many: in-state versus out-of-state birth, Anglo versus Hispanic identity, rural versus urban upbringing, working-class versus middle-class family, circumstantial bilingualism versus elective bilingualism (Fishman, 1965), straight versus gay, male versus female, and so on. The fact that all four participants became dual-language teachers in Title I, new national demographic, urban elementary schools with “D” or “F” school grades, however, may suggest that diverse childhoods can nevertheless lead to the same, very specific profession.

On the other hand, similarities in the participants’ childhoods may also be important in terms of establishing an early foundation for their chosen profession. All four participants were born and grew up within two hundred sixty miles of the U.S.-Mexico border and currently live and teach that same distance or less from the border and from their respective
places of birth. All four grew up in areas where Anglos, Hispanics, and Mexican Americans live and work side-by-side in the same communities. As a result, all four experienced cultural and linguistic friction as well as cultural and linguistic understanding between the two groups. All four traveled in Mexico or South America before graduating from high school. All four went to school with children who were either immigrants from Mexico or whose parents were immigrants. All four were either bilingual as children or became so as young adults, an accomplishment that later influenced their decisions to become passionate advocates for the language rights and development of others. All four attended public schools.

Though only correlative, similarities in geography, language, and intercultural associations among this group of participants seem to be important to the participants’ later decisions to become dual-language teachers in schools in need. They were all well-acquainted with the land, languages, and peoples of a particular subsection of the American Southwest and all chose to leverage the knowledge they acquired and the skills they cultivated therein to teach and advocate for children growing up on the same land, exposed to the same languages, and interacting with the same cultural groups.

The extent to which there is a convincing cause-and-effect relationship between the participants’ childhoods and the profession they chose is speculative. Even more speculative, I believe, are connections between important facets of their childhoods and their ability to continue teaching despite harmful “reforms” that have led to the resignations or early retirements of many of their peers. Nonetheless, it is possible that the participants’ life-long associations with the land, languages, and cultures of the area link them strongly enough to their professional work that leaving that work would be more difficult for them than it would
be for others without such associations. These links and associations will remain correlative and speculative while they await the work of future researchers interested in pursuing them.

**Personal Traits**

**Distribution of traits across participants.** As I describe in Chapter 6, careful analysis of the data led me to identify and define six personality traits I believe are salient, consistent, and relevant to the main research question. The traits (and common synonyms) that I have identified are summarized in *Table 7* and defined as follows:

- **Adaptability** (flexibility, accommodation): thriving in one’s position by changing one’s approach to the position as the conditions associated with the position change.
- **Dedication** (loyalty, commitment, allegiance, “calling”): a devotion to one’s mission that transcends other ways of relating to it.
- **Focus** (prioritizing, suppressing impulses, remaining grounded): concentrating on the most important objectives while ignoring or postponing key distractions that could derail one’s mission.
- **Hope** (positivity, confidence, faith): believing the current state of affairs will improve even when there is little evidence to that effect.
- **Patience** (tolerance, forbearance): waiting out difficult times and choosing one’s battles.
- **Perseverance** (persistence, determination, stubbornness, tenacity): not giving up, even when pressures to do so mount.

The table shows that *adaptability* and *dedication* are the two traits shared by all four participants. Each of the remaining four traits is associated with different pairs of participants: *focus* is salient for Fatima and Julie, *hope* for Selene and Theo, *patience* for Fatima and Theo, and *perseverance* for Fatima and Selene.

**Discussion and implications.** As I discuss later in this chapter, most of the six traits listed here have at least some bearing on resilience and advocacy, two areas that may be crucial to teachers’ decisions to continue teaching despite the harmful effects of education.
Table 7. Summary of relevant personal traits.

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Fatima</th>
<th>Julie</th>
<th>Selene</th>
<th>Theo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

“reforms.” The degree to which the traits influence these areas varies by participant. What may not be evident individually, however, might be more evident collectively. The fact that adaptability and dedication are salient traits for all four participants may indicate that, unless a teacher is adequately adaptable and dedicated, she may not be able to withstand the “reforms” in order to continue to advocate for her students. As for the other four traits, their relatively even distribution across participants seems to suggest the uniqueness of individuals as they navigate different spheres of their personal and professional lives.

**Independence**

I define independence as the period that begins after high school and ends at the beginning of a career. For the four participants, much of this period included similar life events and achievements. For example, all participants graduated from high school, went to college, received teaching degrees and credentials, and specialized in dual-language education, at some point during this period of independence. Indeed, logic and professional protocols dictate that, to become a teacher, one must graduate from high school, obtain a degree in education, and acquire teaching credentials (license, endorsements, etc.). All
participants also had experience in international travel in either Mexico, Chile, or Paraguay. Closer examination, however, reveals important distinctions between participants during this critical period in their lives.

While still a teenager, Fatima juggled a baby, a move to another city, and a change in career path as a college student: from education, to court reporting, and back to education. Both she and Selene began their teaching careers virtually straight out of college. Fatima and Julie raised their own children while they were still beginning teachers. After receiving their undergraduate degrees, Julie and Theo engaged in volunteer work that was relatively unrelated to their undergraduate degrees: Theo with the Peace Corps and Julie with TVA. Both also received their teaching credentials in post-baccalaureate programs. Upon returning from the Peace Corps, the prospect of a potential “gay teacher purge” arriving from California led Theo instead to begin a ten-year career in wholesale jewelry.

**Discussion and implications.** In general, the similarities in the participants’ periods of independence highlight the differences. If one takes into consideration the fact that all four eventually became teachers, Selene’s independence profile seems the most direct route from high school to becoming a teacher. I address these and other elements of the participants’ periods of independence in the sections on Becoming a Teacher and The Teacher-Advocate. *Table 8* summarizes the participants’ stages of independence, whereas *Table 9* represents my attempt to apply a chronology to each participant’s period of independence.

**Significant Experiences and Events**

As I suggest in the previous chapter, significant and relevant experiences and events in different stages of the participants’ lives emerged as important in terms of the participants’
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event, status, characteristic, or achievement</th>
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<th>Julie</th>
<th>Selene</th>
<th>Theo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended state college</td>
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<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended private college</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received BA in state where currently teaching</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received BA out of state where currently teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received BA in education</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received BA in other discipline</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Received MA in education out of state</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>✓  (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Currently married</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previously married</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse/ex-spouse Hispanic/Mex-Am</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has traveled in South America</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching was 2nd career</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Years teaching at time of study</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Fatima = court reporting, Julie = political science, Selene = law, Theo = medicine, archeology, social work

**Table 8. Stages of adult independence.** Relevant events, characteristics, statuses, and achievements that define the transition from childhood to young adulthood to adulthood.
personal growth, their decisions to become teachers and, more importantly, their
development as teacher-advocates. Most of these events fall into two categories: a) cultural
and linguistic lessons from parents; and, b) experiences with racial, linguistic, or sexual
identity discrimination. In this section, I present some of the similarities and differences
between the experiences and events, and also suggest what they might mean for this study.

**Lessons from childhood and parents.** All the participants identify events in their
childhoods as important in their adult and professional lives. For three of the four
participants, these events were linked directly to their parents. Fatima’s mother’s insistence
that Fatima attend a bilingual elementary school and be raised bilingually had a lasting effect
on Fatima’s adult life as a mother and teacher; so, too, did the perspective her mother
provided on the ephemeral nature of education politics. Fatima was advised to be patient and
bad times will pass. Finally, her mother’s critiques of the Eurocentric views and values
embedded in Fatima’s U.S. education opened Fatima’s eyes early to the subtle but important
ways in which young minds can be manipulated by politicians and publishers.

The benefit of hard work and persistence was a powerful lesson Selene learned from
her parents. Her father’s rise from a migrant farm worker to a pilot and flight instructor
could have occurred no other way. This same rise from abject poverty to a position of social
distinction also taught Selene lessons in human dignity, as she was aware that the same boy
who picked seasonal crops possessed just as much dignity as the airplane pilot. The lessons
in cultural relativity she learned from visits to her relatives in Tijuana afforded her valuable
insights into life along the border. And although she would have benefited from teachers
whose identities more closely resembled her own, she learned from her mostly Anglo
teachers that the practices of good teachers have the potential to bridge such identity gaps.
Theo’s father and grandfather also provided lessons in human dignity through their frequent admonishments to Theo and his brothers to show respect for the Mexican ranch workers his family often employed by speaking to them in Spanish. His mother provided the same by insisting they provide food and water for those traveling across their ranch. Throughout his English-dominant K-12 education, Theo experienced a growing awareness of the ways in which a difference between home and school languages might be affecting the identities and learning of his Spanish-speaking classmates. Such concerns led him first to the Peace Corps in Paraguay and later to a career as a dual-language teacher where he developed into a strong advocate for Spanish-speaking students.

Though Julie does not identify her parents as the source of lessons on culture and language practices, her observations as a child and young adult of the sometimes tense relations between long-time Hispanic residents of her area of the state and recent Mexican immigrants demonstrated to her the complexity of issues related to language, culture, and immigration in the American Southwest.
Identity discrimination. For all four participants, the experiences that seem to have had the most profound implications for their lives later as teachers and advocates were specific hurtful and discriminatory actions on the part of others of which the participants themselves or close family members were the target. The language and cultural identity discrimination Fatima faced as an expectant teen after moving to a new city in the 1990s resonates in her to this day. She felt targeted, both culturally and linguistically. After the election of 2016, she felt she was once again a target, though on a broader scale. She knows many of her students and their parents feel the same. The social justice education she affords her students, and to some extent their parents, is a direct response to the ways she and her students have felt targeted by the current presidential administration.

Julie’s encounters with discrimination are both direct and indirect. In terms of the latter, the racial discrimination her Mexican American husband and children experience periodically not only affect her as a parent, but as the teacher of children who might be subjected to similar treatment. If her husband and children are susceptible to such discriminatory treatment, so is most every student in her class. On the other hand, the racial and linguistic discrimination Julie has suffered at the hands of some Hispanic colleagues and guest speakers from the university are more direct. Nonetheless, experiences like these often serve to fortify Julie’s resolve to demonstrate that the world of possible advocates for students of color is more varied and complex than many believe.

Like Julie, Selene also experienced indirect discrimination, in her case, the stories of the language discrimination experienced by her parents. Though indirect, her parents’ experiences had direct effects on Selene and her sisters, as their parents “protected” their daughters from discrimination and humiliation by not teaching them Spanish or choosing to
enroll them in bilingual schools. This had the effect of continuing the discrimination in Selene’s generation. Like Julie and Fatima, however, Selene was able to convert this discrimination into motivation; instead of allowing the situation to stand, she resolved to become fluent in Spanish and dedicate her professional life to supporting the language and the general education of students like her.

Theo is acutely aware of the privileges he enjoys as a white man in the United States. In what ways, then, might he experience discrimination? Social class is one possibility. Like Selene, Theo grew up in the working class. As an adult, however, he has moved mostly in middle-class circles and does not report having suffered much social-class discrimination. The other way is by not aligning with the country’s heterosexual majority. Theo has known since he was very young that he was gay. Therefore, his experiences with discrimination are based on sexual identity, not race. The trauma he suffered as a fifth grader of being gifted a doll by a sixth grader at a school assembly is just one example of many others. Now, as a teacher who has faced one form of discrimination, he finds it easier to relate to and advocate for students who have faced other forms of discrimination. At the same time, because of the privileges he has enjoyed as a white, English-speaking, now middle-class man, he has been able to help similarly privileged students realize their privilege and how to be allies for classmates who are less privileged.

**Discussion and implications.** Fatima, Selene, and Theo experienced lessons from parents that had lasting impacts on their awareness and knowledge of the languages and cultures around them, their formal and informal relationships to these languages and cultures, and how this awareness and knowledge served them as teachers and advocates. In Julie’s case, the lessons were not so much explicit and taught by parents as they were inferential and
observational in nature and “taught” by the people who lived in and around her community. In addition, all participants experienced cultural, linguistic, or sexual identity discrimination in childhood or in young adulthood that had profound effects on their personal growth, their identities, and their decisions to become teachers.

To the extent parental lessons and societal discrimination contributed to the participants’ decisions to become dual-language teacher-advocates, and in light of the suggestion that being a teacher-advocate is key to continuing to teach during difficult times (see below and Chapter 8), these lessons and experiences cannot be dismissed as isolated factors that have no bearing on the participants’ later years. They must be considered in the totality of factors that contribute to the participants’ abilities to continue teaching.

**Becoming a Teacher**

Each participant’s path to becoming a teacher is unique in terms of chronology, duration, institutional requirements, as well as influence from family members, their own experiences as K-12 students, teachers they had known throughout their lives in various contexts, other employment experiences, and more. In the sections that follow, I focus on similarities between their respective teacher paths before pointing out milestones unique to one or two participants. Milestones on the path to becoming a teacher are summarized in *Table 10.*

**Influence of family members who were teachers.** Fatima, Julie, and Theo refer to the ways family members influenced their decisions to become teachers. For Fatima and Julie, however, the influence was negative. Members of Fatima’s family who were teachers, including her own mother, had told stories about the difficulties of teaching that essentially discouraged Fatima from pursuing a teaching career. Julie’s reluctance to teach was based
on an aversion to contributing further to stereotype confirmation, specifically, that of the overwhelming numbers of female elementary school teachers.\footnote{According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), as of 2016, 77\% of all U.S. public school teachers are female. In elementary schools, nearly 90\% of teachers are female. (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator克拉.asp).} Theo also alludes to family members who were teachers; however, he considers this fact a motivating factor, not a deterrent. Any dissuasion he experienced was due to the prospect of the arrival of a gay teacher purge. Selene does not mention knowing of family members who were teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage or influence</th>
<th>Fatima</th>
<th>Julie</th>
<th>Selene</th>
<th>Theo</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family member influence</td>
<td>√ (neg)</td>
<td>√ (neg)</td>
<td></td>
<td>√ (pos)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admired other teachers’ work</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in career focus</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respond to teacher shortage</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsion to give back, due to opportunity</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsion to give to, due to privilege</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitute teaching</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer in classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational assistant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10. Milestones on the path to becoming a teacher.*

**Influence of other teachers.** Somewhat related to the influence of family members is the influence of other teachers, specifically, the admiration of their work. Again, three of four participants indicated that other teachers had a strong and positive influence on their decisions to become teachers. In this case, however, the participants were Fatima, Selene, and Theo, and the influences were largely positive. Fatima felt a strong and enduring connection to and admiration for her own K-12 teachers. She remains appreciative of the cultural and linguistic correspondence between her and her teachers and credits them, along
with her mother, for much of the motivation to teach.

Selene also felt a strong and enduring affection toward her teachers. Unlike Fatima, however, it was not due to cultural and linguistic correspondence between her and her teachers. (Selene was raised as an English speaker, but her family’s heritage language was Spanish.) Nonetheless, just as part of Fatima's motivation to become a teacher was to replicate the correspondence between her and her teachers, Selene was motivated to establish the teacher-student correspondence she never had.

The teachers who influenced Theo were not those he knew as a K-12 student but those he came to know as an adult. The elementary school teacher in Paraguay, with whose class he realized a garden project, was an initial influence. “Rose,” a teacher in whose classroom Theo often volunteered upon returning from Paraguay, was the second. The path that leads from the teacher in Paraguay to Rose and thence to Theo’s own teaching is a bit circuitous, but continuous.

**Change in career focus.** The third stage in becoming a teacher where three teachers coincide is change in career focus. Interestingly, the same three teachers who identified teachers in their own families, whether the influence was positive or negative, were the same who did not initially choose teaching as a career: Julie majored in political science and Theo in anthropology, while Fatima diverted from education to court reporting before returning to education. And though Selene pursued teaching from the beginning of her college years, her childhood dream had always been to become a lawyer.

**Shortage of teachers.** The fourth and last stage of becoming a teacher where three of four participants coincide is in response to teacher shortages. For Julie, she was partially motivated to teach after learning of a shortage of bilingual and dual-language teachers in the
neighboring state where she had attended college. For their part, Fatima and Selene were motivated to teach in part not only because of a shortage of bilingual teachers, but because of a shortage of bilingual teachers of color; Fatima because she was a beneficiary of this correspondence and Selene because she was not. Both participants recognize potential advantages for many children when characteristics such as race, culture, and language align with those of their teachers. They have seen this alignment at work with Anglo children in the district and are aware of the academic and other advantages such alignment can provide.

**Giving back.** This is a stage that two of four participants have in common. It is no coincidence that it involves the two teachers of color. Both Fatima and Selene recognize their careers as teachers of color afford them a way to give back to the community in which they were raised—or, in Fatima’s case, a community so similar to the one in which she was raised, that the distinction is of little importance. Both participants were raised in communities of color with large percentages of Spanish speakers. Teaching in the same or similar communities represents a fulfillment of a commitment to give back to a community that was at least partially responsible for their own success.

In addition to giving back to communities of color, Fatima is also giving back to schools with bilingual programs. In fact, she is giving back more than she received, since the dual-language program in which she teaches is considered superior in the development of the bilingual student than the transitional bilingual education program in which she was enrolled as a child.\(^{50}\) Fatima’s desire to give back may include yet another motivation. By providing high-quality, dual-language education to others, she can give to her mom—albeit indirectly

\(^{50}\) The goal for transitional bilingual education is English acquisition, often at the expense of the English learner’s home language. On the other hand, the goal for dual-language programs is bilingualism, or the development of two languages in elementary school and, if possible, through middle and high schools.
and only symbolically—the bilingual education her mother never had. In this way, Fatima’s motivation is similar to Selene’s, as Selene is providing for others the bilingual education she never had.

For those who might subscribe to a deficit view of communities of color and assert that perhaps Fatima and Selene succeeded despite the communities in which they were raised, the two teachers perceive their childhood communities as instrumental in their success, as ideal training grounds for cultivating success in others. Nowhere in the interviews or focus group sessions does either participant make a reference to having “overcome” disadvantages or lack of privilege. Instead, they recognize the intrinsic values and advantages of growing up in communities where members are proud of their cultural and linguistic heritages and can leverage that pride to become successful both inside and outside the communities.

**Giving to.** Julie and Theo are also motivated by “giving to” the community; however, their cases are qualitatively different from Fatima’s and Selene’s. For Julie and Theo, they are not so much giving back—which would imply giving back to the relatively privileged communities in which they were raised—as they are giving to a more underprivileged community in which they had not been raised. That is, they are transferring privileges acquired in one type of community to another type. Their motivation for giving to, therefore, stems from their recognition of the privileges they enjoy as English-speaking, middle-class Anglos.

**Other milestones on the teacher road.** Among the four participants, only Fatima and Julie had experiences as substitute teachers. Fatima was a long-term substitute for a teacher on maternity leave at the dual-language school where Fatima had enrolled her
daughter and where she, Fatima, eventually became a full-time teacher. Julie sometimes substituted for other instructors as a volunteer for Literacy Volunteers for America. In both cases, the substitute experience contributed to the participants’ interest in becoming teachers.

Finally, I identify four milestones on the road to becoming a teacher that apply to a single participant. Theo is the only participant who volunteered in a classroom on a regular basis before entering teaching as a career. He volunteered in his friend Rose’s class. He is also the only participant who was an educational assistant (EA) prior to becoming a teacher. He was an EA in a high school English as a second language (ESL) class for a year and a half. Both experiences provided encouragement and motivation as he continued on the road to becoming a teacher. Julie is the only participant to respond to a school district’s public recruitment of bilingual teachers. Finally, Selene is the only participant highly motivated by teachers she loved, but teachers whose cultural and, to some extent, linguistic identities did not correspond to her own.

**Discussion and implications.** Each participants’ family members, friends, and acquaintances who were teachers had either a positive or a negative influence on the participant’s ultimate decisions to become a teacher. In the two cases of negative influence, however, the participants overcame their aversion to teaching and fully embraced it. Moreover, all of the participants had at least considered other careers before becoming teachers, and three of the participants pursued other careers—if only briefly—before deciding to teach. It is possible that overcoming an aversion to teaching, and also considering other careers before returning to teaching strengthen one’s dedication to the profession which, in turn, may fortify one’s ability to continue teaching even when times are hard.
Furthermore, all four participants were motivated to teach by an interest in “giving back” or “giving to.” Related to giving back and giving to were Fatima’s, Julie’s, and Selene’s interests in responding to shortages of dual-language teachers and, for Fatima and Selene, dual-language teachers of color. Entering the profession certain about the reasons for one’s career choice (Guariño, et al., 2006) may strengthen one’s professional, moral, ethical, and personal links to teaching and, consequently one’s ability to withstand long periods of challenges to their core work.

Teaching in the Era of “Reform”

Cross-case analysis of “reforms.”” In the previous chapter, I noted each participant’s estimation of the most harmful education “reforms” as identified and ranked by him or her with colored stickers on a list of “reforms.” The list itself consisted of “reforms” each participant had identified, as well as those identified by the other three participants. I presented the list to the participants just prior to the second focus group. I later compared each participant’s responses on the combined list of onerous “reforms” with those each had identified in his or her one-on-one interviews and in the first focus group.

Indeed, discrepancies did emerge between “reforms” they identified on the combined list and those they identified separately in their narrative responses. “Reform”-complicit administrators and negative student behaviors are two examples of “reforms” that received much greater attention in the interview responses than on the list. However, I did not design this study around variables and controls and the measurement of participant responses over time. The purpose of the list and the analysis of “reforms” within the narratives was simply

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51 Negative student behaviors are better described as by-products of or responses to “reforms,” not true “reforms” created by policy makers and enforced by administrators. However, Selene and Julie consistently mentioned negative student behavior in the context of “reforms,” so I included it here with the understanding that it is more a response to “reform” rather than a “reform” itself.
to gather as much information as possible about which “reforms” presented the greatest impediments to the participants’ teaching practices. The following analysis of participant responses to “reforms” is, therefore, a combination of the “reforms” ranked by participants on the list of “reforms” and those he or she discussed with passion and urgency in the interviews and focus groups. As for the list itself, I have organized and summarized it in *Table 11.*

In this chapter, instead of considering each case separately as I did in Chapter 6, I consider the “reforms” across the four cases. Based on the interactive, weighted list, and combined with my analysis of the interview and focus group transcripts, the most onerous “reforms” identified by the group were: a) standardized testing; b) teacher evaluations; c) misguided policy makers; d) complicit administrators; e) lack of teacher autonomy; and, f) teacher blaming. Though participants describe and measure the effects of each “reform” differently and respond to them in different ways, they consistently address the same six “reforms.” Among the “reforms” discussed in Chapter 6 that are not identified as the most harmful by all four participants are the privatization and corporatization of public education (Ahlquist, Gorski, & Montaño, 2018). Still, two participants, Fatima and Theo, identify privatization and corporatization as elements of education “reform” that greatly impede their efforts to teach effectively. While it may be true that privatization and corporatization are not necessarily the same, Fatima and Theo use the terms interchangeably. Indeed, if one’s goal is to privatize public schools, imposing a corporate structure and culture on schools would likely facilitate the process. I discuss Fatima’s and Theo’s dim views of the increasing privatization and corporatization of the public schools in Chapter 6.
Also cited by only two participants in Chapter 6 as a harmful “reform” is increased negative student behavior. As I point out in the previous chapter, I believe negative student behavior is not a “reform” so much as a student response to or by-product of “reform.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Type of “reform” or “reform” by-product</th>
<th>Fatima</th>
<th>Julie</th>
<th>Selene</th>
<th>Theo</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Assessment &amp; Evaluation</td>
<td>Standardized testing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher evaluations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A-F school grades</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Autonomy &amp; Professionalism</td>
<td>Lack of teacher autonomy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of teacher input</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Federal &amp; state mandates</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Narrowed curriculum</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Policy &amp; enforcement</td>
<td>Misguided policy makers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Complicit administrators</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Teacher blaming</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Excessive accountability</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Privatization &amp; Corporatization</td>
<td>Corporatization</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Privatization</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 11. Education “reforms” identified and organized by type.* The “reforms” are ranked and organized by participants according to the severity of the impact on their teaching practices and effectiveness. The numbers represent the number of colored stickers each participant applied to the associated “reform.” The greater number of stickers, the greater the perception of harm associated with the “reform.”

Nonetheless, Julie and Selene both feel that negative student behavior has worsened noticeably in the last decade and, therefore, has impinged on their practice in much the same
way as do many of the “reforms.” Indeed, if “reforms” are harmful, and if students currently enrolled in public schools are largely products of the “reforms” and act out in response to them, Julie and Selene make a convincing argument that negative student behavior has itself become another—albeit indirect—instrument of education “reform.”

Finally, included in the analysis of “reforms” in Chapter 6 are three areas of “reform” identified by only one participant. In all instances, the participant is Selene. She identifies the A-F school grading system, the proliferation of semi-private charter schools, and entrenched sexism as other “reforms” that harmed her teaching and her students’ education. The school grades serve to publicly humiliate her school, other schools with low grades, and the students, parents, and teachers associated with them. The charter schools, especially those that cater to potential students in her dual-language program, deplete the enrollment at her school and weaken her program. As for sexism, Selene believes it permeates the “reform” era, as it is based on an assumption by those in the GERM that professions dominated by women are open to criticism and blame far more than those dominated by men.

**Discussion and implications.** Analysis of the participants’ responses to “reforms” in the interviews, focus groups, and on the “reforms” chart has led me to a better understanding of how they perceive the machinations of “reform.” The logic proceeds as follows: motivated by profit, corporate powers convince policy makers that teachers are the problem in public education. The corporate and policy worlds claim to have the “solution” to this problem: high-stakes, standardized tests designed and sold by corporate powers. In an effort to support the underlying premise—that teachers are the sole problem—the tests are causally linked to teacher evaluations and A-F school grades. Finally, district and school administrators enforce the “solution.” All other “reforms” addressed by the participants—
lack of teacher autonomy, negative student behavior, the proliferation of charter schools, government mandates, paperwork and accountability, etc.—can be linked to this logic.

My attempts to isolate certain “reforms” so the participants could explain their responses to them were helpful and did increase my understanding of “reforms” as they impact directly teachers and students. Indeed, an excess of focus on particular “reforms” or discrete elements of them risks missing the forest for the trees. This is why a Gestalt perspective is useful. Still, I find Selene’s three isolated “reforms” interesting. She alone explains the humiliation she feels when, despite her rigorous instructional practices, her school receives a “D” or “F” grade from the state Department of Education. Moreover, she has felt personally betrayed by the opening of a nearby dual-language charter school that has recruited away many of her school’s top students. Charters have long been promoted by “reformers,” both nationally and locally. Finally, she is convinced that because eighty percent of public-school teachers are women, sexist notions about the passivity of female teachers has led “reformers” to believe they can impose their “reforms” on teachers with relative impunity.

Ultimately, it does not matter much which of the “reforms” is currently the “reform” that a particular teacher believes presents the greatest impediment to her teaching. The reality is that the Global Education Reform Movement, or GERM, remains as present and powerful as ever, and that the effects of its various tentacles have led some teachers, including an increasing number of dual-language, veteran teachers to leave the profession prematurely. Others, however, perhaps including the participants in this study, respond differently to the “reforms.” Instead of leaving the profession to avoid “reforms,” or staying and perhaps becoming unwitting agents of them, these teachers perceive the “reforms” as
challenges to their practice and threats to their students. The more frequent and intense the “reforms,” the more focused their teaching and more ardent their advocacy. It has taken most of the duration of their careers, but they have ultimately learned to transform the negative powers of “reforms” into the positive powers of pedagogy and action that fuel their teaching and advocacy.

The Teacher-Advocate

In the previous chapter, I discuss the notion of the teacher-advocate as it applies to the participants individually. In this chapter, I consider advocacy practices across cases. In doing so, I have found it helpful to organize the discussion around three domains of advocacy that emerged through the cross-case analysis of teacher advocacy: motivations for becoming a teacher-advocate, advocacy as a reason to remain in the profession, and strategies for advocacy. As is often the case, an element of advocacy can belong equally or proportionally to more than one domain. For example, an element of advocacy could be both a motivation to become an advocate and a reason to remain a teacher—and to equal, lesser, or greater degrees. All things considered, the location of each element within one, two, or three circular domains is an approximation, one that lies between lines that in reality are blurred, flexible, and permeable.

That said, it is imperative I point out that advocacy by teachers on behalf of their students was not an area about which I questioned the participants. The notion of advocacy arose as I was analyzing the data, that is, long after I had collected it. Therefore, the incidence of various types of advocacy presented herein represents only what the participants emphasized individually, voluntarily, and spontaneously in relation to questions about other topics I posed during interviews or focus groups. As with all other analyses in this chapter,
the seeming absence of a trait, practice, belief or other characteristic does not imply the participant is devoid of it; it simply means that he or she believed other characteristics better explained the response. Future studies designed with teacher advocacy in mind could shed more light on this phenomenon.

Therefore, I have designed a diagram that attempts to organize the three domains such that any given element (attribute, concept, practice) can be associated with one or more of the domains of teacher advocacy. This diagram is presented in Figure E. There are fourteen elements of advocacy distributed between the three domains. In the sections below, I address each element in descending order of distribution among the three domains and the four participants. For example, since it is present in all three domains and applies to all four participants, I begin with dual-language education. Finally, in light of the data I collected and analyzed while conducting this study, I conclude the section on teacher advocacy with a retrospective on the literature on teacher advocacy I collected prior to the study.

1. **Dual-language education.** Teaching all school subjects in two languages without translation is the one element of advocacy that complies with all three domains and applies to all four participants. By adulthood, Fatima, Julie, Selene, and Theo were all bilingual. Their interest in using their bilingual skills professionally augmented their *motivation* to teach as a form of advocacy. At the very least, the participants agree that teaching in every student’s home language fifty percent of the time or more affords all students equal access to the district’s curriculum, helps reduce or prevent intergenerational language loss (see for example: de Jong, 2011; Potowski, 2007; Wong-Fillmore, 2000), and helps close the achievement gap between English speakers and speakers of other languages (Collier & Thomas, 2009). Therefore, dual-language education is also an important strategy for
advocating for PHLOTE\textsuperscript{52} students. Fatima, however, alludes to other, more enduring benefits when she asserts that people may “[think] that dual language teachers . . . [do this] just to preserve the language, but I don't think they see the longer benefits of it . . . it’s so much more, but they don’t see that” (FG2a, April 19, 2017). Finally, a severe and increasingly chronic shortage of dual-language education programs combined with perennial threats to the future of bilingual education provide the four teachers with reasons to remain in the profession.

2. Immigrant students, teacher-student identity correspondence, giving back and giving to, and teachers and students as targets. This group of elements consists of those that fall into two domains of advocacy. The first is working with immigrant students who, in the Southwest, are overwhelmingly from Mexico and Central America. The meaningful experiences with immigrant children to which the four participants were exposed as children—though in different ways—provided them motivation to advocate for immigrant children. In light of increased belligerence toward immigrants emanating from the Executive Branch in Washington, D.C., advocating for immigrants provides the teachers with a strong and urgent reason to remain. All four participants express their own as well as their students’ fears of the implications of the harmful immigration policies originating in the capital.

The second is teacher-student identity correspondence, which I define as the degree to which teachers believe their cultural, linguistic, socio-economic, immigrant and other statuses align with those of their students.\textsuperscript{53} For Fatima and Selene, these statuses are more aligned than for Julie and Theo. Nonetheless, all four are motivated by this correspondence.

\textsuperscript{52} Primary Home Language Other Than English.
\textsuperscript{53} Of course, research into the degree to which students believe their cultural, linguistic, socio-economic, immigrant and other statuses align with teachers, and how the degree of alignment affects their education, would complement and likely improve our understanding of this relationship.
Fatima and Selene are motivated because they believe their students benefit from and are motivated and inspired by having teachers who look like them, speak like them, and share cultural foundations such as indigenous origins, musical traditions, food, and so on. Fatima believes she owes much of her academic success to teachers who reflected important elements of her identity. Selene believes she succeeded despite the fact that most of her teachers did not reflect her identities. She wants to provide for others an advantage she did not have. Despite their different experiences with teacher-student identity correspondence as
children, this correspondence serves to motivate them to advocate for students with whom they share important identities. It also provides them a reason to remain, as both are aware of severe local, regional, and national shortages of teachers of color.

For Julie and Theo, teacher-student identity correspondence is more complex. The fact that their identities do not generally align with those of their students has made them aware of the privileges associated with their identities. This awareness has motivated them to use their privileges to advocate for those who do not possess the benefits they enjoy. Leveraging privilege for advocacy also provides these teachers a reason to remain. Also providing the teachers a reason to remain is the notion that teaching English learners of color may not be what a white person should be doing. For Julie, the notion is manifested in periodic suggestions from colleagues and others that perhaps she should leave the responsibility of teaching children of color to people of color. For Theo, the notion is more theoretical. He invokes the work of critical race theorist and educator Lisa Delpit as he considers whether teaching children of color is appropriate for a white man. He is still not sure. Instead of dissuading Julie and Theo from further teaching and advocacy, however, awareness of the tension in identity correspondence motivates both Julie and Theo and affords the two of them a reason to remain—if only to “prove them wrong” (Yosso, 2006). Based on their success with students of color and on the admonishments and recommendations of educators like Delpit, both teachers conclude that many are the types and identities of educators who can teach children of color effectively (Delpit, 2012; Howard, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Singleton, 2014; White, 2012).

The third element is giving back or giving to. I discuss these dual concepts in the section entitled Becoming a Teacher. These concepts apply as much to becoming advocates
as they do to becoming teachers and both provide motivation to become teacher-advocates and reasons to remain in the profession. Fatima and Selene are highly motivated to give back to communities and schools similar to those they feel were important to their success as children and adults. Giving back involves advocating for students who, without advocates, might not achieve success as they did. Their students’ successes and their continuing desire to give back serve as strong reasons to remain in the teaching profession. The same holds true for Julie and Theo, the difference being the nature of the giving. Julie’s and Theo’s motivations to give as a form of advocacy are more consistent with giving to schools and communities in which they were not educated or raised. Likewise, just as giving back affords Fatima and Selene reasons to remain in the teaching profession, giving to affords Julie and Theo reasons to continue teaching in schools where their advocacy has the greatest impact.

One final area where motivation and reasons to remain intersect is in Fatima’s desire to address the fact that she believes both she and her students are targets or potential targets of various forms of discrimination and even violence. She is highly motivated to orient her teaching around social justice so that her students will acquire skills necessary to confront and defeat these negative forces so that they are no longer perceived as targets. She believes the election of Donald Trump and his tacit support of groups oriented toward racism and violence make her work that much more urgent, thus providing her with an additional reason to remain.

3. Choice of school and student empowerment. These elements of advocacy represent the second group of elements that fall into two domains of advocacy. Choice of school and empowering students represent strategies for advocacy as well as reasons to
remain. As for choice of school, in most cases, a person interested in advocating for others must find arenas in which to advocate. For Fatima, Julie, Selene, and Theo, the arenas are schools, specifically, low-income, urban, NND public schools with “D” or “F” school letter grades that enrolled high numbers of immigrants, English learners, and children of color. This choice is 

strategic

in nature because such schools are perceived by the teachers as schools enrolling concentrations of students with little access to power and resources and who face the greatest threat of discrimination based on race, language, or immigration status. Consequently, they are in the greatest need of advocacy. Once established in such schools, the teachers feel a strong obligation to remain, as leaving raises the possibility the replacement teacher may not be as much an advocate.

Selene’s and Julie’s perspectives on choosing where to teach are representative of the group. Says Selene, “I’m not going to go and teach fourth grade at Northside [an affluent, predominantly Anglo school]... I’m just not going do that. That would feel really wrong” (FG1b, March 1, 2017). Julie adds, “I teach where I teach by choice. That’s really important to me” (FG1b, March 1, 2017).

Student empowerment is a strategy emphasized by all participants, but particularly by Fatima and Julie, who consistently emphasize educating students and their parents regarding the ways in which political powers operate to discriminate against children with similar racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic profiles. If parents are similarly educated, students will have teachers and parents as sources to consult as they continue to understand the social politics of the United States. Student empowerment also serves as a reason to remain. Like choice of school, if Julie or Fatima were to leave the profession, there would be no guarantee
her replacement would exert the same effort to inform and educate students and their parents about their rights.

Fatima believes racism is one of the discriminatory factors that most affect her students. She brings racism to the fore in her social studies lessons, even when its importance is muted in textbooks and other resources. She links the study of racism to actual racism experienced by her students. She feels the same about language discrimination. She reminds her students, “You do not feel ashamed of speaking your first language, if it’s not English, and you stand up for yourself and for others!” (Fatima2, March 18, 2017). Fatima and Julie believe one of the main roles of social studies in elementary school is to apprise students of their rights. They believe this is especially important after the election of Donald Trump and the anti-immigrant policies he began implementing during his first week in office. Julie believes it is more important than ever to “[make] sure students know their rights through social studies and through selectively choosing social studies units [to help] them understand what their rights are” (FG2a, April 19, 2017).

4. Childhood experiences, beneficiary of advocacy, advocacy for non-students, aspiring to be a lawyer. These four elements of advocacy represent the first of three groups I have determined are associated primarily with only one of the three domains. In this case, it is motivation. Three of four participants cite meaningful and even traumatic events in childhood or young adulthood that served as the teachers’ motivation to advocate for children. Fatima’s experiences with racism and linguicism after moving farther north from the border, Selene’s parents’ decision not to teach her Spanish, and Theo’s experiences with sexual identity discrimination ultimately contributed to their decisions to become teachers so they could advocate for other students facing these and similar experiences. Julie was
similarly motivated; however, the traumas that motivated her—antagonism toward white teachers and discriminatory acts perpetrated on her husband and children—occurred primarily in adulthood. Nonetheless, these events strengthened existing advocacy that had been instrumental in her decision to teach.

Julie and Theo had previous experience advocating for people other than students: Julie for adult immigrants through LVA and Theo for farmers in Paraguay. These experiences were not inconsequential. Rather, they were key motivators for advocacy both teachers engaged in later as teachers. Moreover, these initial experiences with advocacy promoted advocacy skill development used later as teacher-advocates. Says Theo, “Working for the person who has the least amount of power but can come up with power . . . was something that was instilled in me [in Paraguay]” (Theo2, April 6, 2017). It has apparently stayed with him since.

Fatima and Theo report that being the beneficiaries of advocacy by others compelled them, at least in part, to engage in advocacy for others. Fatima’s mother had been a strong advocate for Fatima’s bilingual education and Theo is clear about the advocacy efforts for gay rights made by his straight allies. Fatima’s mother’s and Theo’s friends’ advocacy efforts motivate both teachers to advocate for the language and other rights of their students. Additionally, Theo’s experiences as a beneficiary of advocacy have motivated him to teach his white, middle-class students how to be effective allies for others.

Finally, Selene alone seems to have been motivated to advocate for others through her childhood dream to be a lawyer. In middle school, she wrote a paper on Roe v. Wade and felt it was an important step toward fulfilling her dream. But lack of confidence with her ability to speak in front of others under pressure made her rethink her dream. In her own words, her
dream gradually “transitioned” through high school and evolved into a different form of advocacy, one with a familiar focus: young children like her whose various potentials might not be realized due to negative forces of which they may not be aware nor have the skills to confront. For Selene, the line between abogada and advocate has been blurred ever since.

5. Education as key to success and access to resources. These two elements of advocacy represent a second group that I believe falls under a single domain of advocacy: strategies. Julie, Selene, and Theo are clear about how they believe a good K-12 education and, if possible, a college education can lead to success in modern America. Julie tells her students that a good education will likely lead to a better life and better opportunities for her students and their parents, especially if their parents also continue their formal education. Selene focuses on helping students access their inner motivations, determinations, strengths, and desires. She believes this is important because, without their help, her efforts alone to overcome the ways in which they are disadvantaged and to move them to “another level” are less likely to result in success. Theo’s skepticism about education as a key to success is evident in comments he makes about the myth of meritocracy: that simply trying hard or harder will lead to success. Nonetheless, he is realistic about the difference in incomes between those with and those without college degrees. Therefore, he encourages all his students and their parents to consider a college degree and not a high school diploma as the endpoint of the children’s education.

Julie is the lone participant who explicitly places emphasis on leading students’ families to community and other resources that have the potential to improve their living standard. In her work with TVA, she noticed that immigrant families were working hard to succeed in their new country. But working hard was not always enough. They often needed
help with food, clothing, transportation, interpreters, and more in order to even have a chance of improving their situation or at least assuring a better life for their children. Therefore, to the extent Julie knows about these resources, she tries to keep her families informed about them.

6. The teacher as students’ sole advocate. One element of advocacy I believe belongs primarily to reasons to remain and not to other domains is the participants’ perception that they may be the sole advocates for some or all of their students. Fatima, Julie, and Theo pose some form of the same question: “If we do not stand up for these children, who will?” Part of the answer to the question may be, “the teacher who replaces me if I were to resign or retire early.” Assuming much of their advocacy for students would come to an end upon resigning or retiring, the teachers sense no guarantee that the teachers who replace them would advocate for their students as fervently and effectively as they did—if at all. Therefore, the possibility of leaving vulnerable children and families without the advocacy the teachers know they themselves can provide is a strong incentive to continue teaching. In fact, Fatima is so concerned about the continuation of advocacy for her students and her families that if for some reason she could no longer teach, she would seek another capacity through which to advocate for them.

Revisiting the literature on advocacy. In this section, I consider the literature on teacher advocates in light of the ways the participants describe their advocacy efforts on behalf of their children. I follow the same format as I established in the advocacy section of the literature review in Chapter 2. I begin the discussion with the definition and characteristics of teacher advocacy, continue with the genesis and evolution of teacher advocacy, and follow with various forms of advocacy. In the next section, I offer
suggestions for future research in teacher advocacy. In the last section I discuss possible implications of advocacy on the ability of teachers to continue teaching during challenging times.

**Definition and characteristics of advocacy.** As I describe above and in Chapter 6, the advocacy practiced by the four participants hews closely to established definitions of teacher-advocates, though to different degrees and to varied effects. Specifically, advocates represent those who cannot represent themselves (Athanases & de Oliveira, 2007) and act on behalf of others to ensure equitable treatment and access to resources (Haneda & Alexander, 2015).

Moreover, the participants are associated with various characteristics of advocacy as described by advocacy researchers. Peters and Reid (2009) describe advocacy as a combination of “disturbing knowledge,” “transforming practice,” and “exercising power.” The participants “disturb” their knowledge by questioning the wisdom and ethics of the education “reforms” they are expected to implement. This, in turn, transforms their practice. They exercise the resulting power by protecting their students as best they can from the effects of the “reforms” while advocating on their behalf despite—and perhaps because of—the “reforms.”

Picower’s (2012) advocacy model includes “reconciling the vision,” “moving toward liberation,” and “standing up to oppression.” The participants envision a public education system free of oppressive “reforms.” They move toward their and their students’ “liberation” from “reforms” by standing up to their oppressive forces—when they can, and to the extent they can.
Finally, Athanases and de Oliveira (2007) suggest that advocates: a) consider all schooling as problematic rather than given; b) learn to locate expertise in oneself; and c) strive to envision schools that treat students fairly and equitably in order to meet their various needs. In various ways, all four participants consider modern schooling as problematic, locate and exercise expertise in themselves, and strive not only to envision schools that treat students fairly and equitably in order to meet their various needs, but create them.

**Genesis and evolution of teacher advocacy.** Teacher-advocates, whether self-defined or defined by researchers like those above, have histories. Their advocacy is largely the result of the evolution of relevant facets of their personal and professional lives. Collay (2010), Cahnmann & Varghese (2005), and Mawhinney et al. (2012) suggest that family composition and dynamics, memorable childhood events, and key personal and professional traumas are often instrumental not only in teachers’ decisions to teach, but to advocate for their students. This is the case for the four participants, though the paths inspired by these experiences are unique to their individual origins and evolutions. The experiences have, in turn, led to a desire to “carry the water back” (Collay, 2010), a concept I refine into giving back and giving to. Carrying the water back also means an obligation to use one’s higher education as an instrument for advocacy. Collay suggests this is especially true for minority teachers, as higher education often leads to greater awareness of their own oppression and, by extension, that of their students. This is very much the case for Fatima, who equates the oppression her students suffer to her own.

**Forms of teacher advocacy.** For teachers in general, internal advocacy takes place in the classroom and the school. External advocacy takes place outside the school, with the goal of affecting positively what takes place in the school and classroom. Individual teacher
advocacy is undertaken by a teacher on her own, whereas collective advocacy involves teacher collaboration.

**Internal and external advocacy.** Fatima, Julie, Selene, and Theo all engage in internal advocacy, or advocacy that is largely contained within the classroom or the school (Dubetz & de Jong, 2011; Haneda & Alexander, 2015). In that regard, they strive to create learning environments in which they remold the curriculum, when possible, into forms that are more culturally and linguistically relevant, inclusive, and meaningful. They respond in class to sociopolitical issues outside of class, such as racism, classism, linguicism, and rapidly changing anti-immigration policy. Through dual-language instruction, they address the specific linguistic needs of their students in order to increase their chances of attaining academic success, while reinforcing their linguistic and cultural identities (de Oliveira & Athanases, 2007).

External advocacy for the participants largely consists of home-to-school advocacy, where they serve as cultural and linguistic arbitrators between the home, the school, and the various systems and bureaucracies that immigrant and marginalized populations must learn to navigate (Dubetz & de Jong, 2011). Notable is the fact that none of the participating teachers reports engaging significantly in the form of external advocacy that takes place in formal political arenas, such as union halls, school board meetings, or state legislatures.

**Individual and collective advocacy.** Related to internal and external advocacy are individual and collective advocacy (Dubetz & de Jong, 2011). It is apparent the participants engage in different forms of individual advocacy, which they usually undertake within their classrooms, in one-on-one interactions with parents, after school hours, or during parent conferences. Fatima, Julie, and Selene also engage in forms of collective advocacy, where
they elicit the support of colleagues in order to resist “reforms” and other policies they believe are harmful to their students, while replacing these “reforms” and policies with practices they believe promote the various rights, needs, and desires of their students (see Resistance, below). However, this collective advocacy is generally confined to the school. I found few, if any, examples among the participants of collective advocacy outside the school. Cahnmann and Varghese (2005) suggest this may be due to the fact that fighting individual and collective battles on behalf of students carries a greater potential for burnout than if teachers were to battle in only one arena, such as their school, or no arena at all.

**Future research on advocacy.** In addition to further research on teachers’ prior experiences with advocacy and what effect these experiences may have on their advocacy as teachers, Dubetz & de Jong (2011) suggest more research is needed on: a) the catalysts for specific forms of teacher advocacy; b) the relationship between teachers’ identities and advocacy; c) differences in advocacy between veteran and novice teachers; d) how success or failure with advocacy efforts affects future advocacy; and e) the effectiveness of individual versus collective advocacy. Research in any of these five areas would enhance our understanding of teacher-advocates in general, and the teacher-advocates in this study in particular.

**Discussion and implications.** As I will suggest in Chapter 8, I believe there is a paradoxical relationship between teaching and advocacy. Whereas these two activities often appear inextricably linked, they can be separated, both in theory and in practice. Therefore, when the teaching side of the teacher-advocate dyad is threatened by “reform,” not only can the participants in this study put more focus on their advocacy efforts, but they often feel compelled to do so, given the threat to their students posed by some of the “reforms.” In a
sense, advocacy can serve as a sort of life preserver to teaching when teaching comes under attack.

Resilience

When questioned specifically about resilience, the participants’ responses generally fall into five categories. The first category concerns personal traits, which I address extensively throughout and summarize in Table 7. I address these traits again here in the context of resilience. The other four categories are: 1) mentoring, 2) dedication\textsuperscript{54} to school and program, 3) change or taking a break, and 4) education, experience, credentials, and knowledge (EECK). They are summarized in Table 12. The similarities, differences, and outliers I identified as I analyzed across the cases are discussed below. At the end of this section I revisit the literature on resilience in light of the data I collected and analyzed for the study.

**Personal traits.** The ability to continue teaching despite the many challenges education “reforms” have presented to teachers over the last two decades depends considerably on key personal traits. As I discuss above, all four participants place an emphasis on two traits in particular: *dedication* and *adaptability*. Associated closely with dedication are commitment (Brunetti, 2006; Day et al., 2005), as well as teaching as a calling or vocation (Gu & Day, 2007). Although they explain these traits in different ways and with different examples, the four participants believe their dedication to their profession is essential, especially as it concerns withstanding forces they believe are often harmful to their students and impede their work. However, they apparently do not perceive their professional dedication as invulnerable. Therefore, the ability to discreetly, selectively, and temporarily

\textsuperscript{54} Here I differentiate between dedication to one’s profession as a general trait, and dedication to specific schools and programs not so much as a trait, but as a practice that strengthens resilience.
adapt to mandates and initiatives with which they do not agree represents a way of remaining on high, dry ground when the dykes of dedication are temporarily breached.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type or strategy of resilience</th>
<th>Fatima</th>
<th>Julie</th>
<th>Selene</th>
<th>Theo</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
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<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continually seek new mentors</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication to school &amp; population</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dedication to dual-language program</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge gained by obtaining master’s degree</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Change schools</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Change grades within school</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Table 12. Resilience types and strategies. Checks represent resilience types or strategies identified by participants as important for remaining in the profession*

For Fatima and Selene, *focus* supports resilience as they focus on their initial motivations for teaching. For Julie in particular, this trait explains how she is capable of periodically shutting the forces of “reform” out of her classroom so she can concentrate on teaching the way she knows is right, without worrying about whether the way complies with the expectations of “reformers.” She refers to this process as “putting the blinders on.” This comports closely with a general description of focus by Mansfield et al. (2012) that includes the ability to dismiss, ignore, and refuse to internalize institutional stressors in order to focus on the task at hand.
I interpret hope and patience as somewhat complementary. One first kindles hope, then employs patience until such time as the hope is realized. Both traits are salient for Theo with respect to resilience. Given that Theo is significantly older than the other participants, perhaps he has had more time to witness hope and patience play out, often to his advantage or to that of others. For Selene, hope is important, though it represents a trait she prefers to cultivate in students rather than one of which she avails herself in order to continue teaching. However, can one effectively cultivate or instill hope in others if one does not also possess sufficient quantities of it? Like Theo, Fatima relies more on patience than on hope to be able to continue teaching. She is clear she learned much of her patience from her mother, who has reminded Fatima throughout her career that “reforms” come and go; the key is to wait them out. Finally, perseverance, or being stubborn or “terca,” as Fatima and Selene describe themselves, is a trait they credit for their ability not to give in or give up. As Selene says, you cannot “sit and mope.” You must “keep going” and “continue forward” (Selene2, March 30, 2019).

Change. All participants except Fatima have changed schools at least once since beginning their respective teaching careers. Julie, Selene, and Theo report that such changes recharged their energy, interest, and perspectives which, in turn, contributed to their longevity in the profession. In their professional careers, Julie and Selene had taught at three different schools and Theo at five, though one was as an administrator. Fatima, Selene, and Theo report that executing positions within a school that removed them from regular

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55 Two years after I collected the data for this study, Fatima reported she had accepted the position of bilingual coordinator at the high school that most of the students at her former elementary school eventually attend.
classroom instruction had essentially the same energizing effect.\textsuperscript{56} For example, Fatima served as an instructional coach at her school, Selene as a response to intervention (RTI) coordinator, and Theo as a student teacher supervisor, an assistant principal, and a student assistance team leader. All of these roles helped reset and recharge their careers while providing them with a valuable perspective on life beyond their classrooms. Indeed, Selene referred to the RTI position as what God had given her instead of a vacation trip to Australia! Finally, Julie suggested that changing from one grade level to another served to renew her interest in teaching and gave her incentive to teach longer in order to improve her practice at the new grade level.

\textbf{Mentoring.} All four participants state that being mentored by others was key to surviving the first five years of teaching, a period when nearly fifty percent of all new teachers leave the profession for various reasons (Ingersoll, 2003). More relevant to this study, perhaps, is the fact that three participants also stated that mentoring other teachers has contributed in various ways to their professional resilience. For Fatima, mentoring young, new, or prospective teachers involves reminding them why they entered teaching in the first place and who it is they intend to “serve.” As Fatima reminds others of their original intentions and goals, she simultaneously reminds herself, thus reinforcing her motivations for continuing to teach.

Theo has benefited from mentoring others both formally through the post-baccalaureate teaching program in which he was a supervisor and informally at the various schools where he has taught. He reports that his mentoring experiences in the teaching program provided him new insights into teaching and broadened his perspectives on public

\textsuperscript{56} Well after I had concluded data collection and analysis, Julie reported that she had taken a position as librarian at her school.
education such that he was eager to return to and remain teaching once his contract as supervisor expired.

Selene’s relationship to mentoring is perhaps the most involved. She was mentored early in her career and continues to seek mentors even after twenty years. In Chapter 6, I explain the three types of mentors she seeks and the reasons for which she seeks them. At the same time, Selene continues to serve both formally and informally as a mentor to others. In fact, she was Fatima’s mentor during the first few years of Fatima’s career, a fact both mentioned prior to the first focus group. Selene makes it clear that without continued mentoring throughout her career—both as the recipient of mentoring as well as the provider of mentoring—she likely would not have survived to teach for twenty years—and counting.

**School programs and population.** All four participants consider their devotion to the school and programs in which they teach—and the students enrolled in them—as an essential component of their resilience. For, when the forces of “reform” are the most challenging, remembering where, what, and whom they teach addresses the more important question: why? They refocus on their professional “mission” in order to return to teach another day, another month, another year. Fatima makes clear these schools, programs, and associated students represent her “calling.” Selene states, “this is where I belong” (FG1b, March 1, 2017). Julie and Theo also made purposeful choices about where, what, and whom to teach. Says Julie, “I teach where I teach by choice” (FG1b, March 1, 2017). Theo speculates that if dual-language education were ever threatened, he would not leave and seek employment elsewhere, but would stay to fight. Clearly, choosing where, what, and whom to teach makes these teachers more resilient to forces that might lead them to leave than if choice were not an option.
**Education, experience, credentials, and knowledge (EECK).** Fatima, Julie, Selene, and Theo all make definitive statements about how their education, experience, credentials, and knowledge help them continue teaching during the current era of “reform,” when the future for students and teachers can sometimes appear bleak. Awareness that they often “outrank” policy makers and school administrators in individual or collective EECK strengthens their resilience, as they become increasingly convinced what they are doing is what is right, even if it conflicts with the agendas of policy makers and administrators. As Fatima’s mother frequently reminds her, policies come and go, yet teachers abide. If knowledge is power, presumably its power is enhanced if buttressed by the benefits of higher education, years of experience, and specialized credentials that the more politically powerful are likely not to possess.

**Education.** Fatima, Selene, and Theo received their master’s degrees from a department at the local state university known for its orientation toward social justice education. Fatima and Selene credit their master’s degrees with reinforcing their teaching practices prior to entering the program and with introducing them to new concepts and practices that enabled them to greatly enhance, both in quantity and quality, their social justice teaching practices and advocacy for students. For Fatima this process was especially profound, even transformative. Theo does not discuss his master’s degree other than to say he is tired of having to continually prove to administrators and policy makers that he knows what he is talking about. Julie received her master’s degree online from a university located in the state where she received her bachelor’s degree. While her masters has also enhanced her knowledge of social justice education, it did more to affirm that she was right about what
constituted effective teaching practices, even as the powers of “reform” attempt to convince her otherwise.

**Experience.** At the time of this study, Fatima, Julie, Theo, and Selene had ten, fifteen, seventeen, and twenty years year of teaching experience, respectively. While it is difficult to define and quantify a concept as broad as “teaching experience” that collectively spans over sixty years and that involves hundreds of students and families from nearly a dozen different schools, it is clear the *collective* experience of the four participants, though different individually in many respects, is associated with similar *but not identical* schools, program types, grade levels, and student demographics. Therefore, in broad terms, one could argue they have the potential to have had many similar experiences. Indeed, many of their responses to interview questions bear this out.

If there are distinctions in experience among the participants, one might be Theo’s experience at his current school, which has a much larger percentage of middle-class Anglo students who are learners of Spanish. The other might be Julie’s experience at a school in a neighboring state, which she describes as a transitional bilingual education (TBE) program, one that adds increasing amounts of English each year until students “transition” to English-only instruction, usually by middle school (Baker, 2011; Collier & Thomas, 2009; Crawford, 2004; de Jong, 2011). Of course, within their schools and careers, and on a day to day basis, each teacher has accrued experiences that are unique to her or him.

**Credentials.** I define credentials as classifications supplemental to academic degrees. The four participants have attained Level 3A teacher certification as defined by their state Department of Education, the highest level for teachers, which places them in the highest teacher salary group. The four also have ESL and bilingual endorsements associated with
their teaching licenses. These endorsements are state-mandated prerequisites for teaching in dual-language programs. They receive annual stipends for these endorsements as long as they are still teaching a dual-language class. Selene obtained certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) for which she receives an additional salary increase. Theo received his administrative license (Level 3B) several years ago. He served two years as an assistant principal at another elementary school in the district before leaving that post in disgust and dismay and arriving at Zapata Elementary School to teach.

**Knowledge.** If an accurate description of experience is rather elusive, a description of professional knowledge is probably more so, as it is in large part derived from experience. In brief, all four participants are conscious of and proud of the professional knowledge they have obtained through years of teaching, pursuing advanced degrees, and seeking various licensure endorsements. They are clear about the ways their accrued knowledge has helped them withstand the forces of education “reforms.” For, as Fatima says, “[it’s] us against them: the people that don’t have a solid knowledge about what education really is about” (Fatima2, March 18, 2017).

**Revisiting the literature on resilience.** In this section I take account of the literature on teacher resilience in light of responses the participants provided on the topic. Specifically, I discuss definitions of resilience, factors that elicit resilience, individual attributes and strategies of resilience, and contextual attributes of strategies of resilience. I conclude with a brief discussion of possible implications of resilience on the participants’ ability to continue teaching.

**Definitions of resilience.** Resilience has been defined as coping with, overcoming, adapting to, or bouncing back from adversity (Beltman, et. al, 2011), recovering one’s
strength and spirit in the face of adversity (Gu & Day, 2007), staying the course despite
difficulty one encounters (Brunetti, 2006), and using energy productively to achieve school
goals in the face of adverse conditions (Patterson et al., 2004).

Behaviors and practices exhibited by the participants have, in various ways,
conformed to one or more of these definitions. Theo bounced back and recovered his
strength and spirit after essentially failing in his effort to stop the implementation of
corporate education “reform” in his school. Julie recovered her own strength and spirit after
receiving thinly veiled suggestions that white teachers may not be suited for teaching
children of color. Fatima employed both her stubbornness and the totality of her education,
experience, and credentials to essentially withstand waves of “reform” implementation and to
stay the course of social justice education in her classroom. And when faced with
standardized assessments of her students’ academic progress that show what policy makers
and administrators might consider alarming shortcomings, or even failure, Selene constructed
student-centered interpretations of her students’ progress to show her students are indeed
making impressive gains the standardized methods of assessment are incapable of detecting.

As Gu and Day (2013) suggest, successful resilience often leads to greater resilience;
that is, if a teacher can withstand current adverse circumstances, she has a better chance of
withstanding similar circumstances in the future. This may indeed be the case for these
teachers. At the same time, Gu and Day caution that, for some teachers, their resilience
erodes over time, a phenomenon akin to battle fatigue. Though the participants in this study
are likely not immune to this phenomenon, I did not find convincing evidence of it.

Factors that elicit resilience. Beltman et al. (2011) and Dunn (2015) found that
moral conflicts between an individual teacher’s personal beliefs, on the one hand, and practices expected of him or her as a professional, on the other, presented challenges to teachers’ resilience. Examples from this study include Fatima’s conflicts with textbook biases, Julie’s frustration with the expectation of teacher political neutrality in light of threats to her students from the president’s immigration “policies,” the professional dissonance Selene experiences between standardized test results and her intimate knowledge of her students’ actual academic achievement, and Theo’s objections as an administrator to a one-size-fits-all teacher evaluation he was convinced was biased against conscientious and critically-minded teachers. These incidents contribute to existing workplace stress, which puts increased demands on the teachers’ resilience. Beltman et al. also found that dissatisfaction with one’s professional efforts often induces resilient strategies and behavior in teachers. I did not find evidence of this among the teachers in this study. While they were often dissatisfied with efforts in education, this dissatisfaction was routinely directed toward the efforts of others, such as policy makers and district and site-based administrators, not toward themselves.

In addition to individual factors that elicit resilience, Beltman et al. (2011) identify contextual factors, as well. All four participants experienced challenges inherent in meeting the needs of disadvantaged students. The teachers also identify a lack of teacher empowerment, autonomy, and professionalism brought on by the reform movement as challenging their resilience (Brunetti, 2006; Dunn, 2015), as well as pressure on teachers to perpetually learn and implement new and sometimes controversial programs, policies, and practices (Day et al., 2005).

**Individual attributes and strategies of resilience.** The participants in this study
recount numerous individual attributes of resilience. These include personal traits such as dedication (Beltman et al., 2011; Brunetti, 2006), adaptability (Patterson et al., 2004), hope, persistence, focus, and the fortitude not to internalize institutional stressors (Mansfield et al., 2012); EECK, or what Beltman et al., (2011) refer to as professional growth and reflection.

In terms of resilient strategies, all participants, especially Fatima and Theo, mention teaching for social justice (Brunetti, 2006; Patterson et al., 2004) as a practice that seems to help them continue teaching during challenging times. Furthermore, the prospect of leaving the profession and, in doing so, depriving their students of a social justice education at the hands of a teacher not similarly oriented, is a potential “pull factor” drawing them closer to staying and further from a decision to leave (Dunn, 2015). Similarly, the notion of giving back to the community, as with Fatima and Selene, or giving to the community, as with Julie and Theo, is another individual strategy that may create greater resilience in teachers, resilience that might facilitate the teachers’ desire to stay rather than leave.

**Contextual attributes and strategies of resilience.** Beltman et al (2011) found that support from administrators, mentors, colleagues, students, and friends and family were important in terms of teachers’ ability to withstand various pressures that might incline them toward leaving the profession. They also found that administrative support enhances resilience in teachers. In this study, however, it is more often the lack of support from administrators that challenges (but also affirms) the teachers’ resilience. The participants mention mentoring as important, with Selene placing particular emphasis on the need for veteran teachers to seek the support of mentors in order to endure the pressures of “reforms.” For the other three, solidarity with colleagues may serve a similar purpose. And Fatima, Selene, and Theo all mention support from friends and family members as key to their
longevity during challenging times. As to whether resilient behaviors or practices on the part of their students contribute to teacher resilience, I found little evidence of this, but believe it to be an interesting focus of future research.

**Future research on resilience.** In addition to studies that address the effects of student resilience on teacher resilience, I believe more research is needed concerning certain strategies of resilience that emerged as significant in this study, such as how movement from one school to another or from one position to another within a school affects teacher resilience. All four participants state that such moves have been important to their professional “survival.” More research could also be undertaken regarding how specific motivations for teaching, such as responding to teacher shortages (Julie), to deficiencies in teacher diversity (Selene, Theo), or to one’s racial, linguistic (Julie, Theo), or gender privileges (Theo), might affect a teacher’s ability to continue teaching during challenging times.

**Discussion and implications.** Resilience lies at the core of this study. Without the ability to cope, overcome, adapt, bounce back, recover strength and spirit, or stay the course, these four teachers very likely would not have remained in dual-language programs in “D” and “F” urban elementary schools long enough to become participants in this study. I have discussed the nature of their resilience and the ways in which they invoke it here and in Chapter 6. In Chapter 8, I address resilience a final time as part of my response to research sub-question number four.

**Resistance**

It is clear that, among the study’s participants, resistance to “reforms” is often not
their first response. In general, the participants first employ strategies of resilience in order to continue teaching. They describe various ways they cope with, endure, and otherwise survive the “reforms.” When the powers of resilience are tested, however, the participants face difficult choices: continue enduring the “reforms,” quit teaching, or convert their resilience into various forms of resistance. I begin this section with observations on what inspires and motivates each participant to resist. I then discuss the various ways they resist “reforms” they believe are harmful to public education in general, and to their schools, programs, and students, in particular. Types and strategies of resistance identified and practiced by the participants, or by each participant, appear in Table 13.

The power to resist. The participants vary widely according to how and from where they draw the inspiration, motivation, and courage to resist education “reforms.” Fatima gives considerable credit to a single personality trait: persistence. She simply will not compromise her teaching and advocacy practices in favor of other agendas, especially the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resistance type or strategy</th>
<th>Fatima</th>
<th>Julie</th>
<th>Selene</th>
<th>Theo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teach subjects neglected by “reform” priorities</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase teaching of social justice</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge boxed-and-scripted curriculum</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize colleagues against curriculum changes</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resist test preparation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resist changes to successful 90-10 dual-language program</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resist supplemental testing</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get rid of bad administrators</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confront corporate education surrogates</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13. Resistance types and strategies.
GERM (Global Education Reform Movement). If education “reforms” get in her way, she is determined to challenge them and defeat them. She prefers to do this through curricular practices but is not afraid to challenge administrators and policy makers who believe they can lead her astray. Threats from the English-dominant “reform” movement motivate her to double down on the teaching of social justice—*in Spanish*—so her students now have a greater chance of confronting threats to their education in the future. Meanwhile, her EECK light the way and buttress her confidence.

Ironically, Julie derives some of her inspiration, motivation, and courage to resist from the few site-based and district administrators who challenge state mandates that are consistent with national education “reforms.” “Something at the district level that’s important is seeing that they push back with the state . . . and fight for [us], and not just go, ‘OK, the state says we need to do this, so you have to do it now’” (FG2a, April 19, 2017). Such actions give Julie and others at the school level “cover” to resist; if they know administrators will support them, they are more apt to resist and succeed. Though Julie is not especially assertive and outspoken, she states clearly that teachers must push back at every opportunity so the forces of “reform” do not win. Like Fatima, she believes her EECK provide her with the skills to find and present data that demonstrate to “reformers” that her resistance is justified.

A form of “compliant resistance” motivates Selene. When “reform” mandates are imposed, she is generally inclined to accept them and attempt to implement them, albeit cautiously and skeptically. When skepticism of the absurdity of the design and implementation are confirmed, she leverages her experience with compliance to confront “reform”-friendly administrators to demonstrate that the mandated “reform” is a failure. She
believes resistance to “reforms” is all the more powerful when those who resist can state honestly that they tried to implement them, only to find they were not in the best interests of their students. And like Julie, she generates her own data or researches others’ data to show that the “reforms” she is resisting are ineffective or harmful.

Theo states up front that, as a gay man who faces perpetual anti-gay discrimination, the well of resistance never runs dry. He knows what it is like to fight and win and can apply that to other contexts, including resisting education “reforms” he believes cause the most harm to the teaching and learning that occur in his classroom. His EECK allows him to determine early whether a new “reform” will be harmful for him or his students. He can discern the corporate and political hands manipulating the “reforms.” Confidence in his teaching knowledge and ability allows him to defy “reforms” he believes are harmful and continue to do what he knows is best for his students. He dares administrators or policy makers to suggest he do otherwise.

**Resisting through curriculum and instruction.** Fatima, Julie, and Theo report they resist what is often either a “reform” suggestion or a mandate to greatly reduce or even eliminate the teaching of subjects that do not appear on the annual high-stakes standardized tests. Test scores are the foundation of education “reforms,” thus administrators and policy makers demand high test scores at all costs, including the narrowing of the curriculum. As a response to this suggestion, Fatima focuses on what by law she is required to teach and teaches it without regard to test scores. This is a relatively safe place, as she is operating with the law on her side. Of the subjects she is required to teach, but one that does not appear on the test, is social studies. Instead of reducing the amount of social studies she teaches, however, she increases it or teaches it more in depth.
Julie does the same, but in her case, she has experienced the administrative directive to not teach social studies or science as more of a mandate than a suggestion. She and her colleagues have ignored the order and have maintained or increased the teaching of the prohibited subjects, reasoning that students are in school to receive an education, not to produce test results exclusively in language arts and math.

Importantly, Fatima and Julie do not double down solely on the teaching of social studies; they double down on social justice issues. Julie has always thought one of the most important purposes of social studies is to teach students about their rights. She believes it is even more important now, especially given recent anti-immigrant actions initiated by the federal government. Fatima agrees and adds that orienting the curriculum toward social justice has multiple effects. First, it defies the recommendation of “reformers” to reduce the teaching of social studies in order to raise math and language arts test scores. Second, it challenges the parts of the “reform” movement responsible for the sanitization of the social studies curriculum and materials. Fatima is vocal about her opposition to the ways policy makers and publishing companies have omitted important topics from textbooks and other resources in order to not threaten the sensibilities of white, middle-class speakers of English. Last, but perhaps most importantly, she believes teaching social studies provides the most vulnerable students the knowledge and skills to resist when their later education is threatened by political and corporate “reforms.”

For Theo the subject has been science. When one of his former schools made room in its schedule for test prep and expected teachers to use that time for the intended purpose, Theo refused. Instead, he reinvigorated the teaching of science. “I knew I was right all along that I shouldn’t cut out science to do test prep, so screw it! I’m still going to do science!”
Since that time, Theo has not engaged in test prep, regardless of suggestions or mandates from administrators to the contrary.

Selene’s resistance through the curriculum has taken the form of opposition to teaching boxed-and-scripted publishing materials with fidelity. After demonstrating with data and with compliance that implementing with fidelity is impossible, unproductive, and threatening to teachers’ professional autonomy, she organized her colleagues and extracted only the parts of the required reading series that fit their teacher-made social studies units.

**Resisting administrators and policy makers.** If high-stakes standardized testing is a thorn in the sides of teachers after the signing of NCLB, testing preparation drives the thorn deeper. Selene and Theo mention test prep as a major way they resist the wishes of administrators and policy makers whose goal is to raise test scores at all costs. Selene again organized her colleagues to put an end to the principal’s practice of spending two thousand precious dollars on test prep materials, to eliminate the requirement of spending two or more hours a week preparing for the tests, and to repeal the principal’s policy of depriving students of recess until they have memorized their multiplication tables. Theo simply stopped engaging in any form of test prep and used the time to teach science, which was a subject administrators flagged as one teachers might go easy on or not teach for long periods of time in favor of test prep.

Julie also organized colleagues and parents and gathered ample supporting research to assure that the district’s plan to convert the school’s 90-10 dual-language program into a 50-50 program\(^\text{57}\) was halted. (Theo objected to a similar plan at a former school, but his

\[^{57}\text{90-10 programs begin with 90\% minority language instruction in kindergarten and reduce that percentage by 10\% each year until instruction occurs 50\% in the minority and majority languages by fourth grade.}\]
objection occurred only after the principal came to inform him that the conversion had already been finalized and that there was no recourse. His resistance had been preempted.) Though not as opposed to test prep as Selene and Theo, Julie was adamantly opposed to a new state-mandated test that essentially duplicated existing assessments. Armed once again with research, she demonstrated how the assessment was a waste of instructional time and refused to administer it.

Finally, Theo is the only participant who cited confronting corporate education surrogates in person. He objected to their insistence on the use of boxed-and-scripted curricular materials and the practice of displaying data associated with students’ academic progress on the classroom walls and in the hallway. Though he did not win on either score, he tried. His defeat may have been due to operating alone. I conclude that while this was indeed resistance that did not succeed, it was nonetheless resistance from which he learned valuable lessons that ultimately strengthened his resistance to other “reforms” later in his career.

Revisiting the literature on resistance. In the sections below, I revisit the literature on resistance in light of the ways in which the four participants engage in resistance against education “reforms.” I adhere to the same structure I established in the section in Chapter 2: definitions of resistance, resistance as a problem, resistance as a symptom of institutional weakness, resistance as a legitimate strategy for positive change, and resistance as transformational change. I follow with a brief note on external resistance, suggestions for future research on resistance, and conclude with comments regarding the implications of resistance for this study.

Definitions of resistance. The online version (2.3.0) of the New Oxford American
Dictionary (2018) defines resistance as “the refusal to accept or comply with something; the attempt to prevent something by action or argument.” As I stated in Chapter 2, I also believe that resistance involves “challenging and critiquing institutional practices and proposing and building alternatives” [emphasis added] (Oliviera & Athanases, 2011, p. 210). Finally, I believe resistance must also be accompanied by a certain degree of risk; otherwise, its definition may conflate with the definition of resilience, a more risk-averse approach.

I found the ways in which the study’s participants engage in resistance meet most of this comprehensive definition. That is, in almost all cases described here and in Chapter 6, acts of resistance involve: a) refusing to accept or comply; b) proposing, constructing, and maintain alternatives; and, c) exposing oneself to risks, though not necessarily in an “a-b-c” order. Indeed, Selene often follows a “b-c-a” approach. One of many examples is how Selene and Theo resist test prep. They refuse to comply, they propose alternatives (which usually involves teaching what they were supposed to teach in the first place), all the while risking administrative reprimands, administrative transfers, and more.

**Resistance as a problem.** Much of the discussion of resistance by teachers assumes the point of view of policy makers, institutions, and administrators, as opposed to that of teachers. Knight (2009) simply asks: What can we do about teacher resistance? He views resistance as a problem that institutions need to overcome so policies and practices being resisted can instead be implemented. To this end, Knight believes some accommodations can be made to improve facets of teachers’ practices within the institution, but only to the extent the accommodations lead teachers to abandon their resistance. While there is evidence the site-based administrators in the participants’ schools often view teacher resistance as a problem, I do not find evidence they have attempted to appease teachers with strategic
accommodations in order to stem their resistance. This does not mean accommodation has not occurred. However, if it has occurred, it has not always produced the desired effect, as the participants proceeded with acts of resistance, to varying degrees of success.

**Resistance as a symptom of institutional weakness.** Gitlin and Margolis (1995) describe strategies such as the Baldrige model as “first wave” responses to teacher resistance, where outside consultants are imported in order to avoid a common trigger of resistance: administrators. The authors describe “second wave” responses as those that attempt to convince teachers that school change (i.e., “reform”) can only originate outside the school, that such change is inevitable and beneficial, that the implementation of change lies at the heart of the problem, and that teachers are the primary obstacle to implementation. With enough teacher education and engagement—one form of which the researchers refer to as “contrived collegiality”—this obstacle can be overcome. The logic includes the assumption that when teachers resist, whether successfully or not, the institution has failed, and therefore must seek other methods of implementing its “reforms.” The logic does not include acknowledging that perhaps teachers are justified in their resistance and that the “reforms” should be withdrawn.

As a teacher in the same school district during the most intensive years of “reform,” I can attest to the widespread adoption of these strategies and assumptions by administrators and policy makers. However, I can also attest to the ways in which the four participants generally have become immune to these strategies and have mounted and maintained selective and strategic resistance against them. This may be because the strategies and assumptions in question often depend on reasoning with teachers, suggesting that others know better, and convincing them that the adoption of certain “reforms” is a preferred course
of action. If the examples of resistance provided in this study are an indication, the participants remain largely unconvinced.

Gitlin and Margolis (1995) further assert that teachers will resist or reject nearly all initiatives that result in a reduction in classroom autonomy. In general, I found this to be true. The four participants are indeed sensitive and resistant to policies and practices that involve telling teachers what to teach and when and how to teach it. But telling teachers what, when, and how to teach is foundational to the “reform” movement. Therefore, it is not surprising the participants often cite “reform”-compliant administrators and policy makers—and the lack of professional autonomy they promote—as starting points for their resistance.

**Resistance as a legitimate strategy for positive change.** Standing in contrast to resistance as an employment or institutional problem that needs to be solved is the interpretation of teacher resistance as a serious and legitimate strategy for positive change. That is, perhaps resistance is based on valid critiques and, therefore, we should listen to teachers, perhaps join their resistance, and consider adopting what the teachers believe are superior alternatives.

Such is implied in Kanpol’s (1991) study of “Hillview” Middle School, where teachers are successful in their efforts to resist cultural practices outside the school (e.g., racism) and institutional practices within it (among them, a mandatory remedial hour that most teachers concluded was a waste of time). Largely due to their individual and collective EECK, the teachers in the current study are convinced they often know better than administrators and policy makers what is good for them, their students, and their schools and undertake their acts of resistance accordingly. As Kanpol suggests, teacher resistance is more effective if it is a collective effort, a strategy three of the four participants employ.
While Kanpol’s (1991) teachers practice resistance, their resistance is sometimes trivial (quotas on the copy machine) and what they offer as replacements are not always better than previous practices (several teachers leave students to their own devices during the remedial hour, making the hour more of a waste of time than had the teachers complied with expectations). Moreover, while the teachers sometimes practice resist-and-replace strategies, they more often practice an “attempt-attack-abandon” strategy (Knight, 2009)—sometimes reduced to an “attack-abandon” strategy—that did not include a satisfactory replacement.

Based on the data I collected from the four participants in this study, I found little evidence that teachers engaged in trivial resistance, proposed unsatisfactory alternatives, or practiced “attempt-attack-abandon” strategies. (“Attempt-resist-replace” might serve as a more accurate description.) Again, this does not mean they do not engage in trivial resistance, that their replacements are always superior to existing practices, or that they never attack or abandon policy or administrative mandates. A study undertaken in their classrooms might have detected such practices. Instead, the absence of these practices in the data may mean simply that the participants’ standards of resistance are higher and narrower than those of others.

**Resistance as transformational change.** Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) define transformational change in education as “some level of awareness and critique of [one’s] oppressive conditions and structures of domination” that are “somewhat motivated by a sense of social justice” (p. 319). Although they apply this definition to high school students, I believe it can apply to teachers, as well, especially as they consider the “oppressive conditions and structures of domination” faced by their students and their students’ parents. I believe Vasallo’s (2013) Ms. Hall exemplifies transformational change
in teachers. She resists and rejects the encroachment of neoliberal thought and practices into her classroom and articulates her objections to them fluidly, invoking Freire, Bourdieu, Marx, Gramsci, Foucault, and others. Like some of the teachers profiled in Hagopian (2013), Schniedewind and Sapon-Shevin (2012), and Crawford-Garrett et al. (2016), she is aware of the oppressive conditions and structures to which she and her students are exposed and responds to them through curricular practices oriented decidedly toward social justice.

I make no claims the four participants in this study exemplify transformational change in the same way and to the same degree as Ms. Hall. Furthermore, other than Theo’s reference to the works of Lisa Delpit, I note few if any explicit references to established researchers and theorists in the area of social justice education, teacher resistance, and even the oppression of students, a phenomenon that was cited frequently. However, I am aware of the social justice orientation of the department at the university where Fatima, Selene, and Theo received their master’s degrees. I am confident they were exposed to numerous influential scholars and practitioners in the field of social justice education. Therefore, coincidence and chance do not adequately explain how or why the social justice practices in their classrooms (and in Julie’s) align with those of prominent scholars and practitioners in the field of social justice education. This alignment lends support to the possibility that resistance to education “reforms” among the participants is, like Ms. Hall’s, very likely transformational.

A note on external resistance. In Chapter 2, I discuss what I believe are the four basic types of teacher resistance: (A) individual-internal, (B) collective-internal, (C) individual-external, and (D) collective-external. The resistance described by the participants in this study is almost exclusively internal and occurs almost entirely within their respective
school buildings. It manifests sometimes as collective in nature (B), as with the collaborative resistance among colleagues (or colleagues and parents) described by Fatima, Julie, and Selene. More often, however, it is individual in nature (A), where teachers act alone in order to resist education “reforms” in favor of classroom practices they believe are more beneficial to their students.

I found few examples of external resistance among the participants, either individual (C) or collective (D), such as speaking out at board meetings, attending union-sponsored protests at the state capitol, or participating in the public burning of teacher evaluations. Again, this does not mean the teachers do not participate in public resistance. Indeed, on several occasions prior to conducting this study, I stood near Theo during street-corner protests against standardized tests and school grades. But when I asked the participants to explain the forms of resistance to education “reforms” in which they engaged, their responses were limited almost entirely to those that occurred within their schools. Perhaps this is because schools and classrooms are where teachers believe they have the most control, where teachers are most familiar with institutional and collegial networks and alliances, and where the results of resistance are most immediate and effective. There may be other explanations that future research focused exclusively on resistance may be able to identify.

**Future research on resistance.** Various comparative studies of teacher resistance would contribute to our knowledge of teacher resistance. Researchers could compare teachers inclined toward internal resistance to those inclined toward external resistance. They could compare the same between teachers who favor individual versus collective resistance. Studies comparing white teachers to teachers of color, male teachers to female teachers, teachers who clearly articulate resistance theory versus those who do not, veteran to
beginning teachers, or monolingual to bilingual teachers would help answer some of the questions raised in this study. An interesting study might be one that involves an investigation into the location of the trigger point between one’s limits of resilience and one’s desire to stop coping and to resist the forces that are taxing one’s resilience in the first place. There are more. In the current public education climate, there would be no shortage of teachers or contexts to consider.

**Discussion and implications.** It is clear the participants, perhaps like many teachers and advocates, would rather not expend their energy engaged in resisting the forces that oppress them and others. Therefore, they seem to resist only when necessary, when they are well armed with data, knowledge, and expertise, and when they believe they have a good chance of winning. I discuss these topics in more depth as a part of my response to research sub-question number four in Chapter 8.

**The Breaking Point**

Fatima, Selene, and Theo stated that an end to dual-language education might be enough to convince them it was no longer worth teaching. Only Fatima believed she would leave teaching altogether. However, she would seek employment in some capacity where she could continue to advocate for the same students she used to teach. Selene admitted she might try to establish a bilingual Catholic school or even stay in non-bilingual public schools if she could advocate for the same students, albeit while teaching in English. And Theo admitted that, even though the elimination of dual-language education might ultimately drive him from teaching, he would first stay and fight until the last battle was won or lost.

For her part, Julie stated she might consider leaving education if she felt she was no longer contributing positively to or otherwise making a difference (Brunetti, 2006) for
students living in difficult circumstances, such as the students in her dual-language classroom. She said she would leave education for no other reason, leaving open the question as to whether she felt she might be able to contribute positively or make a difference for similar students outside the context of dual-language education.

**Discussion and implications.** Because the teachers in this study are still teaching, we cannot say for sure what would make them leave prematurely—if they were to do so at all. Still, it is clear from their responses to questions about their breaking points that a specific moral disagreement with what and especially how they are expected to teach—i.e., a requirement to conduct instruction entirely in English—would be the broader basis for their departures. Perhaps this is because their decision to teach in dual-language programs is not simply a strategic or programmatic decision, but a moral decision, one that positions them precisely to undertake advocacy work they believe is a moral imperative for their personal and professional lives. For that reason, the elimination of dual-language education would be a potential death knell for their careers. This is true for Fatima, even though she offers an unsustainable salary reduction as equally threatening. It is also true for Julie, who does not specifically cite dual-language education, but who believes she makes a difference in the academic and personal lives of her students every day by providing instruction in their home languages.

**The Resilient and Sometimes Resistant Teacher-Advocate**

Given the similarities and differences between the characteristics possessed by the four veteran dual-language teachers in this study, what conclusion might be drawn? Specifically, what personal and professional characteristics and practices seem to best support a teacher’s ability to withstand harmful “reforms” and continue teaching in the low-
performing, Title I, NND, urban, “D” and “F” public elementary schools he or she has purposefully selected?

In the section below, I take a closer look at the characteristics shared by the participants and attempt to construct a composite profile from which one might work when considering the efforts of other teachers who might one day find themselves in similar situations. It is important to note that any such profile is simply a model, a generalization based on participant responses; it is not intended as a prescription, formula, manual, or protocol to be used in making staffing decisions by teacher education programs or public-school districts. I follow the description of this composite profile with a brief comment on the role of characteristics not shared by participants.

This composite profile begins with a teacher who was born and raised in the American Southwest, who possesses an intimate knowledge of and interest in the cultures, languages, and history of the region, and who has witnessed or experienced various discriminatory practices long associated with the region. These experiences have eventually led the teacher to question and confront these practices at foundational levels. To do so, she engages in a critical interpretation of the history of the region, acknowledges and honors the region’s many cultures and languages, and embraces and affords equal status to the two colonial languages of the region: Spanish and English. This last includes the understanding that, although Spanish was spoken in the region for three hundred years before the arrival of the first speakers of English, and is therefore not considered a foreign language, it is no longer considered the dominant language of power and influence in the region (Gómez, 2007; Gonzáles-Berry, 2000).

These realities culminate in a concern for some of the most vulnerable in the region,
that is, Spanish-speaking children of color marginalized by discriminatory practices associated with the contact between cultures, languages, and histories of the region. The same realities that have led to this marginalization have also resulted in residence patterns whereby many if not most of these children live in communities and attend schools largely with other vulnerable, Spanish-speaking families of color. Concern for these children and their families, combined with a desire to give back or give to communities in need, has led the teacher to conclude that public schools are where she can make the greatest positive impact in their lives. She decides to become a dual-language teacher and an advocate.

The teacher-advocate accrues many years of experience while implementing a curriculum through Spanish and English that is oriented toward academic success, social-class mobility, and social justice. Eventually, however, she is forced to confront what are described as education “reforms,” many of which threaten to undermine her work. Consequently, she is obligated to muster various forms of resilience. These include: personal traits such as dedication and adaptability; changes in work responsibilities, work assignments, or professional status; mentoring others—or seeking to be mentored by others—confronting the same “reforms”; and asserting her education, experience, credentials, and knowledge (EECK) over those of the policy makers and administrators who create and promote the “reforms.” When resilience alone does not adequately lift the yoke of “reforms,” she engages in select resistance to throw it off. These strategies and others allow her to continue teaching and advocating even while other veteran dual-language teachers in similar schools leave in unprecedented numbers.

This composite teacher is a generalization based on characteristics common to all four participants in this study. Of course, individual participants possess characteristics
seemingly not shared by some or all of the others. These distinct characteristics serve to underline the differences among participants, which, in turn, create diversity with the composite model. Therefore, acknowledging that the model could be constructed and interpreted in many other ways, and that the model includes both similarities and differences among participants, I submit the following caveats.

The composite model is representative of teacher-advocates who have already proven they can continue their important work with vulnerable students despite education “reforms” that threaten to undermine their work and cause further harm to their students. Therefore, the characteristics and practices that comprise the composite model can be considered indicative of characteristics and practices that veteran, dual-language teachers may need in order to continue teaching in challenging contexts during challenging times.

The diversity in the characteristics not shared by all four participants may indicate that the pool of potential dual-language teacher-advocates from the region who can withstand the “reforms” is broader even than this small but diverse group suggests.
Chapter 8

Findings and Conclusion

As I conclude this study, I believe it is important I address three key areas. First, a review of Modern Critical Theory in light of the collective, cross-case profile presented by the participants. Second, the findings of this study and how they address the main research question and sub-questions. Third, final thoughts from the participants on how they manage to continue teaching.

Modern Critical Theory: A Second Look

This multi-case study is informed by Modern Critical Theory, defined by Lindlof and Taylor (2002) as “an ethically heightened and politically reflective study of the relationship between power, knowledge, and discourse that are produced in contexts of historical and cultural struggle” (p. 47). Such a definition has framed this study well. The teacher-advocates are not passive public employees, but thoughtful education professionals deeply engaged in ethically heightened and politically reflective deliberations associated with real, imminent, and sometimes threatening policies and “reforms” that frequently challenge their personal and professional practices and ideologies. Moreover, they are aware of how the power differential between policy makers and teachers often makes it more difficult for the latter to resist the policies of the former. Yet, instead of automatically capitulating to political power, these teachers use their individual and collective knowledge, experience, and discourse practices to develop ways of mitigating, neutralizing, and overcoming this power on behalf of their students and colleagues. As veteran teachers in particular, they possess historical perspectives on the cultural and political struggles experienced by teachers of the past and currently by their students and by themselves.
Furthermore, as critical thinkers with years of direct or indirect experience with social, economic, and political inequality, the teacher-advocates have demonstrated that they are well acquainted with the broader contexts and mechanisms that give rise to and maintain inequality. They are ever conscious of the macrostructural imbalances outside the school between the less privileged groups to which many of their students belong and the dominant and more privileged political and economic classes that establish the rules and retain the power in public education. This has been especially true since 2003, when the signing of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act at the national level initiated a sustained neoliberal takeover of the nation’s public schools (Lipman, 2011; Schneider, 2014; Ravitch, 2010).

Nevertheless, the teachers’ microstructural focus on the well-being of their students serves as a moral and ethical pole star that guides them through the rapid and often harmful changes in local and national education policy. To that end, they strive to advocate for those who, like their students, may be too young to know how they are being exploited, by whom, and how to respond. Like the relationship between Apple’s (2013) critical scholar-activist and the teachers with whom they collaborate, these critical teacher-advocates have developed ways to modify the curriculum, adapt to or evade unreasonable mandates, and resist harmful policies in order to improve the academic and personal lives of their students.

In reality, however, the participants’ efforts to challenge the educational, political, and economic power structures that affect their teaching are not always successful; even when successful, they are often constrained to the most local of levels: the classroom. Consequently, the broader power structures abide, a fact that contributes to the normalization of beliefs and practices associated with them. Regardless of whether one considers these beliefs and practices beneficial or harmful, the longer they are maintained, the more likely
they are to be considered normal, especially by those less familiar with previous beliefs, policies, and practices. Indeed, it has been my experience that many if not most teachers who began teaching after NCLB generally consider high-stakes standardized testing, data-driven instruction, punitive teacher evaluations, school letter grades, boxed-and-scripted curricula, the Common Core standards, the privatization of public schools, the disparagement of teachers’ unions, etc., as part and parcel of what it is to be a teacher today.

On the other hand, veteran teachers, like those in this study, either began teaching prior to the full implementation of NCLB and its “reform,” or, like Fatima, remained in constant contact with those who had: well-established teachers, such as her own mother, or the teachers of her children. Therefore, unlike beginning teachers, veteran teachers often possess an historical perspective on contemporary education that is as critical as it is valuable. Furthermore, the very notion of the normalization of education “reforms” may be more problematic for veteran teachers than for beginning teachers, as it requires the acceptance of replacing what they once considered normal and possibly superior with an inferior “new normal.” Awareness of other ways of teaching and learning is a quality veteran teachers can attach to the pole star that guides them through what many consider difficult and challenging times in public education in the United States. Paraphrasing the late American author Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.: an historical perspective on education is defensible and attractive. It is also a source of hope. It means teachers do not have to continue teaching this way if they do not like it.58

Finally, I believe one of the most important elements of Modern Critical Theory is the

58 Vonnegut’s actual words: “Cultural relativity is defensible and attractive. It’s also a source of hope. It means we don’t have to continue this way if we don’t like it.” (From the foreword to Free to Be You and Me, a children’s play published in 1973 by actress Marlo Thomas.)
humanization of the subject (Giroux, 2001), in this case, the four teacher-advocates. It is my hope that the earnestness with which I have listened to them, the care with which I have considered and portrayed their responses, and the respect and awe I have demonstrated for the people they are and the work they undertake are evidence enough that these teachers are not two-dimensional, anonymous cogs in the metaphorical machinery that is public education in the United States. Rather, they are complex and multi-dimensional people with histories: once children, later young adults, and eventually mature adults with jobs, families, and associated responsibilities. They possess myriad experiences, epistemologies, identities, emotions, opinions, beliefs, and interests, accrued through lifetimes as local and global citizens and as teachers in state-sponsored bureaucracies. Their names are Fatima, Julie, Selene, and Theo. They sleep, eat, walk, talk, teach, travel, and consume in the social, political, and economic contexts in which they live and work. And as they live and work, they do so conscientiously, critically, and thoughtfully in order to enrich not only their own lives, but those of their students. Socrates’ assertion that “the unexamined life is not worth living” is one well heeded by these teacher-advocates who continue to critically examine their personal and professional lives to the benefit of their students.

The Research Questions

Main research question: How do veteran, dual-language teachers in low-performing, Title I, new national demographic, urban, public elementary schools in the Southwest manage to continue teaching despite recent education “reform” initiatives that have contributed to accelerated rates of attrition among their peers?

To answer this question, it is important to understand why the participants decided to become professional educators in the first place. One reason, of course, was to teach math, language arts, science, and social studies to young children, with the goal of improving their
students’ chances for academic success in middle school, high school, and college, and in their adult lives afterwards. After all, this is what teachers do.

This is not, however, all these teachers do or set out to do. In addition to a desire to teach core academic content, the participants in this study also entered the profession out of concern for the well-being of young people of color who historically have progressed through the education system disadvantaged by social, political, and economic forces that render more difficult their own and their teachers’ efforts to achieve academic success. All four participants cite powerful experiences as children or as young adults as having motivated them to become not only teachers but advocates for their students. These experiences include having been children of color (Fatima, Selene) or working and going to school with children of color (Theo, Julie), marrying a person of color (Julie), experiencing the education of one’s own children of color (Fatima, Julie, Selene59), being the beneficiaries of advocacy (Fatima, Theo), having served as an advocate for others (Julie, Theo), and feeling obliged to give back or give to a community of color. The culmination of these experiences and obligations is the teacher-advocate.

Moreover, the primary tool or mechanism for the teacher-advocates is dual-language education. In addition to promoting bilingualism, affirming linguistic and cultural identity, decelerating or eliminating language loss, enhancing cognitive flexibility and functioning, and more, such programs afford Spanish-speaking students a right often taken for granted by their English-speaking peers: receiving essential academic instruction in their home language. Complementing dual-language education—though to varying degrees of intensity and frequency—is a second tool: social justice pedagogy. This tool is designed to help

59 Selene’s children consist of nieces, nephews, and godchildren.
students identify the various forces that work against their public-school education so they can develop effective strategies to confront them—now and in the future. Together, dual-language education and social justice pedagogy comprise the core work of these teacher-advocates.

Also contributing to the participants’ ability to remain teaching is the realization that if they do not advocate for their students and their families, perhaps no one will. Indeed, Fatima, Julie, and Theo all stated some version of the following: “If we do not stand up for our students and parents, who will?” Leaving the profession for any reason might risk leaving their students and their families without one of their strongest advocates and, in some cases, their only advocate. There is no guarantee the teacher who replaced them would have the knowledge, experience, and courage to navigate and confront the powerful political and cultural forces that threaten these vulnerable students’ daily lives. The surest way to guarantee effective advocacy for their students is for the participants to remain in the profession and continue teaching and advocating for their students.

As I have asserted throughout this study, the teacher side of the teacher-advocate has been under sustained attack since the signing of NCLB in 2003. This attack has taken a toll on the ability of teachers at all levels, including veteran teachers, to continue teaching. Many veteran teachers no longer recognize the profession they once knew and have decided to leave instead of continuing to be complicit in what they perceive as harmful education policy.

If teaching comprises the majority of one’s professional identity in the public schools, and if that identity is no longer recognizable or sustainable, it is understandable one might be tempted to either leave and seek a profession where expectations of one’s professional
identity aligned more closely with one’s professional duties and responsibilities, or retire from the professional workforce altogether. If, on the other hand, one’s identity in the public schools is defined as both teacher and advocate, it is conceivable this identity could serve to sustain or retain a teacher in the profession even when teaching cannot. Indeed, as teaching and learning in the classroom deteriorate and the harm to students increases, the role of advocate might emerge as even more important and the need to remain in the profession even stronger, if for no other reason than to protect students from further harm.

Of course, one could argue that the conflict between teaching and advocacy could lead some teacher-advocates to leave the profession. Continuing to teach while one’s personal and professional identities remain in conflict might feel hypocritical and, therefore, untenable (Beltman, et al., 2011). The extra advocacy efforts might increase anger and frustration toward “reforms” and accelerate burnout (Cahnmann & Varghese, 2005). For others, however, the conflict could lead to a desire to enhance both teaching and advocacy. That is, perceived threats to teaching and learning might have the effect of strengthening their resolve to teach in ways that confront the threats while increasing the duration of their advocacy efforts on behalf of students. Fatima’s statement is representative of the group’s long-term perspective on teaching and advocacy:

I agree that these are hard times. There’s everything against us right now . . . [we are] faced with a society that might not be educated if we don’t continue to fight for that. I went to school already. I already spent . . . time building and becoming what I want to be. [I] might as well stay in this and continue to bring justice to the most vulnerable population, which are [our] children. (Fatima2, March 18, 2017)

The participants’ resolve to continue teaching and advocating is further enhanced by the practice of choosing their battles carefully (Patterson, et al., 2004). As a result, they often win. Fatima’s efforts to remove an abusive principal, Julie’s opposition to irresponsible and
potentially harmful changes to her school’s dual-language program, Selene’s challenges to unreasonable curriculum mandates, and Selene’s and Theo’s refusal to participate in test preparation are examples of carefully chosen battles. In most cases, gaining the support of teachers or parents and supporting their cause with data, research, and precedents constitute a winning formula. When a teacher acts alone, as in the case of Theo’s opposition to the Baldrige plan, the chances of prevailing are greatly reduced.

It is reasonable to consider what might happen if conscientious teachers were never to go to battle over policies they believed were harmful to them and their students. Indeed, they might find their teaching practice so compromised they would decide it was not worth teaching anymore. Likewise, choosing to fight every battle might lead to some wins and some losses, but the weariness induced by endless battles might well overtax one’s strength and stamina such that burnout would become an imminent threat to one’s career (Cahnmann & Varghese, 2005). On the other hand, choosing to go to battle only over issues one believes present the greatest threats to one’s practice—and, due to an abundance of data, knowledge, and evidence are also highly winnable—carries the possibility of preventing battle fatigue and burnout while simultaneously injecting hope and encouragement through each win. This is what I believe these teachers do well and represents another reason they are still teaching while others have left.

Sometimes unanticipated historical events contribute to one’s resilience, longevity, and advocacy on behalf of others. I believe this is what happened with the 2016 presidential election. The four participants consider the election of Donald Trump nothing short of an existential threat, not only to their work as teachers, but to the lives of their students and their students’ families. Selene expressed how she became “totally depressed” as she worried
about the future of dual-language education, public education, and the ability of her immigrant students to remain in the United States. Theo said he had “pray[ed] to God that Trump will last only four years” (FG2b, April 19, 2017), fearing the worst even before Trump took the oath of office. Julie felt it necessary to invite a local immigrants’ rights non-profit organization to the school to inform families of their rights as U.S. residents and what the government’s various immigration agencies can and cannot do to them. Again, Fatima’s words seem to represent the collective reaction to the election of Donald Trump:

I was so disappointed . . . oh my God! We just went back fifty or sixty years in history. So, what’s going to be my responsibility? Go back to the classroom and pick it up where I thought I had finished my civil rights [unit]. I know I’m not done! You’re never going to be done. You’re going to have to empower those kids because those are the targets. I am a target and my kids are, too. (Fatima1b, November 19, 2016)

The participants were dedicated to their advocacy efforts on behalf of their students prior to November 2016. They may have become more dedicated after January 20, 2017, when the new president began implementing his anti-immigrant policies. One effect these policies may have had on the participants was to broaden their perspectives on their own advocacy efforts. Whereas previously they may have perceived their efforts as primarily logistical and practical in nature and occurring in local or regional contexts, they currently seem to perceive their efforts as more moral and ethical in nature and occurring on a national scale. The lives of their students and thousands like them across the country are now at stake and teacher neutrality on immigration issues for many teachers in the Southwest and elsewhere may no longer be considered an option—if it ever was. Ultimately, instead of inducing these teacher-advocates to retreat, the clear and present danger to immigrant families emanating from the nation’s capital seems to have fortified the teachers’ dedication to their work such that they feel an even stronger obligation to continue teaching and
advocating for at least as long as the current president occupies the White House.

**Research sub-question number 1:** What personal and professional factors influenced veteran dual-language teachers’ decisions to choose to teach and continue to teach in low-performing, new national demographic, urban public elementary schools?

All four participants indicate that significant events and experiences in childhood or young adulthood had a bearing on their decision not only to teach, but to teach in schools that are commonly considered “high needs.” Fatima witnessed the benefits she and her classmates accrued because the cultural and linguistic identities of their teachers aligned closely with those of their students. As she noticed her desire to teach grow stronger, she became increasingly convinced that what others provided for her, she needed to provide for others. Though she cannot give back directly to the school she attended, she can give back indirectly by giving back to one very much like it.

St. James is the “upgraded” version of the school I attended as a child. It not only values bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy, but it also empowers parents, regardless of their English proficiency, to advocate for themselves and their children. Therefore, when I found this school, I saw that it was simply the “dreamland” of dual-language education. I have been [here] for eleven years now. (FatimaQ, November 6, 2016)

She was also aware that some children were not as advantaged as she was in terms of economic or legal status. A sense of duty and reciprocity compelled her to choose dual-language programs in high needs schools in which to teach. As a professional, she feels her initial impulses and motivations have been affirmed such that she cannot conceive of teaching in schools populated primarily by students who are advantaged and even privileged relative to her own.

Selene’s cultural and linguistic identities decidedly did not align with those of her teachers. She says, “There was not much that we did . . . that was based on any part of my culture, whether it was Mexican or [Hispanic]. It was based mostly on the ‘American
culture,’ [the] Anglo experience’” (Selene1a, November 29, 2016). Although she believes she benefited from their expertise and their faith in her ability to succeed despite not being a “natural” at school-based learning, she became increasingly aware of the fact that, at a more fundamental level, her teachers did not really know or understand her. She grew up wondering how much more she might have achieved, how much faster she might have achieved it, and especially how much more meaningful the learning might have been had she had teachers who reflected her Hispanic and Mexican American identities. She wonders as well how richer her overall education might have been had her parents decided to enroll her in a program where at least some core content was taught in Spanish. In much the same way Fatima was motivated to give to others what she received, Selene was motivated to give to others what she did not receive. As a professional educator, Selene has spent over twenty years affirming her commitment to students in high-needs schools.

While working with adult immigrants as a VISTA volunteer, Julie realized that much of what she had taken for granted in public education was challenging for others, especially for those who had emigrated to the United States from developing countries. She recognized the fundamental importance of education to immigrants’ overall success and how essential language was to receiving a good education. Her concern for the well-being of immigrant children, her awareness of a shortage of teachers in the bilingual programs in which the children were enrolled, and a desire to leverage her privileges for the benefit of others led her to become a bilingual teacher.

In that way I just think I’ve always taken things for granted and I was able to help people that weren’t more recent immigrants or more newcomers that didn’t have that structure in place, helping build that structure as well. (Julie1a, November 22, 2016)

Later, when her decision to teach children of color was called into question by some who
insinuated that an Anglo teacher might not be the best choice, she interpreted the insinuation as a challenge and dedicated herself even more to her practice in an effort to prove them wrong (Yosso, 2006). After a decade and a half teaching in such schools, Julie cannot conceive of teaching in more “affluent” schools. She has dedicated her career to giving to a community that is not imbued with the privileges she has always enjoyed.

Theo realized as a young boy that he had cultural and linguistic advantages his Mexican American classmates did not. Therefore, after transitioning from the wholesale jewelry business to education, he felt compelled to provide for his Mexican American students what his former classmates did not have: instruction in Spanish in order to have the same access to the curriculum as did the English-speaking students. Theo was further motivated to teach disadvantaged students by his experiences as a gay boy growing up in the hyper-heterosexual world of ranching. As a member of a group that is often relegated to the margins of social life, he feels an affinity with the immigrant students, who often find themselves on the margins, as well, and need support from dominant groups to overcome the forces working against them.

It’s the same thing as a gay man. It was thanks to really strong allies, too, because gay people as a percentage of the population are so small that we could never engender any change, it if was just us. It is because we had allies. And good allies are worth their weight in gold. And I figure I’m an ally in bilingual education. That’s my job. (Theo2, April 6, 2017)

Teaching in schools populated in large part by disadvantaged students gives Theo a mission, a way to convert his racial, linguistic, and socio-economic privileges into services he can subsequently give to a community in need.

**Research sub-question number 2:** What effect have recent state and national school “reform” initiatives had on veteran dual-language teachers’ decisions to continue teaching in low-performing, new national demographic, urban public elementary schools?
The main effect education “reforms” have had on the participants’ decisions to continue teaching in such schools has been essentially to reinforce their resolve to remain. While the “reforms” have presented numerous and difficult challenges to their respective practices, the “reforms” have not yet forced these teachers out of the profession. In fact, an argument could be made that the “reforms” have had the opposite effect. That is, because many “reforms” pose clear and present dangers to teachers and students, the desire to stay and fight, protect, and advocate is all the stronger. And, as I state above, periodic and hard-won victories against select “reforms” provide inspiration and experience for future battles.

Three of four participants stated that only an end to dual-language education would make them consider leaving the profession earlier than they had planned. Fatima added that a serious salary reduction might force her to consider seeking other employment. And Julie stated that she might leave only if she felt she was no longer “making a difference,” for as long as there are immigrant children attending public schools during a presidential administration that continues to implement immigration policies hostile to their families, making a difference in the lives of young children will likely continue to be necessary and gratifying.

Research sub-question number 3: *What effect has the recent increased rate of retirements and resignations among veteran teachers in general had on the decision by the participants to continue teaching in low-performing, NND urban public schools?*

The effect has been minimal on Fatima, possibly because she is not aware of veteran teachers at her school who have left prematurely. Credible reports of such attrition in other schools, however, have served primarily to steel her resolve, to remind her that she has always considered teaching a calling, a vocation, something she was destined to do and continue doing for her entire professional life. On a practical level, she understands why
veteran teachers might leave the profession before they had anticipated, but she cannot conceive of doing it herself. She considers harmful “reforms” the result of harmful politics and, as her mother has reminded her many times over the years, political trends come and go; it is simply a matter of waiting them out. So, though she does not say so explicitly, it seems Fatima believes she possesses some qualities others may not and, if they had them, perhaps they would still be teaching.

Selene is also more emboldened than threatened by the idea of teachers leaving due to the stresses of teaching, including those related to “reforms.” If teaching has always been a teacher’s one, true passion, then she simply will not leave early. Therefore, she was conflicted when a veteran colleague left classroom teaching to accept the position of bilingual special education diagnostician. Selene reports that the colleague found the new position less rewarding than that of a classroom teacher, but at least it involved less stress and the colleague never felt she had to bring work home. Selene exhorted the colleague to return to teaching, where the work would indeed be more difficult, but where she would be infinitely happier. The colleague responded that she was awaiting her first child and that the diagnostician’s position might be more conducive to parenthood. Selene agrees with Fatima that teachers may leave for multiple reasons and that pressure from education “reforms” might simply represent the straw that breaks their proverbial backs.

Theo reports that he usually finds out about veteran teacher resignations or early retirements in August, when he returns to work only to find out that several veteran teachers are missing. His explanation is that they chose to slip quietly out the back door rather than make some sort of public pronouncement about their dissatisfaction. This does not stop him, however, from speculating on the reasons behind their “Irish good-bye.” Becoming
overwhelmed with paperwork, exhausted with student trauma behaviors, and frustrated with incessant policy changes at central office are some of the reasons he has heard about. One teacher in particular had pointed out that various layers of education bureaucracies continued to overwhelm her with mandates such that she felt she could not survive one more. She left quietly over the summer.

For her part, Julie did not offer much on the topic other than to say that the capricious, arbitrary, and punitive nature of the teacher evaluation is all one really needs to offer in terms of an explanation for leaving the profession early.

**Research sub-question number 4:** *What strategies have veteran dual-language teachers developed to deal with, cope with, overcome, or resist challenges or threats to their commitment to teaching?*

As I explain in Chapter 7, the participants employ various strategies of resilience and sometimes resistance in order to continue teaching during difficult times. First among these strategies is personal traits. Dedication (commitment, a sense of “calling”) and adaptability (flexibility) are traits shared by all four participants. Another four traits are shared by different pairs of participants. Whatever the trait in question, the participants relate that it is important to their ability to continue teaching.

Having had a mentor in the early years of teaching was instrumental to the participants’ ability to reach the middle and veteran stages of their careers. Mentoring others has been important in terms of continuing as veteran teachers, as well. This is especially true for Fatima, Selene, and Theo. Mentoring new and mid-career teachers has had the effect of forcing Fatima to reflect on and follow the counsel she gives others. Selene explains the importance of choosing one’s mentors based on specific needs. She describes a three-tiered system of veteran teacher mentoring. Theo’s work with prospective teachers as a supervisor
in a post-baccalaureate teacher certification program was a highlight of his career, one that injected important new motivation and inspiration into his own teaching.

Dedication to their respective schools and dual-language programs is an especially important and meaningful reality for the four participants, as is advocating for the students enrolled in them. The participants chose these schools and programs in which to teach and cannot conceive of teaching in any other context, especially in schools in affluent areas where students’ basic needs, compared to those of their own students, are largely met. “I teach where I teach by choice” (Julie), “I would not teach anywhere else” (Fatima), and “this is where I belong” (Selene) (FG1b, March 1, 2017) are statements that aptly describe the participants’ dedication to the places and the people they teach.

Education, experience, credentials, and knowledge (EECK) are important to teacher resilience. Each participant is convinced she or he is better educated, has more relevant experience, possesses more specialized credentials, and is more knowledgeable than the policy makers and many administrators who either design and mandate harmful “reforms” or expend great energy in assuring they are implemented. Fatima describes EECK as a shield that protects her and her students from the misguided actions of others. Theo expresses frustrations about having to assert his EECK again and again in order to prove to others with less EECK that he knows what he is talking about. In sum, the participants derive confidence and fortitude from their EECK.

Changing grade levels, schools, positions in schools, or taking any sort of break from the stresses of classroom life, including the stresses induced by the imposition of “reforms,” contributed to the participants’ abilities to continue teaching during difficult times. Only Theo experienced change that removed him from classroom life; he was a supervisor in a
post-baccalaureate teacher certification program and later served two years as an assistant principal. The rest of the changes experienced by him and the other participants occurred within the context of teaching or were supplemental to it, such as pursuing a master’s degree or serving as a math trainer for the district. Incidentally, mentoring was also considered a type of change, but seemed to be more of a long-term and indispensable professional strategy than a temporary diversion from regular routine.

Resilience strategies are one way the participants have managed to remain in their chosen profession. Resistance strategies are another. Whereas resilience is a means of surviving by enduring negative stimuli, resistance is a means of surviving by confronting, rejecting, and replacing the negative stimuli. Resistance is accomplished differently by each participant as they select which battles to wage and how to wage them. One form of resistance involves waging battles through and against changes in the curriculum they believe are potentially harmful to their students. They defy directives to cease teaching subjects that do not appear on the annual high-stakes standardized tests (Fatima, Julie, Theo). They increase their teaching of social justice issues so that their students are aware of how education “reforms” might be harming them and can take steps to resist them as they progress through K-12 public education (Fatima, Julie). They organize their colleagues to challenge the fidelity expectations of boxed-and-scripted curricula (Selene).

Resistance also takes the form of confronting the mandates and directives of policy makers and administrators. For example, Selene and Theo resist suggestions or directives to participate in test prep. Julie uses research and data to stop an administrative effort to “dilute” the 90-10 dual-language program. Julie also refuses to administer supplemental and redundant testing. Fatima works with colleagues and parents to rid the school of a harmful
and sometimes abusive principal. Finally, Theo confronts and discredits corporate “reform” surrogates invited to the school by administrators in an attempt to corporatize the school culture. Though for any given issue the participants are more likely to employ strategies of resilience than resistance, they will engage in the latter when they believe they are faced with an existential threat to their cherished profession—and when they believe they can win. In most cases, winning has enhanced the teachers’ confidence and affirmed their belief that they are doing what is right and moral for themselves and for their students.

Sub-question number 5: What recommendations do veteran dual-language teachers have for peers who may be contemplating resigning or taking early retirement due to the pressures of education “reforms”?

Fatima’s response to this question is clear: veteran teachers must insist that administrators and policy makers “[listen] to teachers’ concerns in many different aspects” and “[allow] teachers to have a voice” (FG2a, April 19, 2017). One of her main objections to education “reforms” has been the marginalization of teachers’ voices, knowledge, and expertise from fora where the most important decisions about education are made. She has noticed how this marginalization has contributed to a reduction in teacher autonomy and professionalism as it has attempted to relegate teachers to a compliant workforce whose only job is to implement the misguided designs of corporate “reformers.” If veteran teachers like Fatima do not speak up and assert their rights, knowledge, and expertise, the powerful voices of corporate “reform” are sure to be those that will be heard.

Julie’s main recommendation is similar but focuses on the moral and professional obligations of principals and district administrators to “push back against the state . . . because when their message to you is just, ‘This is what the state says, do it!’ it’s not really a good message” (FG2a, April 19, 2017). Her recommendation to veteran teachers is to hold
administrators’ feet to the fire in such a way that makes them accountable to the students and teachers they are supposed to support. If administrators are truly concerned about the teaching and learning that takes place in their schools, they will resist bad policy mandated by the state or federal government, even if they have to do so surreptitiously and even if it means risking a reprimand or even dismissal. Julie believes teachers are obligated to provide the best education to students, not to please policy makers who often know so very little about education.

Selene agrees with Julie that teachers have an obligation to transform the relationship between teachers and administrators such that it is reciprocal, not unilateral. Just as administrators operate under the expectation that teachers will comply with their directives, so should teachers operate under the expectation that administrators will defend and support teachers’ requests for support when teachers resist what they believe are harmful policies. Selene believes this is particularly necessary in regard to support for dual-language programs. District and state administrators can be adept at the rhetoric that leads one to believe they are supportive of these programs; in truth, however, “they’re not putting their money where their mouth is in terms of what the reality is” (FG2a, April 19, 2017).

Theo recommends that no matter how difficult it can be to continually demand equal status and materials for dual-language programs, teachers invested in these programs should never give up. When Theo insisted he receive materials in English and in Spanish for the math curriculum the district went to great lengths to adopt and implement, an administrator asked him, “Do you know how much this [would] cost?!” To which Theo replied, “Yes, it costs! But that’s what you get when you have agreed to support dual-language programs!” (FG2a, April 19, 2017). He believes that once administrators and others in the curriculum
supply chain are no longer hearing the voices of those who support these programs, they assume all is well, which allows the practices, materials, and content of the English-dominant curriculum to gradually resurface and dominate once again.

The participants seem to understand that many of the strategies of resilience that got them this far in their careers are also employed by other veteran teachers; otherwise, the teachers might not have reached this stage in their careers. What may be missing for some veteran teachers is the desire to go to battle, to engage in strategic resistance. Therefore, the essential recommendation the participants would give to veteran teachers in order to continue teaching in the era of “reform” is this: fight the battles where you believe your teaching practices face the greatest threats, and do not give up. If you give up, you will likely lose, and if you lose, you will be at greater risk of succumbing to the temptation to leave the profession to which you have dedicated so much of your time, EECK, interest, and energy.

**The End of the Line**

At the end of the first focus group I asked the participants to bring to the second focus group an artifact, a physical object they believed symbolized their ability to continue teaching during what they believed were challenging times. Though she forgot to bring it, Fatima’s artifact was the book *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho. It is about a young boy from Spain who, after meeting a wise man with a vision, creates a plan to travel across northern Africa to Egypt where the wise man suggested he would find a treasure. This plan becomes his “personal legend.” The boy eventually reaches Egypt, but only after encountering and overcoming obstacles he could never have anticipated. Several of the obstacles threaten to prevent him from reaching his destination. Fatima sees herself in the boy. While fighting back tears, she explained that the adventure of becoming a teacher presented many obstacles,
any one of which was capable of diverting her from her path. One early and significant
obstacle in her life was becoming a mother when she was nineteen.

I read it the first time when I was nineteen. So, I had just had my first child. And it
might make me a little— [pauses to wipe tears]. Because I identified with him . . . I
had a plan, like we all do when we finish high school. But then I got a blessing, my
daughter, and I wasn’t expecting that. So, this book is about that. It’s about the
obstacles that come in the way: maybe good, maybe bad. But it’s how you interpret
them and how you create your personal legend, is what it’s all about. (FG2b, April
19, 2017)

Fatima read the book a second time after her nineteen-year-old daughter informed Fatima
that she had just read the book for the first time. Fatima’s second reading of the book
convinced her that she had followed her personal legend to its ultimate and fulfilling
destination: teaching. After completing a journey despite so many obstacles, how could she
turn back?

Julie submitted a photo of her niece, dressed in her cap and gown after graduating
with honors from Loyola Marymount in Los Angeles. Her niece is a DACA\(^{60}\) student who
was awarded free tuition, room and board, and transportation to attend college. Julie
explained that her niece “blossomed in dual language programs . . . I show my students this
[photo], too. You can do this! She . . . makes me remember that, yes, this is how it works,
and the program is—” at which point Selene interjected, with emotion, “The prize! It’s your
prize! Keep your eyes on the prize!” (FG2b, April 19, 2017). Julie agreed and added that
each time she thinks of her niece, she thinks of each of her students and her own children, as
well. “You know they can get there, too. That this is why we’re here in the
classroom. What we’re doing is going to get them [there]” (FG2b, April 19, 2017).

\(^{60}\) Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, an executive memorandum issued by President Barack
Obama in 2012 that allowed some undocumented children brought to the U.S. by their parents to take
advantage of a renewable two-year deferral from deportation in order to attend school or obtain a
work permit.
The presentation of artifacts remained emotional. Selene presented dozens of class and individual photographs of students she has taught over the years and proclaimed, “These are the reasons I have stayed” (FG2b, April 19, 2017). She then added, with a note of poignancy, that “there [are] special ones . . . in here who’ve passed away.” She pointed to a class photo and asked Fatima if she recognized one girl in particular. Fatima recognized the girl and also recognized her own daughter, who happened to have been a student in the class at the same time. Selene explained that the girl who had passed away had “gone to another place” and that the little notes and drawings Selene had spread out on the table were those the girl had given her. Selene ended the presentation of her artifacts with a reference to a brother and sister in one of the photos whose father, she estimated, earned between two and three hundred thousand dollars a year, an anomalous occurrence at her school. On the last day of school, the parents of the brother and sister met Selene in the school’s atrium and gave her a large, beautiful, and apparently expensive plant as thanks for all she had done for their children. Two mothers of other children in Selene’s class were in the atrium and witnessed the act. These mothers did not come from the kind of wealth possessed by the parents who gifted the plant. They said, “Maestra, no podemos darle nada. No tenemos para darle. Pero muchas—.”

They were crying. We were all just bawling tears, just totally—. And these were kids that kind of struggled. Both of them, one in special ed and one going through the process. And, I mean, that moment, out of any moment, that’s the moment I’m going to remember. When it’s the final day, that’s what I’m going to remember: [the two moms], just showing their appreciation. (FG2b, April 19, 2017)

Theo presented his artifact first by explaining that doing so was going to make him vulnerable to the others present. For that reason, he had debated for some time whether or

61 “Teacher, we have nothing to give you. We have nothing to give. But many [thanks]—.”
not to share his artifact. At the last minute, he decided to do so. He explained, “A couple of years ago, I almost didn’t make it out of this world on my own. Part of it was professional, some of it was personal. I also have a semicolon tattoo, which is life after the semicolon.” He then produced a pill bottle, stripped of its label, and placed it on the table. “And medicine has helped me still be in this profession, still on this planet, so I had to bring that. This is why I’m still here, I think” (FG2b, April 19, 2017). He went on to explain:

And a lot of therapy along the way . . . And I think the last few years with the evaluations and things, there was just a variety of factors that really pushed me to the edge of whether I could handle it or not. And I’m glad I, yeah, this worked, it works for me. (FG2b, April 19, 2017)

Self-imposed pressure to do the right thing as a teacher, while repeatedly being directed by policy makers and administrators to do the wrong thing, created high levels of stress and anxiety for Theo. Augmented by multiple personal challenges, the stress and anxiety became life-threatening. Ultimately, staying in the profession—and staying alive on this earth—were beyond his human powers. He sought help through modern medicine and therapy and eventually pulled through. Instead of being weakened, intimidated, and frightened by this experience, however, the teacher and person who emerged from it was stronger, bolder, and more resolved than ever to do the right thing in the challenging era of “reform.”

The presentation of the artifacts was the last shared experience of this study. It represented the culmination of the time I had spent with the participants and the time we had all spent together. None of us knew beforehand what the others were going to bring. Yet, what seemed like a random collection of objects coalesced into a fitting metaphor for this study.

Fatima’s book describes a “personal legend,” a life goal, a calling one ignores at one’s peril. The participants accomplish their personal legends by means of a sometimes-
perilous journey that culminates in the fulfillment of a dream to be teachers and advocates in communities where their interests, talents, knowledge and even privileges can do the most good for the greatest number of people. The powers of resilience and resistance acquired through the journey strengthen and support their dedication to the work they undertake once they arrive at their destination. Julie’s niece and Selene’s students represent the many successes that are the products of that hard work and dedication undertaken at the destination.

But reaching the destination does not necessarily signify the end of the challenges the teachers face while fulfilling their personal legends. Remaining conscientious teacher-advocates at a destination that is often under attack can strain one’s patience, faith, and resolve. Therefore, extraordinary measures sometimes must be considered in order to maintain one’s ground. Theo’s medication and therapy represent not only life-saving actions, but the extremes to which teacher-advocates are sometimes driven in order to remain true to their personal legends. While some teacher-advocates leave the current destination in search of those that might present fewer challenges to their personal legends, Fatima, Julie, Selene, and Theo bid them farewell, then return to the work they cannot—at least for now—conceive of living without.
APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A: Glossary

Anglo = Although the word implies Anglo-Saxon ancestors from the United Kingdom, the term is applied widely to white people of European ancestry in the Southwest who speak English as their first language. It is used to differentiate this group from those who consider themselves racially white, but whose European ancestors lived in Spain, not the United Kingdom.

Attrition = “A gradual diminution in number or strength due to constant stress” (American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd Ed.). “Gradually reducing the strength or effectiveness of someone or something through sustained attack or pressure,” as well as “the gradual reduction of a workforce by employees leaving and not being replaced rather than by their being laid off (New Oxford American Dictionary, 2013).”

Beginning teacher = A teacher who is within the probationary period of employment, usually three to five years.

Bilingual education = An educational context where more than one instructional language (or languages) is shared and used by teachers and their students. This includes dual-language education. All dual-language programs are bilingual programs, but not all bilingual programs are dual-language programs. The five types of bilingual programs provided in the state where the participants in this study teach are: Dual-Language Immersion Model, Enrichment Model, Heritage Language Model, Maintenance Model, and Transitional Model. Details for each program type can be found beginning on page 30 of the Bilingual Multicultural Education Bureau (BMEP) Technical Assistance Manual (https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/BMEP_TAM_2016_05.11.17.pdf)

Corporatization = The neoliberal trend toward incorporating into or imposing onto the public schools the structures and practices of the corporate (business) world. The assumption is that schools are like businesses, with workers and products, and therefore should be run like businesses. Corporatization includes privatization, or the use of public funds designated for public schools to purchase products (e.g., standardized tests, boxed-and-scripted curricula, tutoring services) from the private spheres of the economy.

Dual-language education = A form of bilingual education where students are exposed to instruction and content in two languages. The standard model consists of two speech communities, one whose first language is the second language of the other group. Students learn their “target” language by receiving instruction in it and by emulating the language practices of the native speakers of that language. The class is either taught by one teacher, who is bilingual and who teaches in both languages, or is taught by two teachers, one who teaches in one language and the other who teaches in the other language. The ratio of minority to majority languages are usually either a uniform 50-50 throughout the program and across grade levels, or begin at 90-10 at kindergarten, with a ten percent increase in the
use of majority language each year until a “permanent” 50-50 ratio is achieved in or around fourth grade.

**Education “reform”** = For the purposes of this study, “reform” includes policies that were mandated, enforced, incentivized, initiated, or made necessary by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, Race To The Top initiative in 2010, the Every Child Succeeds Act of 2015, and other, similar policies at the state and local levels. “Reforms” also include private and societal trends and practices related to these policies. They include but are not limited to the privatization and corporatization of public schools, high stakes standardized testing, test-based school letter grades, test-based school turnarounds or closures, a prioritization of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math) at the expense of literature and the arts, a consequential narrowing of the curriculum, standardized teacher evaluations, an increase in the standardization and digitalization of corporate-sponsored instructional platforms, blaming teachers and their unions for perceived shortcomings in public education, expansion of semi-private charter schools, flat or reduced teacher salaries, implementation of the privately authored and financed Common Core “State” Standards (CCSS), recruitment of “reform”-minded administrators, and dramatic increases in teacher paperwork and accountability.

**Emergent bilingual (EB)** = a concept and term developed by education researcher Ofelia Garcia as a response to the term English learner, which implies learning English as the goal of bilingual education, *not* the learning of English *and* the continued learning of one’s home language. Emergent bilingual recognizes, validates, and supports the *bilingual* development of the student, not only his or her English development.

**English as a second language (ESL)** = This term applies when immigrants from non-English-speaking countries emigrate to English-speaking countries and learn English in a formalized setting after their arrival.

**English learner** = Also, English language learner or ELL. One whose home language is not English but who is learning English, usually in a school setting.

**High stakes** = Usually applied to standardized tests, this term describes the “be all and end all” importance of testing to determine nearly all decisions regarding education: teacher effectiveness, student achievement, school rankings, funding, and more. The stakes are high because all other measures are minimized or discarded.

**Hispanic** = Usually (but not always) synonymous with Latino, or a person whose ancestors came to the Western Hemisphere from Spain 400-500 years ago and likely intermarried with indigenous groups. In order to differentiate oneself from those who identify as Mexican American, the term Hispanic (or “Spanish”) is sometimes used by those whose ancestors settled in what is now the U.S. *before* Mexican independence in 1810.

**Low performing** = Usually applied to schools, this term is used to describe schools whose collective student test scores average less than the range designated as “proficient” or higher. Under NCLB, this indicated schools that did not see annual yearly progress (AYP). Virtually no measures other than high stakes standardized tests are considered in determining whether
a school is high-, medium-, or low-performing. After the state implemented and ABCDF school grading system, ninety percent of which was based on student test scores, the term low-performing was applied to any school that received a “D” or “F” grade from the state Department of Education.

**Mexican American** = In the Southwest, this term is used widely by those whose parents or grandparents immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico, which implies the period from after Mexico’s independence from Spain in 1810 to the present.

**Mid-career teacher** = For the purposes of this study, a teacher who is no longer in the three- to five-year probationary period but who has not yet taught for ten years.

**Mobility** = As applied to teachers, those who remain in education but who move between schools, other educational institutions, school districts, states and various positions within.

**New national demographic (NND)** = This term refers to the fact that, as of September, 2014, the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) estimated that the majority of students enrolled in U.S. public schools were children of color, an increasing number of whom do not speak English upon entering kindergarten. Schools where children of color outnumber Anglo students reflect this new national demographic (NND). I use this term because “minority-majority” no longer seems to apply; the former numeric minority in the public schools is now the numeric majority. “Culturally diverse” also did not describe the schools where the study’s participants teach, since their schools and many like them are more ethnically and racially homogenous than diverse. A school can be ethnically or racially homogenous and still reflect the new national demographic.

**PHLOTE** = Primary Home Language Other Than English. This is a slightly more asset-oriented term than “non-English-speaking.”

**Privatization** = The use of public funds to purchase materials and services from the private sector, including the use of these funds for private school vouchers or for the establishment of semi-private charter schools. In the past, the private influence in public education was relegated primarily to the purchase of textbooks from publishing companies. Today, virtually every facet of public education has been privatized, to greater and lesser degrees.

**Resilience** = Coping with, overcoming, adapting to, and bouncing back from adversity and challenges (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011), recovering one’s strength and spirit in the face of adversity (Gu & Day, 2007), or “a personal characteristic that enables individuals to ‘stay the course’ despite difficulties they encounter” (Brunetti, 2006, p. 813).

**Resistance** = The rejection of adverse forces, accompanied by an attempt to replace those forces with what the resistor believes is a better plan of action. I assert that an element of risk to the resistor may also be an important element of resistance, one that differentiates resistance from resilience.
Retention and auto-retention = Retention implies an external force that is applied to a person or an object so that the person or object remains. As applied to teachers, this might include a school’s, a district’s, or a union’s attempt to prevent teachers from resigning, or retiring early. Auto-retention, on the other hand, implies an internal force within a person that results in the person remaining, especially when leaving is a viable and attractive option. As applied to teachers, auto-retention would involve strategies employed by the teachers themselves to continue teaching, despite forces that seem to be propelling them toward leaving the profession.

School letter grades = These are the A, B, C, D, and F grades applied annually and publicly to schools by the state Department of Education. Ninety percent of a school’s letter grade is determined by the aggregated results of annual high-stakes standardized student test results. In the district where the four participants teach, ninety percent of a school’s letter grade is based on the school’s standardized test scores. An “A” grade is considered exemplary and an “F” grade failing. A school’s grade is lowered by one letter if the school fails to attain the ninety-five percent student participation rate (i.e., if the school has an “opt-out” rate of over five percent). The school grading system in the state was abolished in 2019.

Three-tiered licensure = In the district where the four participants teach, the tiers consist of beginning/probationary teacher (Tier I), permanent (tenured) teacher (Tier II), and school or instructional leader (Tier III). Moving from one tier to another involves submitting a comprehensive portfolio of student work and teacher practices. Minimum salary levels are linked to each tier and are further modified by years of service.

Title I = A U.S. Department of Education program that provides extra, targeted funding to schools where forty percent or more of the students are members of families whose incomes are below the federal poverty level (FPL), which is $25,750 for a family of four. In light of the fact that poverty levels at Title I schools can range from forty to one hundred percent, some schools are considered by educators and policy makers as “poorer” than others.

Transitional bilingual program = A program that typically begins with 90% instruction in the minority language in K decreases by 10% each year until middle school or high school, when instruction occurs entirely in English.

Veteran teacher = A teacher who has taught for ten years or more. This is my definition, one that I defined specifically for this study. School districts, policy makers, administrators, and others have defined veteran as a teacher with as few as five years’ experience. I felt this was not enough to qualify one as a veteran. See Beginning and Mid-Career teachers, above.
APPENDIX B: Questions for the questionnaire

1. How do you identify yourself in terms of race, ethnicity and/or culture? How have these identities evolved over time? What role did these identities play in your decision to become a teacher? How did these identities affect your decision to teach in this school?

2. How do you identify yourself in terms of language? How have your linguistic identities evolved over time? What role did these linguistic identities play in your decision to become a teacher? How did these linguistic identities affect your decision to teach in this school?

3. How do you identify yourself in terms of social class? How have your social class identities evolved over time? What role did these social class identities play in your decision to become a teacher? How did these social class identities affect your decision to teach in this school?

4. What influence did the identities you described above have on your experiences as a K-12 student and later in college?
APPENDIX C: Questions for the first interview

1. Tell me more about your family of origin: where you were born, where grew up, with whom, etc. Tell me about the family you have formed or created as an adult.

2. How long have you been a teacher? How long have you taught in the public schools? What grades have you taught? What programs? What languages? What student demographic groups?

3. Tell me about what and who influenced you in terms of choosing teaching as a profession. Why did you ultimately decide to teach? Did you have a profession prior to teaching? If so, explain why you changed professions.

4. Tell me about the personal and professional factors that influenced your decision to choose to teach and continue to teach primarily children of color, English learners, in a public-school dual-language program with a “D” or “F” grade?

5. What are your feelings regarding the election of Donald Trump and what it may mean for you and your students?

6. What challenges/impediments to teaching, learning, and professional growth do you face from within your district, on the one hand, and from outside the district, on the other?

7. What do you think of when you hear the term education “reform”? What influence has each of these reforms had on your teaching? How have these “reforms” influenced your decision to continue teaching in this school?
APPENDIX D: Questions for the second interview

1. Resilience has been defined variously as coping with or overcoming adversity, recovering one’s strength and spirit in the face of adversity, or staying the course despite when confronted with adversity. Can you think of ways in which you have demonstrated resilience in your teaching?

2. Resistance has been defined as confronting oppressive forces, rejecting them, then establishing in their place alternative states of being that promote the enduring well-being of those previously oppressed. Can you think of ways in which you have demonstrated resistance in your teaching?

3. What facets of your personal or professional identities, histories, experiences, or characteristics do you think contribute to your decision to continue teaching during what many believe are difficult times?

4. Some social science researchers have found that some teachers are able to continue teaching in spite of it all due to characteristics such as commitment to their students, hope and possibility, intellectual stimulation, promotion of democracy and social justice, shaping young futures, and even “negative” attributes such as anger and desperation. What are some ways you manage to continue teaching in spite of it all?

5. What differences, if any, do you see between you and similarly situated veteran dual-language teachers, real or hypothetical, who have decided to leave the profession early as opposed to stay?

6. How many years do you have left until retirement? What effect does making it or not making it to retirement age have on your decision to continue teaching?

7. What would you say to a skeptic who might claim that, far from staying in the profession despite education reforms we have discussed, that perhaps you’re staying because of them, that is, because you agree with them?

8. Do you think you’ll still be teaching is five years? Ten years? Why or why not? What would make you quit?

9. What questions would you ask about the longevity of veteran dual-language teachers in urban, NND, Title I, “D” or “F” schools if you were the researcher? What question that I did not ask would you like to answer?
APPENDIX E: Questions for the first focus group

1. What personal and professional factors influenced your decision to teach and continue to teach in an urban, Title I, NND school as opposed to a “regular” teacher in a school with different demographics?

2. What internal (school-based) and external (district, state, national) challenges to teaching, learning, and professional growth do you believe veteran dual-language teachers like you face while teaching in low-performing, NND, urban, public schools?

3. What do you consider education “reforms” and how have these “reforms” affected teaching and learning in your classroom, your school, and your district?

4. What are your thoughts on Betsy DeVos, the new Secretary of Education of the United States? What effect do you anticipate her policies might have on your teaching, your students, your school, or your dual-language program?

5. Do you know of veteran dual-language teachers who have recently resigned or retired? If so, what do you know about the circumstances under which they left? What reasons, if any, did they give for leaving? Did any of the reasons involve education “reforms” you have identified? If so, which ones? Are you aware of ways in which they tried to cope with, challenge, or resist these “reforms” before they left?

6. How does the recent increase in the rate of retirements and resignations among veteran teachers in general make you feel?

7. Have you considered leaving teaching? If so, why? If not, why not? What strategies do you believe you have developed or cultivated in order to deal with, challenge, cope with, or resist the forces that have led you to consider leaving?

8. Teachers in a school are generally subject to the same mandates, “reforms,” and other pressures as their colleagues. Nevertheless, reports from around the country indicate that some teachers are choosing to resign or take early retirement because of these pressures while others in the same school stay despite them. Why do you think this is so? What differences do you see between you and teachers who have left?
APPENDIX F: Questions for the second focus group

1. Now that you have placed stickers next to the “reforms” you believe are most harmful to your students or that most impede your teaching practices, please explain your choices.

2. What do you believe are some of the consequences for students, schools, communities, school districts, if the high rates of attrition continue among teachers like you, that is, veteran dual-language teachers in urban, Title I, NND, schools with “D” or “F” grades from the state Department of Education?

3. What do you think students, parents, schools, communities, districts, governments can or should do about these current or future consequences?

4. What advice or counsel would you give to veteran dual-language teachers in urban, Title I, NND schools with “D” or “F” grades who are contemplating leaving the profession earlier than they had planned due to education “reforms” and other challenges that have made teaching for them no longer sustainable?

5. What advice or counsel would you give to new or prospective teachers who, like you, are interested in becoming or remaining dual-language teachers in urban, Title I, NND schools with “D” or “F” grades?

6. What advice would you give to districts in terms of their ability to retain veteran dual-language teachers like you in urban, Title I, NND schools with “D” or “F” grades?

7. What is your breaking point? That is, what would make you leave?

8. On the other hand, what makes you stay?

9. Is there a question that either you wished I had asked—and you would like to answer—or one you would like ask the group?

10. If you brought an artifact today, I would like to offer you the opportunity to share it. If you didn’t bring an artifact, feel free to tell us about it anyway.
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The teacher shortage isn’t an accident; it’s the result of corporate education


