

A NARRATIVE INQUIRY ON PUBLIC MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS EXPERIENCES
WITH DEMORALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Teachers may become demoralized when they feel they are unable to access the moral rewards of teaching. Some moral rewards of teaching include building relationships with students, adjusting methods of instruction that impacts individual student growth, and completing a creative and engaging lesson plan. The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to explore the experiences of public middle school teachers with demoralization in the context of their teaching environments. Six participants who self-identified as demoralized completed semi-structured interviews over Zoom. These interviews were then restoried into narratives, then manually coded into themes. The themes that were developed included time and resources as a valuable commodity, the consequences of the nomadic life of a modern middle school teacher, and balancing policy, administration, community, and student needs. The participants in this study were looking for relatedness from their administrators with communication and trust. They felt they needed more time to be competent in their craft, and they struggled to find autonomy in their teaching practice. Recommendations for further action include all teachers starting in a new school district regardless of experience being given a mentor, new teachers receiving access to district specific information, and that teachers' contracts be negotiated for more than one year. Administration should also consider allowing teachers to have autonomy to teach in a style that works best to them.

Keywords: demoralization of teachers, moral rewards of teaching, school accountability policies, teacher attrition.

DEDICATION

To my husband Mark, thank you for always believing in my dreams and helping them come true. I would not be here without your flexibility, support, and sacrifices.

To my son Jeremy, I am so proud of everything you have accomplished in life so far. Always know that you are capable of anything if you work hard enough for it. I can't wait to share all of your accomplishments with you.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Studies have shown that teachers enter the teaching field because they would like to make a positive difference in their students' lives (Bullough, 2011; Butera et al., 2020; Joseph, 2016; Lee et al., 2019; Santoro, 2011a). Teachers may view the responsibility of their job as upholding morality and values within their school (Lee et al., 2019). They may see themselves not only as teachers but also as leaders and mentors (Lee et al., 2019; Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016). When teachers begin their work in the classroom, they may emphasize creating classroom cultures based on strong relationships, care, and trust (Lee et al., 2019). Teachers may not only focus on teaching curriculum but may also focus on doing what is morally right for their students as mentors and role models (Joseph, 2016). When teachers are able to focus on doing what is morally right for students, then they may be able to have access to the moral rewards of teaching (Santoro, 2018). These moral rewards could include building strong relationships with students, watching students meet educational goals by adjusting curriculum to fit their specific needs, and finding creative or fun ways to share learning with students (Santoro, 2018).

The ability of teachers to seek moral rewards may be challenged by school reform and accountability policies that may not take into account the moral dimensions of the teacher (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2021). Policies have changed teachers' jobs significantly by asking teachers to focus their time on administrative tasks such as teaching to scripted curriculum and collecting data with no extra time allotted in their day (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2021). Teachers may be overwhelmed and stressed with the amount of time these tasks require and feel like they are not being treated as professionals (Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2021). Santoro's (2011a) research, which focused on the difference between demoralization and burnout, and the effects of

demoralization on teachers' lives, found that some teachers were experiencing demoralization. She defined demoralization as frustration and stress due to teachers being unable to access the moral rewards of teaching. Santoro (2011a) explains that teachers may be unable to access these moral rewards because of social constructs such as policies, procedures, and school culture.

There are many reasons that teachers might experience demoralization (Santoro, 2018). Teachers may be spending a large amount of time on non-instructional work, which does not always translate to student academic success. This extra work can include detailed data collection on students' achievement. This type of record-keeping may cause teachers to feel like they are not trusted in the classroom and take away time that could be used to help students in a more direct way (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016). Demoralization can also be caused by a lack of communication from administrators (Wronowski & Urick, 2021). If teachers do not understand why policies are put into place and how these policies will help their students, they might resent the policy and feel that they are losing autonomy in their practice (Brezicha et al., 2020; Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wang & Ong 2020). Schools with low levels of communication, high turnover in leadership, and lack of learning communities for teachers also may have higher rates of demoralization (Sæbø & Midtsundstad, 2018; Wronowski & Urick 2019).

When teachers experience demoralization they may feel shame, embarrassment, and frustration because they are unable to meet their own expectations of the job, leading them to believe that they are having negative effects on their students (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2021). Teachers may feel that they are being demoralized if they are forced to follow policies that they believe do not meet the moral needs of the students (Santoro,

2018, Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Students have many moral needs including building trusting relationships with teachers, feeling safe to take risks, and having access to teacher mentors (Lee et al., 2019; Santoro, 2018). Some examples of policies that could morally hurt students are when teachers are not able to design lessons that fit a student's individual needs due to curriculum mandates or forcing children with test anxiety or attention deficits to sit for long periods of time taking standardized tests (Santoro, 2018). Teachers may feel that they are unable to access the moral rewards of teaching if they feel they are not doing what is best for students (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016). As a result of these negative feelings, some teachers may put less effort into their teaching, withdraw from student and teacher relationships, and in some cases leave the teaching field entirely (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Negative feelings that cause teachers to feel exhausted or withdrawn may also be symptoms of teacher burnout (Raciala, 2021). In order to truly understand if a teacher is feeling symptoms of burnout or demoralization it is important to understand the cause of their symptoms (Santoro, 2018). A teacher may self-identify as demoralized if the causes of their symptoms are related to causes outside of their control (Santoro, 2018).

The difference between demoralization and burnout is the cause of the symptoms that teachers may be experiencing (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016). Raciala et al. (2021) notes that burnout is defined by psychologists to explain how an individual teacher copes with and manages daily stresses that can arise during the teaching day such as time commitments or student behavior. Santoro (2018) defines demoralization as stress teachers feel due to the systematic policies and procedures that are imposed on teachers, which may cause them to be unable to access the moral rewards of teaching. Some symptoms of burnout and demoralization include fatigue, depression, and withdrawal from others (Raciala, 2021; Santoro, 2018; Tsang &

Liu, 2016). Burnout is different from demoralization because of the conditions that cause a teacher to feel burned out (Santoro, 2018). When discussing burnout, it is assumed that an individual teacher does not have the perseverance to handle the stress of teaching and needs coping mechanisms to help them (Bottiani et al., 2019; Raciala, 202; Santoro, 2018).

According to Santoro (2018), teacher demoralization is not a permanent condition. Under the right teaching conditions, teachers can experience remoralization (Santoro, 2018).

Remoralization may be established by assuring teachers have autonomy, competence, and relatedness within their practice (Santoro, 2011a). Remoralization can take place when communication is strong between administration and teachers (Tsang & Liu, 2016). Teachers at times are asked to complete a variety of non-instructional tasks and need appropriate amounts of time and training to complete in order to reach remoralization (Santoro, 2018; Wang & Ong 2020). Remoralization happens when teachers feel they are part of the decision-making process (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016). Moral and ethical practices of teachers need to be recognized as school policies and procedures are put into place (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urlick, 2021).

Definition of Key Terms

Demoralization: A feeling of incompetence or not being able to live up to a person's own expectations which could include feelings of shame, embarrassment, and frustration. (Tecuta et al., 2015).

Demoralization of teachers: Demoralization of teachers happens when teachers are no longer able to access the moral rewards of teaching, which results in feelings of depression, loss of hope, shame, and discouragement (Santoro, 2011a).

Burnout: A psychological condition that occurs when an individual responds to stress or pressure from society or workload demands. The individual experiences negative consequences such as physical, mental, social, and emotional exhaustion of the body. The individual who is experiencing burnout has difficulty finding coping mechanisms that can help them feel better (Raciala, 2021).

Burnout in teachers: A psychological condition that occurs when an individual teacher response to work related stress such as administrative demands, shortage of materials, and student behavior problems. This stress may cause physical, mental, and social exhaustion (Vargas, 2021).

Moral rewards of teaching: Are rewards that teacher may receive when they include moral and ethical values into their teacher practice. These rewards could include-building strong relationships with students, watching students meet educational goals by adjusting curriculum to fit their specific needs, and finding creative or fun ways to share learning with students (Santoro, 2018).

School reform: A series of federal, state, or individual school policies that are created in order to improve the educational system. These policies are based in educational theory and often seek a turnaround in low performing schools (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019).

School accountability policies: The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) began an era of federal accountability policies focused on standards, assessment, and accountability reforms. School accountability policies focus on teachers' evaluations, and the connection of standardized testing to federal and state funding, which translated into mandatory state standards and standardized curriculum (Wronowski & Urick, 2019).

Teacher attrition: Teacher attrition is number of teachers leaving the profession, which is the primary reason for national teacher shortages. Teaching has a national attrition rate of around 8% annually, and research shows that teachers leaving each year accounts for close to 90% of annual teacher demand. Only a third of national teacher attrition is due to retirement (Carver-Thomas et al., 2017).

Remoralization: The ability of teachers to access and conserve the moral rewards of their work. This is accomplished with an individual action-based approach that helps teachers within the context of their working environment (Santoro, 2018)

Statement of the Problem

The problem that was addressed in this study is that when teachers are not able to access the moral rewards of teaching, they may become demoralized. Santoro's (2018) research led her to find that teachers may become demoralized because they may be unable to access the moral rewards of teaching, because of systematic policies and procedures that may make it difficult for teachers to do what they consider their best work. Policies and procedures may make it difficult for teachers to obtain the three components of motivation which according to Deci and Ryan (1989) are autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When teachers are not able to access the three components of motivation than they may not feel like they are doing the best work for their students, which could cause them to feel like they are not receiving moral rewards of teaching (Santoro, 2011a). Some examples of moral rewards of teaching include building relationships with students, adjusting methods of instruction that impacts individual student growth, and completing a creative and engaging lesson for students to participate in (Santoro, 2011a). Many teachers may enter the field of teaching and view themselves as ethical and moral agents who want to make a difference in their students' lives (Joseph, 2016).

Demoralization may happen when pedagogical and school policies such as high-stakes testing, mandated curriculum, and merit pay for teachers threaten the values and moral identity that teachers have created for themselves (Santoro, 2018). Teachers who experience demoralization may exhibit feelings of frustration, depression, and withdrawal that may lead to poor work performance, a negative school culture, and eventually high rates of teacher attrition (Santoro, 2018; Shaw, 2019; Tsang & Liu, 2016, Wronowski & Urick, 2019). This qualitative narrative inquiry sought out to explore teachers' perspectives of demoralization through personal stories of their experiences.

Self-determination theory, or SDT, was developed by Deci and Ryan in 1989, as a way to explore what motivates individuals. They found that three specific needs are psychologically essential for people to be motivated: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1989). When workers are lacking autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their jobs they are often not motivated to do their best work (Deci & Ryan, 1989). There are many causes of demoralization including school reform and accountability policies that may lead teachers to feel de-professionalized because they have less autonomy in the classroom (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Poor communication and leadership from school administration may lead to demoralization. Teachers need to feel competence and relatedness within the school culture (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Workers are motivated to do work when they are given opportunities to participate in creativity, conceptual learning, emotional tone, and self-esteem (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Demoralization may be caused by political and systematic changes that happen within education systems (Santoro, 2018). Demoralization is different from teacher burnout because teacher burnout is seen as an individual problem, where teachers need to show perseverance in

times of struggle (Santoro, 2018). Demoralization has been found to have consequences on the teachers that experience it, including feeling depressed, discouraged, shameful, and hopelessness (Santoro, 2011a). This study further investigated teachers' perceptions of demoralization within the teaching environment. There has been research on the causes of demoralization, and the effects that it has on the individual teacher (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2021). This study addressed a gap in knowledge, and narrative stories were collected in order to share middle school teachers' individual experiences with demoralization in the context of their teaching environment.

Statement of Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to explore the experiences of public middle school teachers with demoralization in the context of their teaching environments. Santoro (2011a) explains that demoralization of teachers happens when teachers are no longer able to access the moral rewards of teaching, which results in feelings of depression, loss of hope, shame, and discouragement. Moral rewards of teaching are rewards that a teacher may receive when they include ethics and morals into their teaching practice. Moral rewards of teaching can include building strong relationships with students or finding new and creative ways to help students understand a new topic. The demoralization of teachers can be caused by school reform and accountability policies (Wronowski & Urick, 2019), an increase in non-instructional work expectations (Santoro, 2018), poor communication with administration (Tsang & Liu, 2016), and negative school cultures (Patez, 2021). There have been several studies that look at the consequences of teacher demoralization (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Demoralization may impact teachers' feelings about their jobs which can lead to consequences to their health both physically and mentally (Santoro, 2018).

Demoralization may affect teachers' work performance (Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Teachers may not have the motivation to put in the effort needed to teach, and they may become dishonest about reporting student success (Tsang & Liu, 2016). Teacher demoralization can lead to teacher attrition and teacher shortages (Santoro, 2011b). There have been several studies about the causes of demoralization and how demoralization affects the teachers themselves (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). This narrative inquiry sought to collect personal stories from self-identified demoralized middle school teachers about their experiences with demoralization within the context of their individual teaching environment.

Research Questions/Design

The research questions that guide this qualitative narrative inquiry were developed to explore public middle school teachers' experiences with demoralization in the context of their teaching environments. These research questions guided the interview questions, and helped to code the narrative data, this shared data from participants stories was used to explore the experience of public middle school teachers.

Research Question 1: How do public middle school teachers describe their experiences with demoralization?

Research Question 2: How do public middle school teachers describe demoralization in relation to their teaching practice?

Research Question 3: How do public middle school teachers describe demoralization in relation to their teaching environments?

This qualitative narrative inquiry sought eight to 10 participants through a recruitment post on the Connecticut Education Associates Union Facebook page. Public middle school

teachers were asked to self-identify as demoralized to participate in the study. The participants each participated in a semi structured interviews where they described their experiences with demoralization in the context of their teaching environments. The transcribed interviews were restroried using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three dimensions of writing a narrative. The restroried narratives were analyzed using Creswell's (2013) six steps to analyzing data which include organizing the data, conducting a read-through of the information, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework of this study used self-determination theory as the theoretical framework to investigate and discuss teachers' motivations to do good work while experiencing demoralization. Self-determination theory (SDT) was developed by Deci and Ryan in 1989, as a way to explore what motivates individuals. Self-determination theory explores intrinsic motivation as a person's ability to seek out and challenge themselves in order to learn and grow (Ryan & Deci, 2000). There are three specific needs that are psychologically essential for motivation: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1989). Self Determination Theory will be used as a guide to help interpret teachers' perceptions around demoralization. When teachers receive moral rewards for teaching, or rewards that may be received because the teacher has added ethics and morals into their practice, they may feel like they are doing good work and seek out ways to improve (Santoro, 2018). Moral rewards of teaching include building relationships with students, watching a student persevere through a difficult moment, and other rewords that can only be received by focusing on morals when teaching (Santoro, 2018).

Autonomy is one of the three specific needs identified in SDT theory (Deci & Ryan, 1989). School reform has caused teachers to lose autonomy in their practice (Santoro, 2018;

Tang, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). For example, teachers are being forced to use scripted curriculum in the classroom, instead of relying on their knowledge of pedagogy to help them reach each individual student (Santoro, 2011; Tsang & Liu, 2016). Teachers are being forced to spend time collecting and analyzing data in order to prove that their teaching is effective (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). This could cause teachers to feel that administration do not have competence in their practice (Wronowski & Urick, 2021). A lack of communication with school leaders may cause teachers to believe that they do not have a say in the policies that are implemented (Wang & Ong, 2020). Teachers and administration may not be able to relate to each other because of poor communication, misunderstanding of policies and procedures, and lack of time to meet (Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). These misconceptions between administration and teachers may cause lack of relatedness between school administrators and teachers (Tsang & Liu, 2016). In order for teachers to feel motivated to do good work they need to receive autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Santoro, 2018). This study collected self-identified demoralized public middle school teachers' personal stories relating to their experiences with demoralization.

Self-Determination Theory has been used to study motivation in the workplace (Ryan & Deci, 2000). A connection may be made between the causes of teacher demoralization and SDT theory (Santoro, 2011a). When teachers are able to access autonomy, competence, and relatedness then they may be unable to experience the moral rewards of teaching because of the limiting policies and procedures they are forced to follow, resulting in the experience of demoralization (Santoro, 2011a).

A lack of autonomy may be a cause of teachers feeling demoralized (Santoro, 2011a). Autonomy is defined as the feeling of being able to make decisions without the help or

interference of others (Deci & Ryan, 1989). School reform has led to teacher-proofing, or the idea that curriculum is more important for students than teachers (Gagne, 2014). Teachers need to feel like they have opportunities for choice and feel like they are a part of the decision-making process in order for them to feel like they have autonomy within their school (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Scripted curriculum implementation can lead to teachers feeling like they are not trusted to know what is best for their students (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019).

Teachers do not always experience the feelings of competence in regard to their work and may develop feelings that they are not successful at doing good work within their profession (Santoro, 2018). Having competence refers to a person's feelings that have the knowledge and skills to necessary to complete a task (Deci & Ryan, 1989). The job responsibilities of teachers have changed significantly in the last 50 years, leaving some teachers to question if they are competent in their craft (Wronowski & Urick 2021). Teachers may feel they are not competent because they asked to complete work they may have not been trained to do or may not be able to complete in the time given for them to do such work (Santoro, 2018). In order to feel more competent in the workplace teachers could be reflective about what they do not know and seek to learn more (Gagne, 2014). This can be done through a goal setting process, especially if the teacher is part of a professional learning community (Gagne, 2014; Hemmings, 2012). A professional learning community is a group of professionals that are working together to grow and learn about their craft (Gagne, 2014). However, if a teacher is demoralized due to a lack of feeling competent, they are less likely to have access to the natural or intrinsic motivation, or motivation within themselves, to grow their craft (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When teachers are feeling demoralized, they may not intrinsically seek out professional development to grow their

craft on their own without being asked to, which could negatively affect the teaching environment (Gagne, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Santoro, 2018). According to SDT theory if a person is not feeling competent in the workplace, they may not have the motivation to do their best work (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Humans have a psychological need to build relationships with others, or relatedness with others (Gagne, 2014). Demoralization and burnout happen at a school level and are influenced by school culture, leadership communication styles, and individual school initiatives (Santoro, 2011a). Teachers may feel less resentment about the policies and procedures they are asked to enact, if the building administration communicates the reason for the policy, and how it was created to help their students (Hales, 2017). If a teacher feels like they are part of a community they are more likely to find moral rewards in teaching and may not become demoralized (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick, 2021). If teachers are not able to build relatedness with school visions, policies, and administration they may feel demoralized (Santoro, 2018). Demoralization can lead teachers to withdraw, which may affect the classroom dynamics (Santoro, 2018, Wronowski & Urick, 2021).

If demoralized teachers have regular access to all three components of SDT theory to include relatedness, competence, and autonomy, they may have a chance of reversing their demoralization causing the teacher to be remoralized (Santoro, 2018). Strong support, communication, and improvement to work conditions are needed for teachers to grow the motivation to teach well (Santoro, 2018). These improvements to teachers' working conditions will help teachers to create environments that are supportive to their students' learning (Arvanitis & Kalliris, 2020).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope

Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) define assumptions in qualitative research as the statements that are believed to be true as the study is being conducted from which conclusions will be drawn. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explains that when conducting a qualitative research study, it is assumed that reality is socially constructed and there is no one single reality that can be observed. There are many interpretations of the same events, and researchers assume that they can construct knowledge by collecting these interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Norman (2020) expresses that in a narrative inquiry it is assumed that the researcher can articulate the meaning of experience that each participant has shared. It is assumed that retold narratives are a representation of the stories that the participants have told (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

There are several assumptions specific to this qualitative narrative inquiry of demoralization of middle school teachers and these assumptions are concepts that are expected to be true and will be referred to throughout the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). In this study it was assumed that participants will self-identified as feeling demoralized at the time of the study. Teachers' self -identified based on their response to several questions that were provided on the recruitment flyer. It is also assumed that the teachers were open and honest about their experiences during their interviews.

Roberts and Hyatt (2019) define limitations as features in a study that the researcher has little or no control over. When conducting a qualitative study Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) state that the analysis of findings is based on the researchers' choices, so any bias of the researcher is a limitation. The researcher is a middle school teacher who could have unintentionally added her own thoughts or ideas into the creation of restoried narratives. This study limited bias by having participants member check their restoried narratives for accuracy. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) mentions that to show the validity of a narrative inquiry the researcher must understand the

relationship that they hold with participants, the location of the study, and the topic itself. The researcher did not have a relationship with any of the participants. The participants in this study were recruited from the Connecticut Teachers' Facebook page, which limited the diversity in the sample to only public-school teachers who are a member of, or has access to, the Connecticut Teachers' Facebook page.

Roberts and Hyatt (2019) explain the scope of a study as the focus and vision of the research. The scope of this study was limited to the eight to 10 participants who self-identified as demoralized in the teaching profession. These participants are public middle school teachers that are currently teaching in the state of Connecticut. The data from the semi structured interviews were restored using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000), three-dimensional narrative inquiry process which created stories that are situated in present and future, personal and social interaction, and place. These restored narratives were then analyzed by searching for common themes and interoperating those themes in relation to self-determination theory (Creswell, 2013).

Rational and Significance

This study will contribute to the body of research that has already been accumulated about teacher demoralization. Santoro's (2011a) research was the first to identify teachers as being demoralized instead of using the term burnout. Teacher demoralization takes the focus off of the idea that teachers are lacking the perseverance to do good work, and in turn presents that teachers are unable to do good work because policies and reforms make it difficult for teachers to access the moral rewards of teaching (Santoro, 2011a). Since this research emerged there have been many studies focused on the demoralization of teachers that have contributed to an understanding of the consequences and causes of demoralization (Bradford & Braaten, 2018;

Ibrahim & Alhabbash, 2022; Paetz, 2021; Santoro, 2018; Tecuta et al., 2015; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick 2019).

There have been research studies that focus on the causes and consequences for teachers when they experience demoralization (Bradford & Braaten, 2018; Hemmings, 2012; Ibrahim & Alhabbash, 2022; Santoro, 2011a, 2011b, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2021). However, there is a gap in knowledge of how teachers perceive their self-identified demoralization in the context of their teaching environments. This study has collected narratives, or stories, from participants in order to share teacher's individual experiences with demoralization. Demoralization within classroom environments could affect students learning, staff collaboration, school moral, and relationships with the school community (Yildiz & Kilic 2021).

School administrators and educational policy makers could consider the causes and consequences of demoralization in the future, as they create policies and procedures with teachers in mind (Santoro, 2018). If administrators and policy makers are able to understand the implications of demoralization to teaching environments, then there may be the opportunity for policy changes focused on remoralizing teachers in order to improve the educational system (Santoro, 2018). Building administrators who bring in professional development and build strong relationships with teachers may have less turnover in their buildings, less teacher absences, and better employee morale (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu 2016).

Middle school teachers could benefit from this study, as learning about demoralization could lead to less teacher attrition, and more structure for middle school students (Santoro, 2018; Yildiz & Kiliç, 2021). Middle school students are at an age where they are having many biological changes and have a need to develop trust, and in order to develop trust, students need

consistent teachers (Herman et al., 2020). Middle school students look to their teachers as mentors and moral agents, if there is too much teacher turnover students may not have the opportunity to build these relationships (Zoromski et al., 2021). It is important for students to have healthy, well-trained teachers, that are dedicated and motivated by students' educational growth, and that are consistent over time (Santoro, 2018).

When teachers are remoralized they may have the motivation to stay in the teaching field, and may intrinsically, without the direction of administration, seek professional development to grow their craft, (Santoro, 2018). Teachers may develop professional learning communities that support one another, which may lead to teachers feeling more competent in their work (Noble, 2019). If teachers feel like they are able to communicate with administration and feel they are a part of the school community they may be more likely to want to come to work, and ultimately continue in the teaching field (Tsang & Liu, 2016). Well trained teachers that are focused on students' best interest often feel supported and are willing to help support those around them (Santoro, 2018, Shaw, 2019). Remoralizing today's teachers could lead to better student outcomes and limit teacher attrition (Santoro, 2018, Tsang & Liu, 2016).

Summary

Teachers may enter the teaching field because they want to be able to make their students' lives better, and they want to have a moral impact on their students (Butera et al., 2021; Lee, 2019; Joseph, 2016; Santoro, 2018, Yildiz & Kiliç, 2021). When teachers are no longer able to access these moral rewards of teaching, they may become demoralized (Santoro, 2011a). This demoralization may have both physical and mental consequences for teachers and students (Santoro, 2018). School accountability policies and school reform has led teachers to feel like they have little autonomy in their practice (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Studies have shown that

when teachers are demoralized, they feel shame and incompetent (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016). These feelings may lead teachers to put less effort into their practice, misrepresent student growth, or leave the teaching field all together (Santoro, 2011a; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Demoralized teachers may shut down and not contribute to learning communities with peers (Santoro, 2011a). When teachers are showing signs of demoralization it could mean that teachers may not be able to obtain the three components of motivation autonomy, relatedness, and competence, and this affects their work (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Santoro, 2018). When teachers are not doing their best work, it may affect their students (Yildiz, 2021). Middle school students need consistent teachers who are engaged in the work in order to feel trust and build relationships with teachers, who could become their mentors or moral agents (Yildiz & Kiliç, 2021; Zorowski et al., 2021)

This qualitative narrative inquiry collected data through semi structured interviews with public middle school teachers which was used to create restoried narratives to present their experiences with demoralization in relation to their teaching environments. Teachers shared their stories about their experiences within the context of demoralization. This study will contribute to understanding demoralization by adding a collection of restoried narratives that could contribute an understanding of teachers experiences with demoralization and possible suggestions on remoralizing public middle school teachers.

Chapter 2 will include a review of the literature that explores middle school teachers' motivations to do good work, the causes and consequences of demoralization and burnout, and the effects that demoralization has on the teacher. In chapter 3 the methodology and research design of this study will be provided. This includes an explanation of how the interviews were conducted and how the data will be interpreted. Chapter 4 will review and analyze the study's

results and findings, to include the participants restoried narratives. While chapter 5 will present interpretations and importance of the findings and implications of the findings.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

K-12 teachers reported that they are feeling stressed and overwhelmed (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu 2016). Teachers in the United States have been asked to do more without an increase in pay or preparation time, spending hours proving that they are teaching students by collecting data, record keeping, and analyzing standardized test scores (Santoro, 2018). Wronowski and Urick (2019) explain that school reform era began with initiatives such as The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), and Reinvestment Act in 2009 (ARRA). This reform era focused on state-level standards, assessment, and accountability reforms that focused on teachers. Many of the reforms were focused on improving teacher productivity with increased focus on student achievement and teacher accountability, and target teachers for improvement. The reform era contributed to less teachers' autonomy over their work (Santoro, 2018, Wronowski & Urick, 2019). The focus has shifted to accountability-based teaching, which may leave little time and allowance for teachers to focus on doing what is best for students (Branford, 2018). Teachers may be left to question if they are able to make as big of a difference in their students' lives (Santoro, 2018; Shaw, 2019; Tsang & Liu, 2016).

Santoro's (2011a) research found that teachers may experience frustration in their ability to be successful in their careers because they may be forced to limit their moral identities which could leave them with less access to the moral rewards of teaching. She went on to define demoralization as frustration and stress due to teachers being unable to access the moral rewards of teaching. Teachers entering the teaching field have certain moral expectations of what the job will entail (Lee et al., 2019; Santoro, 2018), expectations can include being role models to students, guiding students to be good people, creating a safe and equitable environment for students, and being ambassadors of social justice (Butera et al.,

2021; Lee et al., 2019; Joseph, 2016; Yildiz & Kiliç, 2021). A teachers' moral expectations of the job **may** cause them to develop their own individual expectations of moral rewards (Joseph, 2016; Lee et al., 2019). Joseph (2016) explains that teachers' belief of their moral identities is crucial to how they develop their own ethical practice in the classroom. Demoralization is not the result of teacher inadequacies, but the conditions that they work in (Santoro, 2018, Tsang & Liu 2016).

School reform has led to some teachers feeling like they are unable to access the moral rewards of teaching, because more policies are being created to dictate teachers time and tasks, they must create teachers may feel that they have little autonomy over their own teaching practice (Santoro, 2018; Shaw, 2019; Tsang & Liu, 2016). If school administration does not have good communication, teachers may not be able to understand why policies such as scripted curriculum, data tracking, or teacher evaluations, can cause a teacher to feel targeted and judged for their teaching practice (Tsang & Liu, 2016). There are many different policies that schools have created to comply with school reform (Shaw, 2019; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). If these policies are explained to teachers, then they may be more likely to understand the need for them (Shaw, 2019). If the policies are not explained, teachers may feel controlled, judged, and overworked (Tsang & Liu, 2016). If the reasons behind these strategies are not communicated to teachers, the lack of clear communication may lead to demoralization (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016).

Demoralization has consequences that may affect not only teachers, but the entire school community (Santoro, 2018). If a teacher is demoralized, they are more likely to leave the teaching field, which can lead to teacher attrition (Santoro, 2011b). Demoralization can influence other teachers in the school (Santoro, 2018; Shaw, 2019; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski &

Urlick, 2019). When there are a number of teachers who are feeling demoralized in a certain school building the frustration and stress can transmit to other teachers in the building, who may then begin to feel demoralized themselves. This can lead to low school morale and the possibility for schools to lose their highly qualified teachers due to teachers choosing to leave their positions (Santoro, 2018). If teachers are not able to teach students in a way that they know is successful then students may not receive the best education possible (Santoro, 2018). There is also a possibility that teachers may resent or show frustration when a student does not do well on standardized tests because this effects their job evaluations (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urlick, 2021).

This literature review will begin with an explanation of demoralization in education. The literature will show how teachers create a moral identity within their classrooms, and importance they put on the morale rewards of teaching (Bullough 2011, Lee et al., 2019). followed by a brief discussion of the differences between burnout and demoralization. Burnout will be defined including the symptoms, and consequences and the implications it has on individual teachers. An explanation of the causes and consequences of demoralization will follow. Research studies will also be presented to show that demoralization is not a permanent state, and it can be reversed. The review of the literature will conclude by explaining the gap of knowledge available to explain how teacher demoralization affects the teaching environment.

The research for this literature review began with reading Santoro's (2018) narrative stories of teachers who have experienced demoralization, including ideas of how to re-moralize teachers. After being introduced to the concept of demoralization a search of the word brought up several more articles by Santoro (2011a, b), whose work has focused on

demoralization of teachers in K-12 school districts. Looking at the sources that Santoro (2011a; 2011b; 2018) used in her research study led to finding several strong articles to help guide this study. This built a strong background of literature to support and inform this study on teachers experiences with demoralization within their teaching environments.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Grant and Osanloo (2014) defines the conceptual framework as an explanation of the researcher's understanding of the problem to be studied and a map of how the problem will be explored. It is not just a way to state ideas or facts, but a way to make connections that further explore the ideas presented in the study. A conceptual framework shows the logic in which the study will be undertaken, and it explores the relationship between the variables in the study (Adom et al., 2018; Grant & Osanloo, 2014). The conceptual framework of this study will explore how middle school teachers' feelings of demoralization may lead to a lack of intrinsic motivation to do good work in the classroom, which could surface in the environments that they teach in. Workers are motivated to do work when they are given opportunities to participate in creativity and conceptual learning which could lead to feeling of self-esteem and confidence (Santoro, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The theoretical framework that will be used to guide this research is Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which states that in order for workers to have intrinsic motivation, workers need competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1989). Intrinsic motivation is the motivation to do something on your own without the external rewards. When workers are lacking autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their jobs they are often not motivated to do their best work (Deci & Ryan, 1989).

When teachers are unable to access the moral rewards of teaching, they may become demoralized (Santoro, 2018). They may experience feelings of frustration and shame because

they feel like they are unable to meet their own high expectations of the job (Santoro, 2018; Shaw, 2019; Tsang & Liu, 2016). Negative feelings may develop when teachers are not able to find autonomy in their profession (Santoro, 2011a). When teachers are asked to use scripted curriculum, or teach to standardized tests, they may experience negative feelings because teachers could feel that their knowledge and skills could better help individual students. They also may feel that it is inaccurate to judge their classroom teaching skills on one individual test (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). When school accountability policies are created and implemented teachers may feel that they have a lack of competence because there may be a lack of communication from administration (Tsang & Liu 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Teachers who do not understand why the policies were implemented, and/or have no say in the creation of these policies may feel like the policies were created because administration does not trust teachers to do the job that they were trained for (Santoro, 2018). A lack of trust with administration can lead teachers to feel a lack of competence (Tsang & Liu 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Teachers may feel demoralized when they do not feel like they are a part of a positive school culture (Santoro, 2011a). If teachers cannot find relatedness with stakeholders in the school, they may not feel like they are part of the school community (Tsang & Liu, 2016).

When teachers feel like they are not able to do their job well, or access the moral rewards of teaching, they may not feel motivated to do good work (Santoro, 2011a). Teachers who are not motivated may be experiencing demoralization or burnout (Santoro, 2011a; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). This narrative inquiry collected personal narratives from self-identified middle school about their experiences with demoralization and in relation to their teaching environments. The data collected was analyzed using the three components of SDT theory.

Self- Determination Theory

The theoretical framework for this study focused on self-determination theory or SDT, which is a meta theory that investigates the motivations behind a person's behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1989). SDT includes three components needed for motivation including, autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Deci and Ryan's (1989) research explored the motivations of employees in the workplace in order to determine what is needed for them to do the best work. When teachers are not able to access autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their work, then they may be unable to experience the moral rewards of teaching and instead feel like they are incapable of doing their job to the standards that they set for themselves and in turn they experience demoralization (Santoro, 2011a).

With support from administration, improvements in working conditions and strong communication between administration and teachers, teachers who are demoralized may be able to reverse this feeling (Santoro, 2018). When teachers understand the tasks that are asked of them, they are much more likely to find motivation to complete them (Gagne, 2014). Bassi (2011) found that teachers understand their work is sometimes difficult and tedious and if they found these tasks to be meaningful, then they were more motivated to complete them. Some tasks that teachers may find tedious include preparing lessons, updating knowledge, and evaluating students (Bassi, 2011; Santoro, 2018). When teachers are given the autonomy, competence, and relatedness are components needed for motivation according to SDT then they may be able to become remoralized. Remoralization happens when teachers no longer feel demoralized because they are able to begin accessing the moral rewards of teaching once again (Santoro, 2018). When environments are supportive of these three psychological needs, the individual is more likely to understand the situation and behave according to the values and

principals of the workplace (Arvanitis & Kalliris, 2020). In order to understand how SDT and demoralization are connected it is important to look at each of the three psychological needs for motivation.

Autonomy

All people have been found to have a desire for autonomy in order to feel fulfillment and well-being (Gagne, 2014). School reform has led to teacher-proofing, or the idea that curriculum is more important for students than teachers (Gagne, 2014; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). School accountability policies have forced teachers to teach to a set of standardized tests (Santoro, 2018; Shaw 2019; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). As a result, teachers may have lost control of what they are able to teach in the classroom (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Curriculum has become scripted or focused on standardized tests, causing teachers to feel like they are not trusted (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). When teachers are bound to a mandated curriculum, they cannot teach in a way that they feel will reach all students and are not able to conduct their practice in a creative way (Santoro, 2018). A mandated curriculum takes away a teachers' ability to choose what they think are the right methods of teaching (Santoro, 2018, Wronowski, 2019). Self-determination theory explains that when workers do not have choice in their work, or the ability to be creative, they do not have autonomy in their work (Deci & Ryan, 1989; Gange, 2014). According to SDT theory, if teachers feel a lack of autonomy due to curriculum mandates this can lead teachers to become less motivated to do good work (Wronowski & Urick, 2019).

Gagne (2014) identified ways that have been found to support autonomy. The first is having one's ideas be acknowledged. School administration has the power to help teachers feel like they still have autonomy in the classroom by allowing them the opportunity to be a part of

the decision-making process (Brezicha et al., 2020; Wang & Ong, 2020). The second is providing information in a clear and meaningful way (Gagne, 2014). Administration has the ability to lessen the effects of school reform by explaining why a policy is important and if possible, by focusing on implementing policies that align with the schools' vision and culture (Santoro, 2018). In order for autonomy to be present there has to be opportunities for choice and a feeling of integration (Santoro, 2011a; Ryan & Deci 2000). Individual school culture plays a large role in how supported and involved a teacher feels (Wronowski & Urick, 2021). Many of the causes of demoralization are directly related to teachers feeling a loss of autonomy in the classroom (Santoro, 2011; Tsang & Liu, 2016).

Competence

Teaching careers have changed and evolved drastically in the last 60 years (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Teachers [may be](#) asked to do work that they are unfamiliar with, or have not been trained to do (Santoro, 2018; Shaw, 2019; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Changes in work conditions can lead to a teacher feeling like they are not competent in their work (Santoro, 2018). In order to feel more competent in the workplace teachers need to be reflective about what they do not know and seek to learn more (Gagne, 2014). This can be done through a goal setting process (Gagne, 2014). When teachers are part of a learning community, they may be more likely to feel confidence in their learning and teaching skills (Hemmings, 2012).

In order to feel competent at their job teachers need to feel like they are trusted (Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2021). School accountability policies may leave teachers feeling like they are not able to do their work to the best of their ability (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Middle school teachers are asked to spend their time collecting data, and teaching

to a test that they might not feel is the best indication of their students' learning (Santoro, 2018). When teachers have to make decisions with the time that they are allowed they may feel like they are not able to make the best decisions for their students (Santoro, 2018). When teachers feel that they are not able to do good work or feel competent in their practice they can become demoralized (Santoro, 2018).

Relatedness

Psychologically, humans have a need to build relationships with others, this is considered relatedness (Gagne, 2014). Building relationships helps to explain why demoralization often happens at the individual, school, or district level (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Administration has the difficult job of building a school culture by creating a vision for the school and communicating this mission and vision. Communication and support help teachers to feel safe and a part of team (Tsang & Liu, 2016, Wronowski & Urick 2019). When teachers feel like they understand what is being asked of them, or why policies are being implemented, they are much less likely to feel resentment or anger toward the changes (Hales, 2017). If a teacher feels like they are part of a community they are more likely to find moral rewards in teaching and may not become demoralized (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick, 2021).

When teachers are demoralized, they may feel embarrassed, shame, and lose the motivation to do good work (Santoro, 2018). SDT is a theory that states in order for motivation to exist there are three basic psychological needs, autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Teachers who are demoralized may be missing one or more of these needs (Santoro, 2011a). Teachers may feel that they are losing autonomy in their work when they are asked to use a scripted curriculum instead of creating their own lesson plans (Tsang & Liu, 2016). An example of when teachers may feel that they are not able to find relatedness is when

there are communication breakdowns between administration and teachers (Hales, 2017).

Teachers may feel like they are losing competence when facing accountability policies tied to standardized testing without taking in to account the teaching that is going on in the classroom (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). If teachers are able to access autonomy, relatedness, and competence than they may be able to become remoralized (Santoro, 2019).

Burnout

Burnout is a psychological syndrome that occurs when people are under chronic occupational stress (Bianchi & Laurent, 2015; Van Dam, 2021). This workplace stress could be caused by high workloads, unrealistic expectations from those in power, and poor communication where employees feel like they are unable to stand up for themselves (Nunn & Isaacs, 2019). Burnout has three symptoms which are fatigue or exhaustion, loss of motivation often with a critical view of one's employer, and depersonalization or distancing oneself from those around them (Bianchi & Laurent, 2015; Nunn & Isaacs, 2019; Van Dam, 2021). When an individual is experiencing burnout, they can feel like they are failing and not able to complete the work that is expected of them (Nunn & Isaacs, 2019). If an individual is experiencing burnout, it is helpful if they take time to be around family, take care of themselves, and exercise on a regular basis (Bianchi & Laurent, 2015; Nunn & Isaacs, 2019). It might also be beneficial to look for new or different employment (Bianchi & Laurent, 2015; Nunn & Isaacs, 2019; Van Dam 2021). Teaching is one of the career fields where employees are likely to experience burnout (Bianchi & Laurent, 2015).

Teacher Burnout

Raciala et al. (2021) indicates three components of burnout for teachers' including exhaustion, distancing self from others, and the inability to communicate. The first is exhaustion

that does not go away even after hours of rest. Teachers may become so tired they are unable to get out of bed. Exhaustion can lead to poor work attendance, and teachers are not able to meet their own needs or the needs of their students (Raciala, 2021). The second component is when teachers distance themselves from their social relationships (Raciala, 2021). This includes family and friends. They [may](#) no longer go to family outings or attend school events. Teachers distance themselves from the people who are important to them. The third component is inability to communicate and cooperate with others (Raciala, 2021). [Teachers may](#) put little effort into anything they do, and this [may](#) cause conflict in the workplace. The person loses hope for their career, often causing them to leave the job all together ([Raciala, 2021](#); [Santoro, 2018](#)). The term teacher burnout is a term that is often used to express teacher dissatisfaction (Bottiani et al., 2019; Raciala, 2021, Santoro, 2018). Santoro (2011a) explains that often the words “burnout” and “demoralization” can sometimes be used synonymously but it is important to acknowledge that they are conceptually distinct. These two terms are connected to each other, but they are different, [and](#) in order to understand the differences, you need to look for the causes of each. It is necessary to research both in separately in order to understand the challenges teachers are facing (Santoro, 2018).

There has been research done to explain the consequences of teacher burnout (Bottiani et.al., 2019; Molero, 2019; Raciala, 2021). Molero’s (2019) study indicated that teachers who expressed high burnout rates had a low perceived personal and collective efficacy, low job satisfaction, and low professional commitment. Teacher burnout can lead to teacher attrition, or low job performance. Madigan and Kim’s (2021) research also found that there is often more than one teacher who is burned out within a school suggesting that teacher burnout may be

transmitted from one teacher to another. If this is the case, then teacher burnout can impact many members of the same school or district (Raciala, 2021; Santoro, 2018).

Burnout symptoms have a cost both on the teacher and the district for which the teacher teaches (Jennings et al., 2017; Raciala, 2021). Jennings et al. (2017) found that, there are high costs of burnout such as high absentee rates, turnover, and healthcare costs. If teachers are able to reduce their stress and symptoms of burnout then they are much more likely to provide a positive social and academic environment for students (Madigan & Kim, 2021). When teachers feel burned out, they can feel forced to make the decision to stay in the teaching field where they may not feel successful or to venture out into other types of work (Jennings et al., 2017; Madigan & Kim, 2021). Rinke and Mawhinney (2017), described the push and pull that teacher felt to stay or leave the field of teaching, finding that, “teacher leavers mentioned disillusionment, exhaustion, stress, or excessive workload within their school context” (p.10). Teachers have many reasons to leave their jobs including not feeling supported or that the work does not meets their expectations (Jennings et al., 2017; Madigan & Kim; 2021; Raciala, 2021). Another reason for teacher attrition could be demoralization (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016).

Demoralization

Frank was the first researcher to identify the term demoralization when he found common emotions among the individuals receiving psychotherapy, in 1961, and identified that the individuals. Frank investigated individuals who sought out psychotherapy and discovered a cluster of symptoms that were associated with giving up or giving in (Tecuta et al., 2015). Demoralization happens when a person is overwhelmed or defeated by circumstances that they cannot control, which leads to feelings of hopelessness and helplessness (Schuyler, 2015; Tecuta et al., 2015). A person who is experiencing demoralization may lose morale

because they feel like they are a burden on others or because they are not able to meet their individual expectations they set for themselves (Tecuta et al., 2015). When a person becomes demoralized, they may feel like they have less competence in their ability to succeed (Schuyler, 2015). Demoralization can make it difficult for someone to find a purpose in their life, causing them to withdraw from friends, feel exhausted, shame, and frustration (Schuyler, 2015; Tecuta et al., 2015). Demoralization can happen in the workforce (Tecuta et al., 2015).

Demoralization In Teachers

Demoralization occurs when teachers become frustrated that they are unable to receive the moral rewards of teaching (Santoro, 2018). The concept that moral identity is a part of how teachers view themselves within their career is supported by several studies (Santoro, 2011a; 2011 b, 2018; Shaw 2019; Tsang & Liu, 2018; Wronowski ,2021). Teachers' moral identities may lead them to seek the moral rewards of teaching (Santoro, 2018). Lee et al. (2019) investigated the reasons why teacher candidates were pursuing a career in teaching. The research showed that teacher candidates thought that they had a moral responsibility to themselves and their students. These teachers saw themselves as mentors, and leaders, both for social justice and equity in education; Lee's et al. (2019) study gives an inside look at teachers' moral intentions which often are focused on making a difference in student's lives. The idea that teachers enter the field in order to make a difference in students' lives is also supported by Santoro (2011a) who expresses that engaging in the moral and ethical values of the job can help sustain teachers even if they are receiving modest material rewards. The rewards that teachers found to be valuable are often one of the reasons that teachers are able to feel good about their work and their moral contributions (Lee et al., 2019; Santoro, 2018). These ethical values were also researched by Tsang and Liu (2016), "the goal of making a difference in students' lives may

influence teachers' definition of their work and, in turn, their morale" (p. 11). The combined research of Lee et al. (2019), Santoro (2018), and Tsang and Liu (2016) suggest that teachers perceive morality and values to be important to their job.

Each individual teacher has a different understanding of what ethics means to their practice (Lee et al., 2019). Freedman and Appleman (2009) concluded that teacher candidates understood the barriers and challenges that they would face in the career but were optimistic that they would be able to make a difference in students' lives. One of the measures that teachers use to gauge their work is their ability to make a difference in their students' lives (Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Lee et al., 2019; Santoro, 2018). Teachers view themselves as moral agents for their students, and take pride in being moral leaders (Bullough, 2011; Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Lee et al., 2019). Ethics can be found in the academic practice as well (Bullough, 2011). Teachers often feel pride when they are teaching topics and concepts that reflect their moral and ethical beliefs (Lee et al., 2019). These moral beliefs are seen in a teachers' curriculum, grading style, and teaching strategies (Bullough, 2011; Lee et al., 2019). Bullough (2011) found that ethics helped to determine a teacher's disciplinary knowledge and that teachers abided by a set of ethical principles even when deciding the content that they would teach within their classrooms. Teaching students to understand academic material in an ethical way is rewarding for teachers (Lee et al., 2019).

Causes of Demoralization in Teachers

There are several causes for demoralization including the implementation of school reform and accountability policies (Shaw, 2019; Santoro, 2018, Tsang & Liu, 2016, Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Wronowski and Urick (2019) found that, when teachers are faced with school accountability policies, they may feel stressed. A change in work conditions may also cause

demoralization (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Santoro (2018) found that teachers jobs have changed significantly over time, with teachers being asked to do more and more tasks with little extra time. Demoralization can be caused by school culture as it is often found at a school level and can be based on a lack of communication from administration (Tsang & Liu, 2016).

Impact of School Reform and Accountability Policies on Teacher Demoralization

School reform and accountability policies can be a cause of demoralization (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Wronowski and Urick (2019) found that during the policy era which began with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and focused on improving teacher accountability some teachers have found that accountability and assessment policies do not align with their views of teaching. This may lead to increased worry and stress that could cause teachers to leave the teaching field (Santoro, 2018). Teachers were directed to use scripted curriculum, instead of having the freedom to create what they thought was best for students. Teachers found themselves being assessed on how students did on standardized tests and asked to collect data on student performance (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick 2019). They were not given extra time to complete these tasks (Santoro, 2018). School reform and accountability policies often caused teachers to feel frustrated or demoralized (Santoro, 2018; Shaw, 2019; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Deci and Ryan's (1998) research found that when a company's conditions did not meet the needs of employees especially with security and pay, then there were limited relationships with employees but when conditions improved so did the relationships.

Wronowski and Urick (2019) identified the three parts of accountability policy that can contribute to demoralization. First, teachers spend more of their time on administrative tasks. Next, teachers feel pressure and stress when trying to reach accountability goals. Finally,

teachers could have negative perceptions of their students who do not do well on standardized tests. Branford (2018) explained in a narrative inquiry how demoralization affected teachers. They found that it may be difficult for teachers to develop a professional vision and quality of work (Brandford, 2018). When teachers are not able to make sense of what is being asked of them, teacher evaluations are not helpful to teachers' growth. In order to improve, teachers may need to understand why they are asked to participate in certain tasks, especially if these tasks are time consuming and different than what they [were](#) used to doing in their classrooms (Brandford, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019).

Changes in Work Conditions

Santoro (2018) explains that one of the causes of demoralization is deteriorating work conditions. Some of the conditions that teachers face include the demands on teachers' time such as having to collect and analyze data, scrutiny of teachers' daily activities unlike any other time in the history of education (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Teachers are being held accountable to student tests scores that they may feel are not an accurate representation of their work (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Teachers may feel that the data keeping, and paperwork associated with accountability policies are time consuming and difficult to produce and could take away from time spent on planning instruction (Shaw, 2019; Tsang & Liu, 2016, Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Tsang [and](#) Liu (2018) looked at how record keeping, and other tasks related to teacher accountability policies have affected teachers. They found that the participants were spending a large amount of time on noninstructional work, that they felt did not directly relate to student academic success (Tsang & Liu, 2016). This teacher accountability paperwork could send a message to teachers that they are not trusted in the classroom (Santoro, 2018).

More and more professional demands are being added to teachers without giving them extra time or pay (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Santoro (2018) identified that intensification was a cause for demoralization. She explains that intensification is the increase in teacher workload without extra time, or compensation for these tasks. Some examples of intensification include having to deal with violent or inappropriate school behavior, having to collect data in order to prove that you are teaching appropriately, having to communicate with parents who are unresponsive or defensive (Santoro, 2018). Pacaol (2021) explains that intensification is often caused when leaders ask teachers to take on excessive tasks throughout the school year that causes teachers to take their time and attention off their teaching to complete. Teachers are often not trained properly and are not paid more or given time to complete the tasks that are asked of them (Pacaol, 2021; Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016). With this increased workload and fewer moral rewards teachers may feel frustrated and lose hope and drive to complete their work (Santoro, 2018).

Lack of Communication

Demoralization is often found at a school level and can be based on a lack of communication from administration (Tsang & Liu, 2016). A lack of communication can lead to teachers feeling like they are losing autonomy for their jobs (Santoro, 2011a; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). A lack of communication from administration, lack of support for behavior or curriculum implication, and lack of training in areas teachers need help with can cause demoralization (Tsang & Liu, 2016). Carver-Thomas et al. (2017) found that it is ironic that policymakers seek to address teacher shortages by using shortcuts to training individuals entering the field. Efforts from administration could help teachers feel supported (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016). Teachers need behavioral support in the classroom, time to grade and give feedback

to students, and clear expectations (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu 2016). A lack of communication can lead to teachers feeling like they are losing autonomy within their jobs (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Deci and Ryan's (1998) research found that managers that were supportive of worker's autonomy saw positive ramifications in work quality. A lack of autonomy is a cause for teachers to feel demoralized (Santoro, 2011a; Wronowski & Urick, 2019).

Wang and Ong (2020) found that administrators felt that they were giving their teachers voice as they created school reform policies. However, teachers did not feel like they were being heard. In fact, they felt like they had little input over school changes. This miscommunication caused both sides to become frustrated (Wang & Ong, 2020). Brezicha et al. (2020) shared that a large number of principals know that that it is imperative to provide opportunities for shared decision-making, but teachers do not see the efforts that they are making. It is important for both teachers and administration to communicate better, or demoralization can happen (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wang & Ong, 2020).

School Culture

Demoralization can be caused by the school environment, policies, and procedures that are put in place (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Negative school environments are often related to school reform, and/or a lack of communication between teachers and administration (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Wronowski & Urick (2019) found that there was 42% to 49% variance in teacher perception of demoralization at a school level, meaning that multiple teachers in the same school often experience demoralization. This suggests that demoralization is affected by individual school's environments (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Every school is different, and some schools have policies and environments that have a higher tendency to produce demoralized teachers (Santoro, 2018;

Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Sæbø's and Midtsundstad (2018) qualitative study, explored teacher perspectives of expectations and teaching responsibilities in two different schools. The research study found that demoralization is related to school culture. Schools that have a strong culture of communication and leadership support are less likely to have teachers who are demoralized (Sæbø & Midtsundstad, 2018; Santoro, 2019). Having clear expectations and communication in schools lowers the rate of demoralization (Santoro, 2019; Sæbø & Midtsundstad, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019).

Leadership in schools differ from one school to another (Sæbø & Midtsundstad, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2019). An ineffective leader can make it impossible to continue to teach for a school or district (Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick 2019). Different schools are a better fit for teachers than others (Santoro, 2018). Patez (2021) found that teachers may leave positions that are not a good fit for them after a reasonable amount of time does not indicate failure or constitute a reason to leave the profession all together. Even if a new teacher is not successful at one school it does not mean that they will not be in another school (Patez, 2021). A strong school culture, with good communication, and strong leadership, could help teachers feel more supported (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016). Supporting and helping new teachers as they enter to field can help them not to feel demoralized (Sæbø & Midtsundstad, 2018; Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019).

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020 changed the landscape of teaching (Vargas, 2021). Teachers were forced to begin teaching online, often streaming live from inside their own homes (Dos Santos, 2021; Vargas, 2021). This lack of privacy and work home balance made it difficult for teachers to complete their jobs (Vargas, 2021). Teachers were not used to teaching in

this manner and so they did not feel confidence in their work, in this way they were not able to receive competence in their practice (Dos Santos, 2021). As a result, many parents of students became very vocal about what was being taught and were critical of teachers' efforts (Vargas, 2021). When schools began to invite students and teachers back into school buildings not all teachers were vaccinated, and students did not have access to a vaccine (Vargas, 2021). Teachers who felt the risk of contracting COVID-19 in school buildings was too high, opted to retire early or take a leave of absence (Dos Santos, 2021). Teachers retiring early, social distancing, and lack of being in schools all together created a situation where teachers were not able to access relatedness in their jobs (Dos Santos, 2021; Vargas, 2021). Students returned to school with a lack of social skills and even more violence than before (Dos Santos, 2021). Teachers were left to fill in the gaps of knowledge lost because not all students were able to access the curriculum while online, and social and emotional learning for students who were isolated (Vargas, 2021). Teachers felt that they were unable to teach because they were not able to access autonomy, and competence. Teachers were forced online with little training, faced fear of becoming sick, and had limited access to teach all students, which could lead them to become demoralized (Santoro, 2018; Vargas, 2021)

Consequences of Demoralization for Teachers

Demoralization can have many consequences for the teachers that are experiencing it (Santoro, 2018, Yidiz, 2021). Teachers who are demoralized face many mental health symptoms including feeling depressed and withdrawing from those around them (Tecuta et al., 2015). Teachers work performances may suffer including a lack of motivation, and an increase in absences (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016). Teachers may not want to participate in professional development or could become withdrawn from colleagues. When teachers are

experiencing demoralization, they may begin looking for jobs or leave the teaching field all together (Dunn et al., 2017).

Teacher Attrition

Demoralization can cause teachers to become depressed and feel helpless as they continue their work (Santoro, 2018). This can lead to teacher attrition which is expensive for school districts and has an impact on student achievement (Yildiz & Kiliç, 2021). Santoro (2011b) researched the impact of demoralization on teacher attrition and found that if teachers feel that they are limited in their ability to do good work, because of policies or procedures that are put in place at the school or national level, this could lead to teacher attrition. If teachers do not feel like they are doing good work they may be unlikely to stay in the field (Santoro, 2011b, Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronoski, 2019). The consequences of teachers leaving a school district or the teaching field all together is felt by students and colleagues (Yildiz & Kiliç, 2021). If schools are low staffed and class sizes are larger, families and students lose trust, and students may not get the highly qualified teachers that they deserve (Paetz, 2021; Yildiz & Kiliç, 2021). Dunn et al. (2017), investigated teacher resignation letters as a genre and found that the letters included narratives that teachers felt they were failing the students that they serve. The arguments that are being given in these letters suggests that these teachers are feeling demoralized in their employment and have lost their hope and desire to want to continue teaching.

Mental Health Concerns

There are many emotions that may come from feeling demoralized (Santoro, 2018; Tecuta et al., 2015). These feelings were investigated by Santoro (2018) and included teachers' feelings about their job, consequences to their health to include both physical and mental, impact on family and relationships, and expectations for how long their career will last. These feelings

are similar to burnout, but they are caused by the feeling that their moral identity is being challenged. When a teacher is feeling demoralized, they may feel that they are not good at their job (Santoro, 2011a). Demoralization causes teachers to feel shame, embarrassment, failure, along with frustration for not being able to do the job to what they believe is expected of them (Raciala, 2021; Santoro, 2018; Tecuta et al., 2015). The frustration of spending more time on administrative tasks and having to teach from a scripted curriculum, leads to feelings of inadequacy, frustration, shame, and embarrassment (Paetz, 2021; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Teachers begin to feel depressed, withdrawn and may decide to leave the teaching field (Paetz, 2021; Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick, 2019).

Job Performance

When teachers feel that they have been disempowered they may feel less motivated to do their best work (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2018). Tsang and Liu (2018) explain that there are two types of teacher disempowerment. The first is the loss of power to control the process of teaching, which he calls technical disempowerment. The second, cognitive disempowerment, is the lack of power to interpret the instructional value and working environment of teachers (Tsang & Liu, 2018). When teachers feel like they lose control of both their ability to choose the methods they feel work best in the classroom and their control of their teaching environment they do not have access to the moral rewards of teaching (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016).

Santoro (2018) explains how demoralization can affect students, “teachers usually cite the ways that they were told to engage in practices that they believed were developmentally inappropriate, pedagogically ill advised, or damaging to students social-emotional well-being” (p.62). Teachers often confide in each other when feeling demoralized (Santoro, 2018; Shaw, 2019). This can lead to several teachers being demoralized in the same school system (Santoro,

2018; Wang & Ong, 2020). Santoro (2018) explored how teachers may deal with the feeling that their practice is having a negative impact on their students. Teachers shared a common moral concern that there were expectations for them to complete professional duties, but these duties conflicted with their professional commitments that motivated them to become teachers (Lee et al., 2019). Santoro (2018) provided examples of some of these duties such as administering standardized tests, mandated use of textbooks, and scripted curriculum. If teachers are teaching to tests, they are often unable to help students where their individual needs (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). They are not able to use teaching strategies that they know work and they may be rushed to fit too much material in a short amount of time (Santoro, 2018). This causes students to become frustrated which can make a teacher feel as if they are not doing their job (Santoro, 2018).

When teachers are faced with policies that they do not understand or they think are harmful to their students sometimes they rebel (Santoro, 2018; Shaw, 2019). Shaw (2019) explains that teachers may resist policy change, by not being honest in their reports of their success in the classroom. Shaw (2019) explains that there could be two reasons for this. The first is because teachers are desperate to protect the learning environment that they have created. The second is that they might not have the time or resources to respond to the request with fidelity. Communication from administrators about why the policies are being enacted and how it can help students would prevent teachers from feeling like these policies are meant to hurt them or cause them problems (Tsang & Liu, 2016). If teachers who do not agree with the policies, they are having to enforce policies that may hurt students could lead a teacher to feeling demoralized (Shaw, 2019; Tsang & Liu, 2016).

Teachers who try to stand up for what they morally believe in are not always taken seriously (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Santoro (2018) expresses, that there is a social and political climate that disregards teachers' grievances as gripes. It is difficult for teachers to work when they feel that they have lost integrity in their profession (Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Teachers believe that they need to fight for their moral dilemmas because they are important for each individual student (Santoro, 2018). If students are not getting the inquiry, discussion time, or support needed and are feeling overwhelmed with high stakes testing they are being harmed in the eyes of their moral teachers (Santoro, 2018). If teachers believe that they have a moral responsibility to their students and to make social change than they might believe that they are failing or not being a good teacher if they are not able to stop some of these school practices (Santoro, 2018; Shaw, 2019; Tsang & Liu, 2016).

Moral Identity for Teachers

As teachers navigate their profession, they form their own moral identities (Santoro 2018). The participants in the study that Joseph (2016) conducted, looked to understand how teachers form their moral identities, and found that the perceived themselves as moral agents, as they reflected on their teaching experiences through a moral lens. Santoro (2011a) states that when teachers are attracted to joining the career because of the moral significance of the work, and at the same time the moral dimension of the job is being limited, it becomes a recipe for demoralization. There are occasions where a teachers' moral identities are compromised, or the moral awards of teaching are difficult to access, causing demoralization (Santoro, 2018). The research shows that morality and ethics are a part of a teacher's identity, sometimes this vision is taken away or changed based on school policies (Wronowski & Urick, 2021).

Teachers serve many roles within middle schools including those of leader and mentor (Lee et al., 2019; Santoro, 2011a, b; Wronowski & Urick 2019). Butera et al. (2020) explained that when educational systems focus on educational functions, teachers can take the opportunity to become mentors that promote learning for all students. Being a role model or a mentor for students can be a rewarding experience for teachers (Lee et al., 2019). Joseph's (2016) research found that teachers expressed the importance of creating classroom cultures that were based on strong relationships, caring, and trust. By creating strong student relationships and classroom culture teachers are able to create their own moral identity to share with students (Joseph, 2016; Lee et al., 2019).

As teachers create their individual moral identities, they may be affected by the way they are seen by students, colleagues, and administrators (Lee et al., 2019). Molero (2019) found that in order to increase job satisfaction for teachers it is important for their work to be recognized by families, the school, and students. Teachers should receive social and economic compensation to balance the demands and requirements asked of them (Molero, 2019). Bullough (2011) looked at how school culture affects teacher morale. This study found there is informal and unspoken culture at each individual school, this culture shapes the moral identity of the school, teachers, and students. In order for teachers to feel like they are doing good work they would benefit from moral rewards such as the knowledge they helped a student overcome, or relationships they build with others, from families, administration, or students (Santoro, 2018). Arvanitis and Kalliris (2020) explains that there is a connection between motivation and moral integrity, intrinsic tendencies are connected to moral principles and emotions of feeling integrated into a workplace. In order for teachers to have intrinsic motivation to do good work, this work needs to align with their moral identities (Lee et al., 2019). Teachers may feel like they have autonomy in creating

their moral identities when they are allowed to create their own learning space, which could include decorations, table arrangements, seating choices (Santoro, 2011a). Teachers may find autonomy when they are able to express their moral identities with students (Santoro, 2018), and may find relatedness in like-minded colleagues and students when expressing their moral identities (Santoro 2011a, Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Effects of School Reform on Moral Identity

Teachers create moral identities that they use to guide many aspects of their careers (Bullough 2011; Joseph, 2016; Lee et al., 2019). School reform can take the teachers focus away from their perceived moral and ethical roles (Joseph, 2016). Teachers are asked to perform tasks that may go against their moral identities such as teaching a scripted curriculum that is not accessible to all students (Santoro, 2018). Tsang and Liu (2016) found that teacher demoralization is connected to the decentralization of school reform in which teachers feel they are losing control over their teaching. When school policy and school reform conflict with a teacher's moral identities problems occur (Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Santoro (2018) explains that demoralization happens when school practices and policies such as high stakes testing and mandated curriculum conflict with the moral identities of teachers. These types of conflicts are not able to be resolved by teachers showing more perseverance or resistance. Policies that are not clearly communicated to teachers, or that directly conflict with their moral identities can lead to demoralization (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016).

School reform can cause teachers to feel like they are losing control of their practice (Santoro, 2018). Wronowski and Urick (2019) found that de-professionalization is a loss of control over the technical or cognitive core of teachers work. Teachers specifically want influence over curriculum and instructional decisions (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Murphy's

(2019) research shows that building relationships, challenging students, and having trust are indicators of success for teachers. However, school reform often only focuses on high stakes testing. Murphy and Bleiberg (2019) go on to explain that, challenging students, teacher turnover, and school climate contribute to teachers' frustration while trying to access the moral rewards of teaching. In order to feel successful from a moral perspective teachers need to feel that they are meeting their students' needs in a moral way, by being good role models and by creating a safe environment for their student to learn (Murphy, 2019; Santoro, 2018, Wronowski & Urick, 2019). School reform typically does not focus on the moral elements of a teacher's career (Wronowski & Urick, 2019).

Teachers who have a strong moral identity are more likely to be demoralized, because they hold themselves to high moral expectations (Santoro, 2018). Santoro (2018) has found that ~~any~~ any teacher can become demoralized but experienced teachers are more likely to face demoralization. Teachers who have been in the career for a long time have an expectation of what their job entails and feel confident in their abilities to complete their job. When this feeling of moral identity is challenged by new leadership or a new policy these teachers are more likely to be demoralized (Santoro 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016). When new policies are introduced to teachers, it is beneficial to explain why they are being implemented (Tsang & Liu, 2016). This type of communication can help build trust in teachers (Santoro, 2018, Tsang & Liu, 2016). Tsang and Liu's (2016) research found that it is the school administrations job to decide what values and policies to implement in school and then to clearly communicate them to their teachers.

When a school is facing changes due to school reform, teachers, and the entire educational system, can be seen as a failure that needs to be reworked or reevaluated (Santoro,

2018). As a response to feeling that the countries education system needed to be reworked in order to ensure economic success a series of reforms were put into place (Dworkin, 2001). These reforms included accountability policies and high-stakes testing. Santoro (2018) lists aspects of teachers' jobs that have deteriorated since school reform. Some of these include standardization, prescribed curriculum, value added measures, high stakes accountability for teachers and students and fast-track or alternative routes to teacher licensure. Both Santoro (2018) and Tsang and Liu (2016) found lack of support from administrators, student behavior, and lack of preparation periods also led teachers to feel demoralized.

The Difference between Burnout and Demoralization

Santoro (2011a) researched the difference between teacher burnout and what she defined as demoralization. The research showed that burnout is a state of mind studied by psychologists who investigate how an individual teacher copes with and manages stress. Psychologists look at personality, physical symptoms, and mental health to see how teachers' bodies and minds react to the stresses of teaching in order to diagnose teacher burnout (Bottiani et.al., 2019). Teachers may experience many symptoms of burnout including fatigue, depression, and withdrawing from others (Raciala, 2021). Some coping mechanisms that have been found to reduce burnout are showing persistence, accepting help from others, and participating in self-care (Bottiani et.al., 2019; Santoro, 2018; Raciala, 2021)

Santoro (2018) explains that burnout may imply that teachers are not using their personal resources sufficiently or might not have come to the job with enough personal perseverance to act during challenging times. One of the key differences between burnout and demoralization is that burnout focuses on the individual while demoralization looks at the impact that policies have on teachers' moral rewards (Santoro, 2011a). Burnout implies that a teacher became burned out

because they did not have the mental toughness to persevere through tough times (Bottiani et.al., 2019; Raciala, 2021). There are many challenges that teachers may face that they are not able to solve by simply pushing through (Bottiani et.al., 2019; Santoro 2018; Raciala, 2021). Santoro (2011a) explains that replacing the word demoralization with the word burnout more accurately explains that teachers are experiencing a problem due to social constructs, not because of their own inadequacies. Teachers who have decided to leave the teaching field can find comfort in the idea that the problems that they faced were not personal, and instead were caused politically and systematically (Santoro, 2019). If demoralization is understood then policies and school culture can be improved in educational systems (Santoro, 2018; Shaw, 2019; Tsang & Liu, 2016). Once improvements are made, teachers can be re-moralized, and schools will be more successful (Santoro, 2018).

Teachers face many challenges that can lead them to feeling frustrated and stressed including having to manage classroom behaviors, complete tasks they are not trained to do, and having expectations being raised without allowing more time for planning or to conduct these tasks (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Bottiani's et.al. (2019) research found that even teachers who are highly skilled, with access to a variety of personal resources, can become hindered with burnout from the high demands a low resource that are found in some schools. This lack of resources includes funding for supplies, professional development, and time to complete new tasks. The resources that teachers are lacking are often not a result of the teacher, but of the educational system and policies that are out of the teachers' control (Santoro, 2018). One of the resources that can become lacking is the moral rewards that teachers can receive from teaching (Santoro, 2011a).

When teachers do not have the resources, they need to do good work then they are in danger of becoming demoralized (Santoro, 2018). Santoro (2011a) explains that the definition of burnout, points out individual failure and weakness instead of problems with political or policy issues. Burnout is perceived as personal, while demoralization reflects the fundamental elements of the educational system (Santoro, 2018, Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Demoralization is caused by many different elements working together, it is not the product of an individual's lack of ability to do or cope with the job (Santoro, 2018). Teacher burnout can be remedied by teachers taking better care of their health and learning how to deal with stress (Bottiani et.al., 2019). Santoro (2018), states that demoralization is rooted in discouragement and despair caused by conflicts in policies, reform mandates, and school practices. Given this difference, demoralization is a social construct while teacher burnout is individual problem. In order to create change in policies that can cause demoralization, some solutions might include those policies needing to be reviewed and rewritten, teachers need to be included in the decision-making process, and administrators need to communicate the reason why changes are being made and how to implement them (Santoro, 2011a; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019).

Reversing Demoralization

Demoralization is when teachers no longer receive the moral rewards of being a teacher (Santoro, 2011a). Santoro (2011a) explains that the moral dimension of teaching is about cultivating teachers' moral identities by restructuring the work so that the teachers are able to be successful. Demoralization is not a permanent condition and can be reversed if teachers are once again able to access the moral rewards of teaching (Santoro, 2018). In order for teachers to access the moral rewards of teaching they need work conditions to improve, strong

communication, and a supportive school culture (Santoro, 2018). Remoralization may be established by assuring teachers have autonomy, competence, and relatedness within their practiced (Santoro, 2011a).

Changing Work Conditions

Santoro (2018) expresses that demoralization is a mindset that is created by the conditions the teacher is teaching in. Changing the school culture and empowering teachers can help them to become re-moralized (Santoro 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016). Hemmings (2012) researched how school reform can bring about re-moralization. The research study inquired how one school was able to help teachers find their moral identities again. They looked to build moral order by creating relational trust and ethical commitments to students first, participated in professional practice, and encouraged purposeful and educationally moral exchanges (Hemming, 2012). This outlook changed the school culture and helped to restore teachers' moral identities.

These conditions can be changed in order for teachers to be re-moralized. The research study found that teachers agreed on the type of school cultures that made them feel the best. Santoro (2018) explains that school leaders are the gatekeepers to policies and mandates, and it is their job to assess these policies and communicate them to teachers in a way that helps teachers understand how they fit into the school's vision. Administrators should protect teachers from being faced with too many initiatives too quickly without explaining their importance. Hemmings (2012) found that restoring a moral balance to schools helped teacher moralization and student achievement. Hemmings (2012) explained that when there are trusting relationships and ethical commitments by school members it helps to give all students a good education. If teachers perceive their success linked to their moral identities than it is important to restore a moral balance in school reform.

An in-depth narrative inquiry is one way to look at how teachers perceive school reform and other moral conflicts that they may be facing. Branford's (2018) research found that in order for teachers to begin to feel re-moralized reform policy efforts must take teachers' perspectives into account. Investigating how teachers are perceiving their environment can inspire change. Learning from these teachers will help lead to more teachers being re-moralized. Santoro (2018)

Strong Communication

Strong communication can help teachers feel more autonomy in their work. If teachers are able to understand why the policies are being created, they are much more likely to want to follow the policies (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2018). Hales (2017) research suggests that when teachers are allowed to be part of the decision-making process improvements can be made. This professional learning community can help teachers feel confident in their content and instructional practices. Clear communication may be a key to understanding how to combat demoralization.

Supportive School Culture

A supportive school culture can be created when a school has a clear vision and culture that is communicated consistently (Kotter, 2012). Open communication between staff and administration can allow teachers opportunities to feel ownership in the school community (Tsang & Liu, 2016). Teachers are constantly learning and reflecting on their practice and opportunities to participate in professional learning communities and mentoring programs allow for strong relationships to be built (Santoro, 2018). When teachers feel like they are part of a team and feel ownership in their school community they will be less likely to feel demoralized (Santoro, 2018, Tsang & Liu, 2016).

Summary

Demoralization happens when teachers are unable to receive the moral awards that they anticipate from their teaching (Santoro, 2018). Teachers pursue their career in order to make a difference in students' lives (Lee et al., 2019). As they begin teaching, they form their own teacher moral identities (Butera et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2019; Joseph, 2016; Santoro, 2018, Yildiz & Kiliç, 2021). Santoro (2011a) stated that, "Engaging in work that has ethical value attracts and sustains teachers in a profession that yields relatively modest material rewards" (p. 4).

There are several conditions that can cause demoralization (Santoro, 2018; Shaw, 2019; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Changes to the school environment due to school reform has caused teachers to feel as if they are demoralized (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Teachers are being asked to do more tasks and given less time to do them. They also have less autonomy in their own classrooms (Santoro 2018, Shaw, 2019 Tsang & Liu, 2016). Leadership plays a role in demoralization, when policies are communicated affectively than teachers are more likely to understand why they are being used and help them to feel better about complying (Tsang & Liu, 2016). When a teacher is feeling demoralized, they are often stressed and show signs of depression, they may choose to leave the teaching field leaving a lack of qualified teachers (Santoro, 2011b). Demoralization often affects more than one teacher in a school, leading to staff shortages (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu 2016).

There are many consequences to demoralization (Bottiani et.al., 2019; Santoro, 2018). It is important to look into how these consequences affect the working environment of teachers because the environment teachers work in affects student outcomes, and other colleagues who may become demoralized as well (Santoro, 2018). There is a lack of knowledge explaining how the demoralization may affect the teaching environments of teachers. This study will collect

stories of teachers experiences with demoralization in relation to their teacher environments.

This literature review began with an explanation of demoralization and moral identity. The review of the literature continued with the difference between burnout which is caused by an individual need for perseverance, and demoralization a social construct based on inability to access moral rewards of teaching (Santoro, 2018). Demoralization a social construct that is caused by policy, school culture and leadership (Santoro, 2018). This review concludes that further studies should be conducted in order to inquire about how demoralization affects teachers teaching environment.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The teaching field has changed dramatically within the last 60 years in the United States (Pacaol, 2021; Santoro, 2018; Shaw, 2019; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2021). Changes resulting from school reform and accountability policies have affected how teachers implement their practice, and how they see their own work (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick, 2021). Teachers may be facing curriculum mandates, data record keeping policies, and other non-instructional work that does not always lead to students' academic success (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Teachers may not be provided with enough time to complete these tasks (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Demoralization is caused by systems and policies that are put into place that teachers have no control over (Santoro, 2018). When teachers feel a loss of control over their profession, they may not be able to access the moral rewards of teaching (Santoro, 2011a).

Self-determination theory (SDT) explains that individuals become intrinsically motivated by three needs that are psychologically essential, autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1989). Many of the causes of demoralization can be correlated with these three essential needs (Santoro, 2011a). School reform and accountability policies can lead teachers to feel less like professionals because they have less autonomy in the classroom (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Poor communication and leadership can lead to teachers feeling a lack of competence and relatedness within the school culture (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Workers are motivated to do work when they are given opportunities to participate in creativity, conceptual learning, that set a positive emotional tone and build self-esteem (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This study collected narrative stories from middle school teachers who self-

identified as demoralized, who shared their personal experiences with demoralization in relation to their teaching environments.

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to explore the experiences of public middle school teachers with demoralization in the context of their teaching environments. Demoralization may lead teachers to feel shame and frustration because they may feel like they are unable to complete their job to the expectations that they set for themselves (Santoro, 2018). A narrative inquiry approach is based on the idea that people use stories to give meaning to and to understand events in their lives (Ntinda, 2019). One hour semi-structured interviews allowed teachers to communicate their own personal experiences with demoralization by giving them an opportunity to tell their unique stories. These interviews were then transcribed and restoried into narratives. The narrative format allowed teachers the opportunity to describe their experiences with demoralization in the context of their teaching environments. These stories were then analyzed to develop themes and patterns about teachers' experiences with demoralization. Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding a person's inner world and a way of making sense of their conflicts in a social or cultural way (Tolman & Head, 2021). Teachers were able to tell their stories in their own voices.

The research questions for this study were developed to guide this qualitative narrative inquiry to better understand the experiences public middle school teachers have with demoralization in context of their teaching environments. This study gave voice to teachers' experiences which allowed them to share their individual stories of demoralization. The study was guided by the following research questions.

Research Question 1: How do public middle school teachers describe their experiences with demoralization?

Research Question 2: How do public middle school teachers describe demoralization in relation to their teaching practice?

Research Question 3: How do public middle school teachers describe demoralization in relation to their teaching environments?

Qualitative research is focused on collecting and analyzing data to find a deeper understanding of a social situation or event through the eyes of research participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain that narrative inquiry focuses on personal and social experiences where each experience grows out of another experience. According to Creswell (2013), a narrative study is a way to tell the story of individual life experiences within an institution, to find shared patterns of the culture of the group, that could help to initiate political action. Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding a person's inner world and a way of making sense of their conflicts in a social or cultural way (Tolman & Head, 2021). A narrative inquiry allowed participants in this study a way to share their own personal story of becoming demoralized in the context of their teaching environment. A purpose of narrative inquiry research is to spark conversation and discussion about the stories that are being told (Norman, 2020).

This narrative inquiry gathered data to create restoried narratives from public middle school teachers in Connecticut through semi structured interviews. The semi structured interviews consisted of questions that encourage teachers to share their individual stories with demoralization. The interview questions centered around the three components of SDT theory, which are autonomy, competence, and relatedness; questions were asked to allow exploration into how each component of SDT theory may have related to the participants teaching experiences (Deci & Ryan, 1989).

After the interviews were transcribed, they were restoried into narrative form and member checked, and finally were manually coded to look for themes. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) explained that coding is a word used so that you can easily retrieve and organize patterns of data collected in different interviews. Once an item is coded then they can begin to look for patterns and themes, additional layers of complexity, and interconnecting ideas (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

Site Information and Demographics/Setting

All of the participants in this study were public middle school teachers in the State of Connecticut. According to Edsite (2022), the state of Connecticut's source for educational data, states that there are 205 school districts in Connecticut, with 52,135 certified teachers. Edsite (2022) also explains that student enrollment in teacher preparation programs in Connecticut has been reduced, and that there is a teacher shortage especially in schools where students come from low-income families. It is important to note that demoralization may cause teacher attrition (Santoro, 2018). This study focused on collecting Connecticut public middle school teachers' experiences with demoralization in relation to their teaching environments.

For the purpose of this study a middle school will be described as a school that is serving students in grades 6, 7 or 8. According to the state of Connecticut Edsite (2022) webpage, there are currently 248 schools that serve middle school students. Middle school teachers complete the certification process to teach one subject, such as Math, Science, or English. Middle school teachers are often responsible for many duties including following structured curriculum, creating a safe learning environment for teaching, communicating with parents, and collecting data on student learning (Herman et al., 2020). Middle school teachers

have a wide range of challenges which include planning lessons, teaching, grading, and recoding learning data on 100 or more students a day, often without appropriate time or training (Herman et al., 2020). These challenges could contribute to a teacher becoming demoralized (Santoro, 2018).

Participants/Sampling Method

Creswell (2013) explains that an important step of completing a qualitative study is to find participants that will be able to share good data, which is defined as purposeful sampling. Middle school teachers who are members of the state of Connecticut Teachers' Facebook page, who self-identify as demoralized will be invited to participate in the study. A recruitment flyer (Appendix A) was posted on the Connecticut Teachers' Facebook page. This Facebook page is a private page, that only those that teach or have taught in Connecticut are invited to join. There are 1.3 thousand teachers in Connecticut that are members of the page. Members are permitted to post on this page, and permission was granted to post the recruitment flyer by the moderators of the group within Facebook Messenger. The recruitment flyer provided criteria for participants to use in order to self-identify as demoralized. These criteria include feeling frustrated, feeling unable to meet the needs of their job, and feeling unable to access the moral rewards of teaching. Participants who self-identified as meeting the criteria on the recruitment flyer were asked to contact the researcher at their University of New England email provided, Participants were sent the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix C) to share further information about the study. The six volunteers who responded to this post were scheduled for an interview. The number of participants were chosen to have enough restoried narratives to form a collective story of demoralization (Creswell, 2013). The six participants were the only ones who answered the recruitment flyer. Interviews were

scheduled with potential participants in the order that they responded to the recruitment flyer. A master list that held potential participants names and emails was created and stored in a separate file from the study documents. This list was destroyed after the restoried narratives had been member checked.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The six participants that self-identified as demoralized and volunteered for this study were contacted through email and scheduled for a one hour semi structured interview that took place via Zoom. Zoom is a video conferencing platform that that can be used to engage with others including conducting interviews (Howlett, 2022). Participants were given the option to have their videos on or off during the interview and were informed that their information is being recorded. At the start of the semi structured interview, the Participant Information Sheet was reviewed, and participants [had](#) the opportunity to ask any questions. An interview protocol was followed (Appendix B) which included interview questions that were asked in no specific order to provide for flexibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A semi-structured interview structure allowed participants to feel free to elaborate and share their own personal stories based on the questions that are asked.

Narrative inquiry allows participants to tell stories about their lives and experiences (Creswell, 2013). Researchers collect these stories and make meaning of them by looking at patterns that explain conflicts or culture in a certain situation (Tolman & Head, 2021). The semi structured interview questions were developed to encourage participants to express their experiences with demoralization in relation to their teaching environment. The interviews were recorded and transcribed through Zoom. Recordings of the interviews was important because in order to convey the participants experiences clearly the researcher should pay close

attention to tone of voice, pauses, or hand gestures (Tolman & Head, 2021). During the data analysis and restoring phase, careful attention was paid not only to the words that the participants used but also their voice and gestures. Using the transcript and video recording, each participants' interview was restoried into a narrative. The restoried narratives were created from the transcripts of the semi structured Zoom interviews and were shared with the participants in order to check that the information that was gathered is accurate.

Data Analysis

After participant interviews were completed and transcribed, the interviews were restoried using the three-dimensional narrative process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly (2000), explain that restorying is the process of gathering information from participants, seeking key elements or themes in the information, and rewriting the stories based on the continuity of past, present, or future, interactions both personal and social, and the setting of the information. After the interviews were restoried they were sent via email to the participants so that they could review the narratives for accuracy and clarity. Each participant was given five days to member check their restoried narrative. One of the participants responded by email and stated that the narrative was a good representation of their thoughts. The other four participants did not respond to this email, their narratives were considered accurate after five days, as stated in the participant information sheet. The data from the restoried narratives were then analyzed to identify themes and commonalities. Data analysis does not always go in a straight line and each step is interrelated (Creswell, 2013). The data collected from the restoried narratives were analyzed using Creswell's (2013) five steps to analyze data. These steps included managing and organizing data, reading for emergent ideas, describing codes and places them into themes, and then representing and

visualizing the data (Creswell, 2013). After the narratives had been restoried and member checked they were read through for themes. These themes were manually coded and organized. Sections of the restoried narratives were organized together to show a collective story of teacher demoralization. The narratives were used as a guide and theoretical considerations of STD to create codes and themes of data and focused on expressing social significance of the participant's story in relation to social constructs of demoralization (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Limitations, Delimitations, and Ethical Issues

Limitations are the weaknesses that can be found during any research study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). One of the limitations of this study is focused on reducing bias, as the narratives are rewritten in the researcher's words instead of the participants. Participants were asked to member check their restoried narratives, and by giving them the opportunity to read the narratives after they are created for accuracy this helped to reduce bias. The narrative inquiry research process created consistency when data is being analyzed, which was done by following Creswell's (2013) five steps to analyzing data. Delimitations are the boundaries in the study (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019), which in this case includes the limited number of participants in the study and the fact that all the participants in the study are middle school teachers and teach in the state of Connecticut. Ethical issues were investigated by looking at the three elements of the Belmont report including respect of persons, beneficence, and justice.

Limitations

Limitations refer to the possible weaknesses that could be developed from a study based on design of the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). In narrative research it is

difficult to verify the results of the findings of a study. By completing the research process the same for each data point will increase this level of accuracy (Creswell, 2013). I am a middle school teacher who has many shared experiences with participants. It was important to make sure that I did not lead participants into their narratives, or restoried information, by relating too much information about her own personal experiences. It is assumed that when participants answered their interview questions, they were honestly recounting their experiences with demoralization in their teaching environments. In order to minimize these limitations member checking was used by giving participants the opportunity to read their restoried narratives and check them for accuracy.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the boundaries of a study, or what is put in and what is left out (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). There are several delimitations for this study. The first is the participants themselves. The participants who were interviewed were teachers who self-identified as demoralized. All of the participants in this study are public school teachers who currently teach in the state of Connecticut, which limits the exploration of demoralization to a small population in contrast to the entire country. Each individual state has different accountability policies and school reform efforts, which may cause teachers from the same state to have similar experiences. The participants in this study were middle school teachers. This leaves out a large group of teachers who teach elementary school and high school. By focusing on middle school teachers, I was able to focus my research on a select group of teachers, that may have shared experiences within this unique age groups that they teach.

Ethical Issues

When conducting research certain ethical issues apply including making sure that participants voices are heard in an accurate way (Creswell, 2013). The Belmont Report (1979) was signed into law in order to protect human subjects from behavioral research. The report is split into three elements, respect of person, beneficence, and justice. The study used the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix C) in order to share how a participant's information will be deidentified using pseudonyms and excluding identifying information. Participants did not have to answer any questions they are not comfortable with, and they were given the opportunity to review their restoried narratives for accuracy. The master list of participants emails, and names was kept in a separate file from the rest of the coded study and was destroyed after the restoried narratives had been member checked.

Respect of Person

The Belmont Report (1979) states that all people should be treated as autonomous agents, and that persons with diminished autonomy should be protected. In the case of this research study none of the participants have diminished autonomy and are able to make the personal decision to participate in the study. The participants in this study entered the study voluntarily and were provided with the Participant Information Sheet. The Participant Information Sheet informed participants of how their information will be stored and kept private. The information was kept on a password protected laptop accessible only to the researcher, and all names and identifying information were deidentified.

Beneficence

Beneficence is described in the Belmont Report (1979) as not only protecting participants but also looking out for their wellbeing. In order to minimize any risk to the participants the researcher protected their identities by using pseudonyms for names and any

identifying information was deidentified. All data gathered from the participants were kept on a password protected laptop accessible only by the researcher. Participants had the right to refuse to answer any question for any reason during the interview process.

Justice

The Belmont Report (1979) explains justice as relating to who will benefit from the research and who will have the burden of it. During the study, each of the participants were treated equally. They each participated in a semi-structured interview following an interview protocol (Appendix B). After the interview the data was restoried using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative process. These restoried narratives were member checked by the participants for accuracy. Each restoried narrative was analyzed using Creswell's (2013) five steps to data analysis.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers must continue to limit and control personal bias when conducting research including design, implementation, and analysis of their study (Creswell, 2013). In order to establish trustworthiness, a qualitative study must have credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The trustworthiness of the study is directly related to those of the researcher, and how the research was conducted (Creswell, 2013). The credibility of qualitative research is based on the training, experience, and rigor of steps taken by the researcher when conducting the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Credibility

The credibility, or validity, of the research comes from the methodology that is chosen (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher does not only look to verify conclusions but looks

to test the validity of these conclusions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). This is done in the research design phase of the study. The study's purpose, research design, methods, and conceptual framework must all be in alignment (Creswell, 2013). In this study teachers' experiences were collected through the interview process and the data from the interviews were collected and restoried using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative process. After the data was restoried it was analyzed using Creswell's (2013) five steps to analyze data.

Transferability

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explains that the importance to research is less on the findings themselves but more on the ability to transfer those findings into other research studies, or transferability. When writing research findings, it is important to add depth, richness, and detailed description so that others will be able to use it as a basis of their study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The literature review helped to inform the study by defining demoralization and identifying the causes, and possible consequences to demoralization. Narrative research is a way of using peoples' stories and accounts in order to make sense of situations that they have experienced (Tolman & Head, 2021). Transferability is the amount of information found during research that can be used in other similar studies (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) explains that methods, data sources, and researcher integrity are all needed for a study to have transferability. Interviews will be conducted using the interview protocol (Appendix B). This study could be translated in several ways. The findings in this study could be transferable to different grade levels teachers such as early childhood, elementary, and high school. The study's findings could also be transferable to different areas of the country, or in private schools.

Dependability

When a study is dependable if it is able to be replicated by other researchers and find similar results (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). One way to do this is to make sure the research design and implementation are clearly defined and detailed in the writing. By describing how the interviews were transcribed, restoried, coded, and themes were developed others will be able to conduct a similar study about demoralization in middle school teachers. The transparency in which the research is completed will help to give dependability or validity to the research (Creswell, 2013).

Confirmability

In order for a research study to have confirmability the researcher needs to prove that their findings were based on research and not personal bias (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). One way to do this is to be transparent about any bias that the researcher may have. It was important to the confirmability of the study to explain this bias. In order to limit the amount of bias in this study the steps for analysis were taken using Creswell's (2013), five steps of analysis. The restoried narratives were created with a focus of not only life as it is now for the participants in the study but life on a continuum (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Once the narratives were restoried participants had the opportunity to member check the stories for transparency. Participants were emailed a copy of their restoried narratives and had five days to respond with any changes. One of the participants responded that they agreed with the wording of the restoried narrative. The other five participants did not respond during the five-day time frame provided, and it was assumed that the participants agreed with the narrative and did not see any conflict or inaccuracy based on the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix C). At this time the restoried narratives were used as they were written.

Summary

A qualitative narrative inquiry study is a way to tell the story of individual's life experiences within an institution and to discover that person's inner world, and how they make sense of their conflicts in a social or cultural way (Creswell, 2013; Tolman & Head, 2021). The study provided a collection of restoried narratives based on public middle school teachers' perspectives on demoralization in relation to their teaching environments. The data for this study was gathered for one hour semi structured interviews on Zoom with public middle school teachers who have self-identified as demoralized. The data was collected and organized based on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative process which includes organizing data based on time, place, and social and personal situations. These restoried interviews were coded using Creswell's (2013) five steps to analyzing data. It allowed the research to spark conversation and discussion about the stories that are being told (Norman, 2020).

In order to check for accuracy, research member checking should be used during the research process (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Member checking was used by allowing participants to review their restoried narratives for accuracy. Participants information was deidentified and a pseudonym were used in place of their names or any other identifying information. Lastly, the researcher acknowledged bias as a middle school teacher herself and focused on fair and accurate interviewing, and coding processes.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Demoralization is a social construct that occurs when teachers become stressed and frustrated because they are unable to access the moral rewards of teaching (Santoro, 2011a). Teachers may enter the teaching field because they would like to make a difference in their students' lives, to become mentors or help make the students' lives better (Bullough, 2011; Joseph, 2016; Lee et al., 2019). There are several obstacles that may make it difficult for teachers to access the moral rewards of teaching (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick, 2021). Teachers may feel like they are not being treated like professionals when they are asked to teach using a scripted curriculum, or when they are evaluated based on standardized testing scores (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2021). Teachers may feel like they do not have time to complete the work that is being asked of them during the school day (Tsang & Liu, 2016). When teachers feel like they are not able to do their best work they experience feelings of frustration and depression because they are demoralized (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016). The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to explore the experiences of public middle school teachers with demoralization in the context of their teaching environments. The research questions that guided this study were:

Research Question 1: How do public middle school teachers describe their experiences with demoralization?

Research Question 2: How do public middle school teachers describe demoralization in relation to their teaching practice?

Research Question 3: How do public middle school teachers describe demoralization in relation to their teaching environments?

The research questions were used to develop semi structured interview questions, as a way to provide a voice to middle school teachers and allow them to share their experiences with demoralization. Narrative research is a way of representing and understanding experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). A narrative inquiry allowed the participants in this study to share their experiences within the institution of middle schools. When experiences are shared within an institution, patterns may develop that could help initiate political change (Creswell, 2013). Once the interviews were conducted, the transcripts were restoried paying close attention to Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three dimensions of narrative writing, time, place, and social interactions. As the narratives were restoried, themes were identified that were common among the participant interviews. In this study three themes emerged from the participant narratives which included time and resources as valuable commodities, the consequences of the nomadic life of a modern middle school teacher, and balancing policy, administration, community, and student needs.

Analysis Method

A recruitment flyer (Appendix A) was posted on the Connecticut Teachers Facebook page which included the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix C) and invited those participants who self-identified as demoralized to respond by email if they would like to participate in the study. The flyer asked the potential participant to self-identify by asking the following questions to determine if the participant fit the criteria of the study:

1. Are you a middle school teacher in the state of Connecticut? Are you 18 years of age or older?
2. Do you feel frustrated and unable to meet your own expectations of being a teacher?

3. Do you have trouble accessing the rewards of teaching that come from feeling like you do good work, and made a difference in your teaching career?

Recruitment was open for 62 days, during this time the recruitment flyer was reposted a total of five times and six participants responded by email that they were interested in being a part of the study. Response emails were sent out to schedule semi structured interviews that were conducted over Zoom with each participant. The interviews were scheduled within a week of each of the participants responding. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using the Zoom transcription feature. The interviews lasted around 50 minutes each; the shortest interview was 40 minutes and the longest was around 70 minutes.

Once the interviews were transcribed, the interviews were restoried and organized based on the following three categories: teaching requirements, working with students, and working with administration. After the data was organized into these categories it was then restoried into narratives paying close attention to Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three dimensions of narrative writing by including time, place, and social interactions. The participants' information was written as a narrative that included a combination of direct quotes and paraphrasing of the stories that they told. The restoried narratives were sent via email to the participants so that they could review the narratives for accuracy and clarity. Each participant was given five days to member check their restoried narrative. One of the participants responded to the review request to the restoried narrative but did not request any changes, five did not respond. As written in the Participant Information Sheet, if after five days passed without a response for changes the five restoried narratives were considered as accurate. The data from the restoried narratives were then analyzed to identify themes and commonalities.

The narratives were carefully read through with a focus on finding common ideas and themes. The researcher color coded the themes within the narrative as a way of organizing the information. The common ideas were color coded in each narrative and patterns began to appear. The three themes emerged from the analysis of the data in this study to include time and resources as valuable commodities, the consequences of the nomadic life of a modern middle school teacher, and balancing policy, administration, community, and student needs.

Presentation of Results and Findings

The narratives from this qualitative narrative study were created from one hour long semi structured interviews that were conducted on Zoom with participants who self-identified as being demoralized. The transcribed interviews were organized based on three categories, teaching requirements, working with administration, and working with students. Once the information was organized the participants stories were written in narrative form using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three dimensions of writing which include paying close attention to time, place and social interactions. The participants stories were written as narratives and member checked. Within each narrative the participants were able to describe their own individual experiences within the social construct of demoralization. After this, each of the narratives were coded and patterns identified. From these patterns themes were developed including time and resources as valuable commodities, the consequences of the nomadic life of a modern middle school teacher, and balancing policy, administration, community, and student needs. Each of the participants explained their frustrations finding a place to teach where they felt valued, finding the time to do their job correctly, and communicating and building trust with administration. These themes were then explained in the context of the type's components needed for motivation according to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1989). The themes show

that there are patterns to the participants experiences with the social construct of demoralization.

Narratives

Six participants who self-identified as being demoralized answered the participant recruitment flyer and participated in semi structured interviews on Zoom in order to share their perspectives on demoralization. The interviews were restoried into three categories. Each of the participants expressed frustration and stress in three specific areas of their career. The first category was teaching requirements. The participants identified not having enough time to complete their duties, having to cover for teachers who were absent or unfilled positions, and having to follow policies and procedures that they did not always understand. The second category was working with administration. The participants expressed frustration over unclear expectations, having trouble developing trust, and what they viewed as unfair treatment. The third category was working with students. Participants expressed having difficulty reaching students with scripted curriculum, frustrations over standardized testing, and stress dealing with student behaviors.

Anne

Anne began teaching 16 years ago and is currently a special education teacher who also started a job in a new school district this year. She explained that she became a teacher because she thought that she would enjoy helping students to reach their full potential. She shared, “It's tough because morals and values are personal to each individual. Me, I just try to be the best person you can be, and that applies to me as a teacher as well.” When she entered the special education field, she thought that she would primarily serve students with learning disabilities. She wanted to inspire her students to be the best people they can be and applies this idea to

herself as well. However, she found the reality of teaching was different because she often had to teach students who had behavior challenges. She explained, “I only did two academics lessons today for a student, because my student just didn't want to do the work. You know there was language, threatening, and he walked out of the classroom.” Many of her students were coming to her with trauma or difficult lives at home, that could have caused them to have difficulty regulating themselves in her classroom.

Anne expressed that she also found the hours of paperwork that were required to create learning plans for her students and preparing for student and parent meetings to be overwhelming at times. She said, “When I began teaching, I had no idea how lengthy and time consuming the paperwork would be.” Anne first became demoralized when faced with the requirements of teaching, which included navigating student behavior, lengthy paperwork, and being asked to follow policies that she did not feel were in the best interest of her students. She continued to feel demoralized when she had difficulty working with administration. Anne felt that the climate at the school was changed when a new superintendent entered her district. She felt that policies and expectations were not always presented in a clear way. On top of all these things Anne felt demoralized because she feels she is not always able to meet the needs of her students, because she has to create her own teaching materials, and does not always have access to the curriculum she needs to best help her students.

Teaching Requirements. Anne explained that there have been several teaching requirements that have led to her demoralization including, the expectation that teachers follow policies and procedures surrounding creating student individualized learning plans, standardized testing, and required trainings. Anne expressed frustration that the policies and procedures of the school districts that she has worked in have not regularly been communicated with teachers in a

helpful way. Anne shared, “No, they have not always been explained, like at this past job I had questions about how to write up a student’s individual learning plan. They told me to read the manual. Here you go. Here’s the manual.” This concerned Anne because there are many laws that need to be followed when creating individual student learning plans and it was important to her to create a legal document that supported her student’s learning. She said, “You have to be really careful because these are legal documents, and they instruct others on how we work with students to meet their needs.” Anne also recalled a time when she was at a meeting with a new teacher and the new teacher asked about the school’s dress code. The dress code policy was very vague, and she was unable to adequately respond to the new teacher’s question. Anne also explained that dress code policies at every school district she has worked in have been vague and not clearly communicated to her. She said, “Not one place I have worked has had a clear dress code, at the school I am in now has dress down Friday, every Friday We didn’t even have to pay. I didn’t know that, either. It would have been nice to know.” She even mentioned that her most recent school had a dress down Friday policy that she had no idea about until a colleague explained it to her. This is just one example of a schoolwide policy that Anne wished was more readily communicated to new teachers.

Since becoming frustrated and stressed with her new job at the new school, Anne has sought out one professional development opportunity. Anne participated in a mandatory training as she entered a new school district who had already participated in the training over the past school year. Anne was given a week to complete training that the rest of the school had much more time with. However, she described that because the program was a new initiative, the entire school was still working on understanding the training. She hoped to receive more guidance about this program for others at the school.

Anne began to feel demoralized when she was asked to complete lengthy paperwork and to deal with students with difficult behaviors. When Anne was asked to follow a school policy that required her students to take a standardized test she identified as being demoralized. Anne felt that by giving the test she would be doing something that was not in the best interest of her students. At that time, she left the school district she was working in all together. She eventually returned to a new district where she encountered several challenges that contributed to her demoralization. These included unclear communication about the policies and procedures of the school district she was reentering into. It also included challenges with a new superintendent of the district whose policies led to challenges in the school climate. With these challenges Anne made the choice to leave a school district once again. At the time of this study, she was currently beginning the school year at a new school that she is hoping will be a better fit for her.

Working with Administration. Anne has worked hard to create relationships built on respect with her administration. She was able to do this successfully with some administrators that she has worked with and has found challenges working with others. When Anne eventually decided to reenter the teaching field in a new district, she felt that the climate of her new school was strained because teachers were on edge while adjusting to a new administrator who was making a lot of changes to the school.

Anne felt that “the little things are difficult when you first start at a school. Like getting all your programs set up and knowing who you can trust.” Entering a new school is stressful and challenging. Anne described that she felt the most supported in her most recent classroom in her most recent position, when an administrator stopped in to check on how she was doing. Anne shared that the administrator said that she was doing an excellent job and asked if there were any materials or support that were needed. Anne felt supported because of this proactive extra effort

to make sure she had everything she needed to help her to meet her students' needs. She shared, "I felt as though the support was given to me to stand up and be strong in a professional way, so I could support the kids." Anne believes in building strong relationships with administration, but this is not always easy. Her relationships with administration added to her demoralization because Anne felt demoralized when working with the new superintendent of her district in the position she held when she first returned to teaching. She worried that she did not understand the expectations and felt her job might have been in jeopardy. This led to her leaving this school district and beginning a new one this school year. So far Anne has had a positive relationship with her new administration and is beginning to feel a little less stress and frustration as a result.

Working with Students. The students that Anne teaches need very specific lessons that are geared directly to them. She explained, "There isn't anything really out there. It's a piecemeal of things that you just kind of have go through and see what works." Anne described that her lesson plans are unique because they are based on her individual student's needs. Instead, she collects several skills and strategies that she will practice with her students and keeps them available for when they are needed. Her students practice skills for five days and when they are ready, they move on to the next lesson. Anne says she does not do her lesson planning at home but instead is able to complete this task at school. Anne shared that she depends on her coworkers in order to know what they are teaching in their classrooms. She said, "I'm having a hard time because I need to know what is going on in other classes so that I can help my students." This is because Anne often needs to push into content area teacher's classrooms in order to support her students. It is helpful to Anne if she is aware of what the teacher is going to teach so that she can differentiate for her students. Communication with these teachers is

necessary for Anne to help her students, a lack of communication can cause stress and confusion for both Anne and her students. Anne shared,

I went and talked with a teacher and asked, “Can you give me access to the eighth-grade language arts for my student?” He looked at me and said, “It's not written anywhere. I thought Wait! No, it has to be written somewhere. Maybe he just doesn’t know where it is. He is like, “No, there's really not a place where it's all together.” Oh, my gosh! I thought it has to be there. Maybe he just doesn’t know about it. But she has been teaching here over twenty years. He started laughing and said, “if you find it let me know”.

This led Anne to feel frustrated that she was not able to meet her students' needs. She had no way of knowing what her students would be learning next so that she could support them in the classroom. Anne also experienced feelings of demoralization when working with her students. She felt frustration when there was not a curriculum that was written to fit student’s individual needs. She also felt demoralized when she could do what was best for her students because she did not know what other teachers are going to be teaching when she pushes in to help them in the classroom.

Anne began to feel demoralized when she was faced with difficult work requirements. These included many hours of paperwork, having to follow unclear policies and procedures, deal with classroom behaviors and hours of paperwork. This was intensified when Anne was required to follow the district’s policy on standardized testing. Anne became so demoralized that she left the teaching field all together. When she returned four years later, to a new district, she continued to feel demoralized. Her relationships with new administration, a district superintendent, caused her to feel under pressure and worried about her job security. She also faced the difficulties of learning a new school district’s expectation. After three years at this

district Anne decided to once again leave this time in search of a better fit. She began teaching at a new school this school year and found that her relationships with administration have shown improvement reducing her feelings of demoralization. However, she still felt stressed about learning all her new requirements as a teacher and meeting the best needs of her students.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth has been teaching for nine years and is currently an English as a second language middle school teacher. She began working in a new district for the 2022-2023 school year, she entered this new position in search for a school that she feels will be a good fit to her teaching style. She remembered wanting to become a teacher at a young age. Elizabeth recalled, “I remember walking through the hallways of the school and seeing teachers whispering with each other, I felt like they knew all of the secrets and I wanted to know them as well.” As she got older, she continued wanting to be a teacher so that she could build relationships with students. She said during her first years of teaching working at a summer camp to help build relationships with her students. She expressed, “It was fun to see my students outside of the school setting, and to learn about what their interests were before beginning to work with them academically.” She stated that one of the most important things that she would like to instill in her students is a love for learning. Elizabeth explained, “I began to teach because I thought it was glamorous. It is a little embarrassing to say this but I thought it was a little bit glamorous. I thought it would be fun. You know talking about things I cared about all day.”

Elizabeth began to feel demoralized when she felt she was not able to meet the needs of her students. She explained that a large amount of her time was spent on standardized testing that did not benefit her students, and she felt that student behaviors sometimes got in the way of her being able to teach her students strategies that help them to communicate better, because these

strategies often depend on group work which could get chaotic. Students running and wrestling in the hallways led to her feeling unsafe at school. Elizabeth's feelings of demoralization intensified when she lost trust in her administration, when she overheard them speaking about her behind her back and felt like her job was politized. "Every day I worry that I will offend someone, I wonder who is talking about me behind my back, and who I can trust? I worry about if my job is safe." The requirements of teaching piled on more feeling of stress and frustration when Elizabeth tried to understand the policies and procedures of a new school that she began this year, plan for each individual students learning because each of her students are speaking English at a different level, and non-teaching requirements such as collecting data on her students, and planning social emotional activities and lesson plans which became more and more time consuming.

Teaching Requirements. Elizabeth spoke about how her view of working with students has changed since becoming demoralized. She expressed that

the biggest perspective changes that I had is to value the small moments and not think so much about the big picture. You know everyone says that you impact students in ways that you don't even know. That is not really rewarding. I mean I appreciate that someone was thinking of me and thought "Mrs. Blank was a good teacher." But seeing that kid smile with when you say something stupid to them. That is really what makes you stay.

She enjoys building relationships with students and connecting with them on their own individual level. Elizabeth explained that even when the job was difficult it was the small moments with students that encouraged her to stick out the feelings of stress and frustration. Elizabeth said that she enjoyed working with and getting to know her students, which is recently important because Elizabeth has started to work in a new school district this year.

She explained that moving to a new district was a big adjustment to make. She expressed that one of the things she has found frustrating is not knowing who to go to for small things. Elizabeth identified the small things as learning how to use the copier, getting a key to lock her classroom door, and not knowing who to ask for help locating things in the building. Elizabeth provided an example of when she asked a member of administration where to find supplies, "They just expect you to know things and yell at you when you don't know how to do them. You know we give so much courtesy and extension to our students if they don't know how to do something, we will teach them. And we do not get that same curtesy back." Elizabeth suggested that each school should have a pamphlet that they could hand out to new teachers. She explained that this could include a map of the building, a list of important phone numbers, and important policies and procedures. She believes that she would have felt less demoralization if she was able to anticipate some of the little things she might encounter and have a resource to help her find what she needed.

While working with students Elizabeth often collaborates with other subject teachers. She said that one thing that made her job a little easier is that all her students worked within the same scripted curriculum. This was important because Elizabeth always knew what page her students were reading from and what skills they were working on. Working in other classrooms while servicing her students gave Elizabeth an opportunity to see how other teachers handle different situations and build relationships with students. Elizabeth explained that it is always great when you have strong relationships with your colleagues, and you can share ideas with them. However, she said this trust can become a problem when teachers become competitive and judgmental which adds to the political nature of the school climate.

Elizabeth explained that there are many different tasks that teachers need to spend their time on and there is often not enough time in the school day to complete all the tasks. She has to plan and differentiate instruction for each individual student which is time consuming but rewarding. However, much of her time is spent preparing for and analyzing data from standardized tests. Elizabeth felt strongly that this time could be better spent doing direct instruction that could help her students meet their learning goals. Elizabeth felt that the number of time-consuming tasks she is asked to do has led to her demoralization.

Working With Administration. Elizabeth felt very strongly that the school climate was often created by the administration of the building. She explained, “They have all the power. They could make or break your day, or your year. They have the ability to end careers and could do so even when you don’t do anything wrong. I try not to talk to them.” Elizabeth explained that her first experience with this was when she watched a co-worker ask a question at a staff meeting. She said, “I am very lucky that the girl that sat next to me at my very first meeting royally screwed up. And I noticed that and thought...wow...I can’t speak up in meetings because the politics are such a way.” Elizabeth felt like both administration and the other staff members of the building treated this teacher unfairly because they did not want to spend any more time at the staff meeting. The new teacher did not know that this was not a time when she should have asked a question.

Elizabeth felt like it had been difficult for her to find colleagues at her school that she could count on. There was often politics and gossip that made it hard for her to connect with others. Elizabeth felt like sometimes her fellow coworkers would try to get others in trouble in order to advance their own careers or to build favor with administration. Elizabeth felt like she needed to be careful around everyone. Elizabeth said, “We experience the same things, it’s

almost like we went to war together, it creates a bond like no other. When that bond is broken it can be very hurtful.” Elizabeth experienced feelings of demoralization when she felt like she was not able to count on or trust her coworkers.

Student behavior is something that Elizabeth felt was a large problem at the schools that she has worked at. She expressed that the behaviors become frustrating when they were not dealt with in a fair and consistent way. Elizabeth felt demoralized when she went to her building administration and explained that she was feeling unsafe because of some of her students' behaviors, which included running in the hallways and rough play. When she brought her feelings up to administrators, they blamed her for the behavior. Elizabeth felt that she was being blamed and judged because of the behavior of her students by administration, the parents of her students and her coworkers. She said, “We had a very detailed list of behaviors and the suggested consequences, but this was followed inconsistently, it almost always was blamed on me as a teacher instead of on the student.” She experienced feelings of demoralization when she tried different classroom management strategies, but they did not always translate to success in the classroom.

Elizabeth experienced stress and frustration surrounding her relationships with the administration and other teachers in her school building. She felt that the administration created a political environment where teachers were afraid to ask questions. Elizabeth felt strongly that the power that her administration had led to her feelings of demoralization. She expressed feeling blamed for her student's behavior, which she felt she had no control over, and felt like she could not always go to colleagues or administration in order to seek out help.

Working With Students. Elizabeth works with English as a second language students. She explained that her students have very specific needs in order to be successful. She shared

that she would like her students to be able to practice their speaking skills before they share out to the whole class. Elizabeth explained that this is a way for students to not only be able to practice their speaking skills but also relieves anxieties surrounding having to speak in front of an entire class. Elizabeth shared, “This activity is just a possibility because students’ behaviors do not allow for teachers to implement these strategies. It is just too risky.” Elizabeth continued to speak about student behaviors when she mentioned the dangerous behaviors that occurred in the hallways of her school. Student behaviors such as running in the hallways, rough house play, and destruction of property led Elizabeth to feel unsafe. Elizabeth expressed that she feels demoralized when she is forced to change her plans based on the behavior of the students in her class. She explained that to control the classroom she is forced to teach her students using more independent work. Elizabeth said, “My students learn best from speaking with each other in groups, and by listening to each other, but that is almost never possible.”

Elizabeth explained that student behaviors attribute to her feelings of demoralization. She expressed that students are participating in activities that can be dangerous to both students and teachers such as refusing to stay in their seats, throwing objects at each other such as pencils, or destroying property. Elizabeth talked about how dangerous it can be walking through the hallways of her school. The dangers included students running from class to class, horseplay, and students getting into physical altercations. Elizabeth explained that “I am concerned about being injured at work, and I think as a person who would ideally have a family one day. I don’t know if I could ever comfortably go to work pregnant, because of the violence in the hallway.” Elizabeth felt that she was in danger by some of the behaviors that students exhibited in the classroom. She could get hit with an object that was thrown or get run into by a student who refused to sit in

their seat. Coming to work worried about herself or one of her students getting injured is a great concern for Elizabeth that led her to feel stressed and demoralized.

Communication is something that Elizabeth feels very strongly about. She expressed how important it is to communicate and build relationships with her students. Elizabeth said that sometimes her students have trouble expressing themselves in English. They need a variety of differentiated materials, such as translated materials, sentence stems, and lots of opportunities to practice. This is one of the reasons that Elizabeth feels standardized tests harm her students. “These tests take up too much time for my students, they are too long. My students don’t always get the support they need, and the time they spend doing them takes away from the time they can learn in other ways.” Elizabeth feels frustrated that the amount of standardized tests take away valuable learning time for her students. Elizabeth explains that the tests themselves, and the results of these tests often leave her feeling demoralized.

Elizabeth admitted that she has felt a large amount of stress and frustration that surrounded working with her students, leading her to feel demoralized. She explained that there were two reasons that made it difficult for her to do her job as well as she would like. The first reason is that she felt that she can’t meet the learning needs of her students because her school spends a large amount of time on standardized testing. She felt this mandatory testing resulted in a loss of time in the classroom that was detrimental to her students learning, leaving her to feel demoralized. Elizabeth also expressed that students’ unsafe behaviors left her feeling unsafe. Behaviors in her classroom including student disrespect, student aggression, and students not staying in their seats, made it hard for her to create lesson plans that will help her students which led her to feel demoralized.

Sydney

Sydney has worked in the education field as a paraeducator for many years. Four years ago, she took the step to become a seventh grade English teacher. She decided to enter the field of education after watching the movie, *Freedom Writers*. In the movie a middle-class teacher goes into a lower income urban school district to teach. The main character gave students journals so they could document situations in their lives that were making it difficult for them to learn. Sydney explained, "It's like this big, magical transformation, like the journals, were incredible and wonderful, and English class saved their lives. Well, I was like I want to do that." Sydney wanted to instill a love for reading and writing in her students. The realities of teaching were different than Sydney expected leading her to become demoralized. Sydney did not understand the amount of teaching requirements that would be asked of her when she began teaching. Extra duties and tasks caused her to become overwhelmed and stressed. This feeling was intensified when her school was not able to fill teaching positions which caused her and her colleagues to have to work even harder to meet students' needs. She explained that her and her colleagues were asked to cover classes during their teacher preparation period. She also had to administer standardized test that she felt caused emotional damage to her students and she felt did not serve any purpose. Sydney had challenges working with students. Sydney did not feel like she had the support staff needed to meet students need which led to behaviors and her feeling like she was not able to do her job well. She also felt frustrated with the curriculum she was forced to teach because it did not meet the needs of the specific students that entered her classroom. Sydney also felt like she was unable to communicate with her administration and that policies were not clearly explained to her.

Teaching Requirements. Sydney began to feel demoralized when she realized the number of extra responsibilities that she was asked to complete. "I just wanted to teach. I did not

know I had to do X, Y and Z too. It was like what you see on social media versus reality, it was a slap in the face.” Sydney knew that she would need to plan lessons and teach her students. She did not realize that she would have to cover for teachers who were out, stay for countless meetings, evening commitments, and collect and track several different student data points. She felt like she had to juggle many different roles, “part therapist, part social worker and part teacher.” Sydney juggled these roles which caused her to feel overwhelmed, frustrated leading her to feel demoralized.

Sydney expressed that the teacher shortage had added extra responsibilities onto her already full plate. Her school had been unable fill a social studies position and this caused her to have to do extra coverage. Sydney shared that she has counted on her team leader for support during difficult times, but he had been tasked to plan lessons for both his classes and the missing teachers on the team. Sydney explained, “He's everybody's go-to guy. So, when he is stressed out, our team gets stressed out. Then we do not know how to support one another, and we start bickering.” Sydney expressed that it would be helpful to be able to have a new teacher to fill the Social Studies teacher role but there does not seem to be anyone qualified or available to apply for the position. Sydney felt that teachers were not willing to apply for a position the school district where she worked, “It's not a teacher shortage. There are plenty of teachers. They just are not getting the respect they deserve. They don't feel safe. They do not feel valued.” Sydney expressed that she felt demoralized because she does not think the school will be able to fill the teacher vacancies, which will lead to more responsibilities on her.

Sydney talked about her responsibilities when it comes to grading and planning for students. She expressed that this year she had completed most of her planning at school and she also carpooled with a colleague which gave them extra time to bounce ideas off each other.

Sydney felt confident that the formative and summative assessments that she and other members of her district created were the best way to monitor student progress. She said that the assessments took a long time to create but gave her important data about her students' progress. However, she expressed frustration regarding mandatory standardized testing that she is forced to give students. Sydney spoke about standardized testing,

It does not tell me what they know. It tells me that they can guess on a test. It also shows me the unrealistic expectations students place on themselves. Students have full blown anxiety attacks over the star test because they don't want to seem stupid. They don't want to do badly because their parents will be mad at them.

Sydney felt demoralized when she had to force her students to take a test that she knew would give her no information on how they were doing in class. She felt frustrated and sad when she watched her students have anxiety and low self-esteem because of a task that she had to administer. Sydney felt demoralized because of the many teaching responsibilities that she was asked to complete, including having to fill in for positions the school was unable to fill, and give standardized tests that she felt were emotionally damaging to her students.

Working with Administration. Sydney found it difficult to work with her administration and explained that she communicated with them as little as possible. She said, "I do not even contact the principal, unless it's life or death." Sydney explained that her relationships with her principal is uncomfortable. She said, "I have this weird, anxious, filled fear of her." Sydney did not feel safe to ask questions or to go to her if she had any problems. If I must talk to administration, I chose to create the shortest, quickest email I can possibly throw out there." Sydney explained that the administration in her building were not always visible to the teaching staff. They typically worked behind the closed door of their office, unless conducting

staff meetings or trainings. This led Sydney to feel like the administration was not interested in building relationships with the staff at the school and gave her the impression that they were unapproachable. Sydney felt like her administration was not available to support her unless she had to deal with a discipline issue that she was unable to handle.

She explained that communication with administration was limited on both sides. She gave an example of a communication breakdown surrounding a block of time scheduled during the day for student intervention. Sydney explained that the teaching staff was frustrated because they were not given clear instructions with what to do with this time. She said, “No one really has a clear idea of what intervention is supposed to be. We understand that it is for students that I need that extra measure of assistance, but no one has told us how to implement that. They simply say, you got this.” Sydney explained that in a way it felt good that the administration trusts the teachers to do what they feel is best with this time block. However, she expressed that in her opinion an administrator’s job is to lead their staff so that everyone understands what is expected of them. She felt that because there is a lack of communication and involvement by administration a lot of confusion was created. She explained that when a new policy is created it is not typically communicated to the staff, it is just assumed that they already are aware of it. A lack of communication led Sydney to feel confused about what the expectations of her job were and leading her to feel the stress and frustration of demoralization.

Working with Students. Sydney was quick to explain that working with students was the part of her job that she enjoyed the most but it was not always easy. One of the difficulties that she encountered was behavior. She shared a student disruption,

We were doing a lesson that is a little bit more complex for seventh graders to understand, and I have a student who has very high energy and lack impulse control.

While I am trying to teach, this student was yelling across the room, asking repeatedly to go to the bathroom or to go get a drink, they spilled their water bottle all over the floor all over the desk, and continued to be disruptive, and it was like, no matter what steps I took to redirect the student or get them to stop doing what they were doing they would not stop, so I chose purposefully to ignore them. Things did not get better. I was trying to teach and she would not let me.

Sydney explained that she felt frustrated because she was not able to give the student who was exhibiting the behaviors the help that she needed but she was also not able to teach the rest of the students in her class. This experience, and ones like it, have caused Sydney to second guess her abilities as a teacher and to feel like she is not able to do her best work, which led to demoralization.

The feeling of demoralization intensified as Sydney expressed her frustration that her students' needs are not being met. She explained that there is only one instructional aid for the entire grade. Sydney felt like the behavior issues could be a result of students not getting the support in the classroom because they may need more than she is able to help them with. Sydney explained "There are a high number of students with behavior plans and individualized learning plans, and we cannot provide them the help necessary for them to be successful, my team needs more support. instructional aids and paraprofessionals." Sydney felt demoralized because she did not have the resources for her students to learn.

Sydney also felt stressed by the limitations of her curriculum, which is a scripted curriculum that was purchased by the school district. She expressed that the idea behind the curriculum is that everything is laid out for the teacher to be successful, but the curriculum does not account for differentiated instruction and struggling learners. She said, "It is very dependent

on your students really buying in and being strong readers, but my students do not buy in, and they are not great readers. It ends up being more of like a skeleton that we work within.” The main ideas were available for her, but the curriculum did not seem to be focused on the type of students that she saw in the classroom. As an English teacher, Sydney also has struggled with choosing novels to share with her classroom. The district she works in had a group of parents who were very vocal about the types of books that their children should be reading in school. Sydney felt that, “It is immoral not to acknowledge our students’ differences, by reading novels that our students can see themselves in. If I do not give value your similarities and differences, how can you be comfortable as a learner?” She wanted to share novels with her students that she thought would be mirrors into the world that they lived in. Sydney felt frustrated and angry that the curriculum could not reflect learners that the school district was serving.

Sydney had to adjust her classroom in order to help as many of her students as possible. Sydney started the school year with her desks pushed together in pods so that students would be able to talk and share with each other throughout class. Unfortunately, this did not work for her classroom and she needed to move her desks into more traditional rows. She also stopped reacting to students’ behavior, “I stopped yelling at my students. It wasn't helping anybody. I do a classroom shut down where I walk to my desk, tell them class is shut down- and to read quietly until we can all reset.” Sydney explained that with just this one small change her overall health has improved because before she started doing this, she felt angrier and sicker to her stomach. These changes have helped her overall health but have left her feeling disappointed that she is not able to do more with her students. She said, “My goal every year is to always try to make a genuine connection with each and every one of my students. I always try to make a connection that's genuine, and that matters.” She expressed that is what she remembered teachers doing for

her. She expressed that she wants her students to feel safe in her classroom, I want my students to feel safe in my classroom,” this is a top priority for her. She wanted to have flexible seating and hands on activities for her students to learn from but expressed that it just was not possible with the students that she currently taught. This led her to feel demoralized in her career as a teacher.

Alice

Alice has taught for five years in various districts. She started with a long-term substitute position, before working two years in high school, and finally transitioning to a middle school English teacher. Alice recalled that she went through a difficult time during her elementary years with anxiety that caused her to feel physically ill and to struggle with reading. She talked about a teacher that inspired her to enter the teaching field, “She taught me to be proud and enjoy reading. She opened my eyes to a new lifestyle. I wanted to be able to help students overcome the challenges that they face and inspire them to embrace who they are.” Alice explained that this is often very difficult to do. She said that she has felt that she has worked in school districts that have many opportunities to inspire and help students to become their best selves. However, she has become demoralized when, “I’ve worked in school districts, where I just felt very hindered and isolated in a way, and that prevented me from being able to do the things that I do best when it comes to helping those students.” Alice began to feel demoralized when she realized the amount of time that her job required her to complete outside of the school day. This time had increased recently due to her preparation periods being used to cover teachers who were out sick and learning the new middle school curriculum. Alice continued to feel demoralized when there was a communication breakdown between her and her administration over what text should be used as a model during her unit. Her frustrations grew even stronger when she had to adjust her

teaching in the classroom to more traditional individual work instead of the hands-on project-based learning, she knew was best for her students, in response to negative student behavior. Having to adjust her teaching methods lead her to feel that she was not doing her best work, which caused her feelings of demoralization.

Teaching Requirements. Alice explained that she felt confused about her school district's expectations of her. She gave an example that she has been asked to go to many professional development classes that focus on equity. Alice explained that the trainings did not give her a clear idea of what strategies to use when working with students in the classroom. She asked for clarification, "What is it that you want to see happen in the classroom? Oh, you know what to do. Your professionals. We are in the philosophy stage of this, next year is when we are going to start executing these things." Alice felt frustrated because her time was being used for the trainings, but they were not giving her valuable information to use in the classroom.

Alice explained that she has had some difficulty transitioning from high school teacher to middle school teacher. The curriculum is different, and so are some of the expectations. An example she gave was that the middle school has a restorative room for students to go a reset when needed. She expressed not understanding if she should be calling the room and sending students on their own or if she should be waiting for an escort for them, "it is just kind of a guessing game at this point." The curriculum that Alice currently used in the classroom was designed by the previous English teachers that taught at the middle school. Alice explains that the curriculum is engaging, hands on and meets the needs of most of her students. Another teacher handed Alice a packet of the unit and explained that it was what he taught. However, Alice expressed that she wished she was given the individual autonomy to embrace the curriculum and make it her own, "As long as teachers are hitting the standards that students are

supposed to be practicing. I think the vehicle to get them to those standards is less important, and I wish that I had the freedom to get them there in the way that I feel works best.”

Alice has expressed that she does not always have the time to create the lessons that she knows are best for her students. She explained that she does not get the preparation periods needed for her to process, research, and plan for her classroom. One of the big reasons for this is because her school is currently short staffed, so teachers are asked to spend their preparation periods covering for teachers who are out sick, or vacant teaching positions. A large amount of time is spent outside of the school day,

I get maybe 45 minutes to do all of my prep, grading and responding to emails.

Weekends I am spending anywhere between three to five hours, weekdays I don't leave the building until four thirty or five o'clock, just because I have so much that I have to get done.

This extra time has caused Alice to miss out on activities that are happening outside of work which has helped her to feel demoralized.

Working With Administration. Alice described working in a school district with a large diverse population of students, with a substantial teaching and administrative staff. She remembered, “It was huge, and we had so many people telling us what we can and cannot do. This woman basically created her own role, wrote her own contract, and created scripted curriculum for teachers to follow.” Alice found that the curriculum did not fit her needs as a teacher or meet the needs of her student population. It was not a curriculum that was purchased and was difficult to follow at times. With a large administrative and department head staff there were many different directives given to staff and often these directives were contradictory to each other. Alice explained that adding to the complications of having so many people working

in administration the communication from staff was not done in person, it was almost exclusively done by email. She said that emails can be interpreted the wrong way or cause confusion, because of this she thought some communication should be done in person. Alice felt that a personal relationship would go a long way with helping her feel more comfortable with administration. “Just having those personal connections are really important if you are an administrator, and you just pop your head in my room like once in a while to just be like, Hey, how are things going?” Alice explained that if this happened more it would be easier to have the difficult conversations. A lack of personal communication has added to Alice feeling a sense of isolation that led to her feeling demoralized.

When Alice met her evaluator for the first time the conversation was focused on the text she would use as models in the units that she would teach, “She wanted me to incorporate more diverse texts and my classes, and I felt like I could handle this, and it would be no problem.” Alice left the meeting with enthusiasm to incorporate these texts into her teaching. She decided to use a model text about black oppression during the second quarter and spent many hours outside of the school day researching and planning for this unit. During a snow day she received an email from her evaluator about the choice of books that Alice chose to incorporate in her unit. “I was sitting on my couch, and I get an email, saying that she is not comfortable with me teaching the text, even though it is on our approved curriculum list, with no further explanation. Just a no, you are not doing it!” The email was followed by many separate meetings about the unit. Alice felt frustration because these meetings did not include all of the people involved and therefore no decisions could be made. During this time Alice felt like her colleagues were gossiping behind her back. She recalls, “My department heads told them that because I am a young white female, and grew up in a white community, I am unable to teach black oppression

to my urban students, but that's not the conversation that I had with her.” Alice is still not sure if this was the reason why she was asked not to use this specific text as a model. The superintendent called a meeting to clarify the situation, but the meeting was cancelled three times and then was not rescheduled. Alice describes the situation as, “It was probably the most stressful experience I had ever been through, probably in my entire life. And it was it was meeting after meeting, and it was never explained or resolved.” The stress of having the unit she planned so carefully rejected, and the subsequent meetings and gossip caused Alice to feel demoralized because she could not trust the administration that was supposed to lead her.

Working With Students. Alice taught five different classes and by contract was supposed to receive a certain number of preparation periods to complete her planning. She was not given this time and so she had a difficult time keeping up with the demands of her job. Alice has planned for her classes by researching and understanding the curriculum she was going to teach and got to know her students’ needs. She looked at pre-assessment data from the previous year to see where her students were at academically. She said, “I feel like I need to like make engaging things. I need to be organized. I need to make sure I'm looking at all these different components of each lesson.”

Alice felt like she had witnessed an increase in negative student behavior over the years including fighting, smoking in the bathrooms, and disrespect to other students and to teachers. Alice recalled, “I have had a student throw a bunch of stuff around my classroom, and then ended up leaving my room just left without telling me where she was going.” Alice explained that the student was upset because they were asked to use text evidence to explain their thinking. The student then told the principal that the reason why she was upset was she felt targeted by the teacher. Instead of receiving a consequence the student had a restorative conversation with the

Alice. During this meeting Alice felt undermined and unsupportive. Alice said not receiving a consequence only escalated the student's behavior, "another outburst in my class, which escalated, two boys got involved, throwing desks, and got into a fist fight. I then had a class where other students were afraid to do anything because they were afraid of what these three kids would do in the room."

Alice felt like the behaviors that she witnessed in the classroom limited the activities that she was comfortable doing with her students. Alice worked hard to build positive relationships with students. She explained that she has students who are excited to see her in the hallways, and students that will occasionally come upstairs and eat lunch with her. She explained that,

I did not do a lot of group work or the type of activities where you can get up and move around. I felt like I needed to teach my classes very traditionally. We sat in rows, or pairs and did individual work.

Alice explained that her class often started by watching a quick video clip and then students would answer questions. Alice knew that this was not the best way for her students to learn and that she was not doing her best work, but she felt that she was doing the best that she could do with the students that she had. If there had been less behaviors Alice said that she would like to do more hands-on project based learning in order to engage her students as learners. Not being able to do this led her to feel demoralized because she was not able to do things to inspire her students as learners.

Shirley

Shirley has been teaching for 11 years and is currently a social studies teacher. She explained that she had wanted to be a teacher for as long as she could remember. She recalled thinking, "I'm going to help so many people, and I'm going to change the world, and you know

that dies eventually.” Shirley explained that she enjoyed her first year of teaching. She taught at a charter school with small class sizes, where she was able to build strong relationships with each individual student. Shirley began to slowly feel demoralized when she realized that more demands were being asked of her, and she was getting less in return. Her feelings of demoralization became even stronger when she had a communication breakdown with her administration. This caused her to leave the district she was working in and enter a new district where she has been working for the past four years. She continued to feel demoralized even in this new district because she feels she is not able to do what is best for her students in her classroom because she is being asked to focus on social emotional skills instead of on curriculum.

Teaching Requirements. Shirley explained that she felt that her responsibilities as a teacher have become more demanding over the years. “Every year there was something else, and then it felt like every month there was something else, and now it feels like every day there's something else.” She explained that she needed to plan for her five academic classes a day, an intervention block, and now a social emotional learning class. Middle school teachers in her district used to get two preparation periods to plan for these classes. However recently one of the preparation periods has been taken for meetings, which gives her 40 minutes to plan for the day, make copies, differentiate materials, and any other activities she needs to accomplish. Shirley spends a lot of her time outside of school planning for her students. She said that she spends an average of 10 hours working on the weekend, “I spend a lot of time working, and sometimes it's like busy work or what are my lessons going to be this week? What do I need to do? Where am I pulling small groups like that kind of stuff?” The amount of time and the expectations and pressure that are put on her has caused Shirley to feel demoralized. She expressed that she felt

she could not keep up with all the tasks that were being asked of her and therefore was not able to meet the needs of her students.

One of the requirements that Shirley felt was a waste of her time is standardized testing. According to Shirley, Social studies does not have a standardized test in the state of Connecticut. This led Shirley to feel demoralization because she felt that her class was not important enough to judge or measure. However, she lost valuable teaching time because of mandated standardized tests for other subjects. Shirley explained that after students completed these tests, they no longer had the stamina in order to do good work in her class. “There's no way to kind of build that stamina. I feel like kids can't sit in front of a computer for an hour and a half and then be expected to go through like a normal academic schedule, that is rigorous.” Shirley felt that the data gathered from standardized tests do not directly help the students instead these tests are used to generate funding for the school. Shirley was not sure where this money was going to but expressed that, “it did not go to supplies, after school activities, or to hire more teachers.” Mandatory standardized testing added to Shirley’s feelings of demoralization because she felt that the tests are being taken because it is in the school’s best interest, not because of the best interests of her students.

One of the frustrations that led to Shirley feeling demoralized was that the pressure that is put on teachers did not seem to be distributed to everyone in education,

less and less are required from the other stakeholders, like the students and their parents.

That has kind of become where my soul is just like, well, I'm not going to work as hard if they're not going to work hard.

Shirley feels strongly that for a school to be productive it is important to hold students and parents to high standards as well. She believes that for a school to be successful their needs to be effort put in by all stakeholders.

Working with Administration. Shirley expressed that she felt demoralized because of her relationships with administration. Shirley had an experience with administration that caused her to feel stressed and lose trust leading her to feel demoralized. Shirley was asked to join a committee that served within the school. At first Shirley enjoyed being a part of the committee because she learned a lot of information about what was going on in the district. Shirley recalled that all of this changed when negative information about another committee member was sent to the committee. In the letter administration was described through an unflattering lens. After receiving the letter Shirley ran into another teacher that mentioned what happened. A short time later Shirley was called into the office of an administrator and reprimanded for talking about confidential information. She denied discussing anything with the other teacher but at this time Shirley voluntarily resigned from the committee. She thought that this incident was behind her. Until about a week later when she was called into her principal's office. Shirley shared,

we have to decide if we want to continue your employment after hearing that you discussed confidential information with others in the building. He said that if I was willing to discuss these matters with others, how does he know that I would not discuss more confidential things. I explained that I had this conversation in a room behind a closed door, with no kids' present. I felt like he was sitting there threatening my job as a teacher, because I did something that he didn't like that made him look bad. The frustration has never been the kids, because I do what I do for the kids. The frustration with me is always admins, and the fact that they are focused on how you make them look.

I don't think that's fair as a teacher, that it's my job to make you look good. You know it's your job to make you look good, and you support me in that effort.

Shirley was not disciplined for this, but that summer, Shirley made it a point to look for a new teaching job. After the meeting Shirley felt disrespected by the administration in her building. She felt like she was not appreciated or trusted.

Shirley felt that the principal of the school she worked at would only appoint teachers to extra positions, such as curriculum writing or extracurricular positions within the school, if she liked them personally. Shirley observed that, “if she didn’t like you, she would still treat you fairly, but you were not given any extra opportunities.” When Shirley began [her teaching career](#), she felt like she was offered many opportunities. However, she believed that this all changed, and she was no longer offered these opportunities, after her falling out with the administrators of the building.

This is Shirley’s fourth year in the district where she currently teaches. One of the difficulties that she faces with administration is that she did not receive clear communication about activities, events, and policies. The district in which she works has multiple members of administration. With so many different individuals in leadership roles Shirley found that she was getting mixed information.

I hear one thing, someone else hears another, and it's not okay, because we don't know what's going on. We don't know what's happening, and we're in the trenches. We're with these kids, and we have to really pass messages on to them.

Shirley provided an example of a dance that the school recently held. This was the first year that the district did not require uniforms, they decided to implement a dress code policy instead. However, because of the policy being brand new there was confusion about some of the

elements. Administration did not want students to change for the dance, which was the practice in the past because of the uniforms. However, no one told the students that they would not be able to change. Shirley asked one member of administration to look into this, but she did not get a response. As a result, many students skipped their last period class to change. Shirley felt like if the expectations were communicated clearly than students would have understood the expectation and would not have skipped class in order to change for the dance.

Shirley expressed that she did not feel supported by administration. She was not sure what administrator to go to for what reason and each administrator had a slightly different vision for the school. After the uncomfortable situation with administration surrounding the committee, she felt that her side of the story would never be heard, and it was her job to make administrators look good even if they were not doing their jobs. She explained that over the years administration positions seem to have become more political in nature. This lack of trust in her professional responsibility and inability to even listen to her side of the story led to feelings of demoralization. This on top of the many responsibilities that she faces has led to great frustration. Shirley expressed the only reason that she makes it to school now is “for the kids.”

Working with Students. Shirley felt frustrated because she is not always given a chance to prepare students for life outside of school. An example of this is how schools respond to student behavior, “The behaviors have always not been great, but I feel like they've gotten now to the point where we excuse a lot of things that won't be excused in the real world.” She reflected on a time where a student in her class looked her in the face and cussed at her. The student was sent to the office and returned without being given a consequence because the student reported that they were hungry. Shirley worries that that kind of outburst would not be accepted outside of a school building. Instead of being focused on curriculum or student

learning, Shirley feels frustrated that she spends so much time in her classroom focusing on social skills. She expressed, “people are too concerned with making sure that nobody's feelings get hurt. So, when somebody's feelings actually get hurt, it's like the end of the world.” Shirley explained that she does not like to “give up her power” in the classroom and therefore she often handles discipline within the classroom instead of sending students out. This is for two reasons, one she knows that the student might like to leave the classroom in order to get more attention, and two, she did not trust administration to handle situations in a fair and consistent way. When Shirley was not able to meet the needs of her students, she felt demoralized.

Shirley expressed that she feels most comfortable in her classroom and wished that she was not micromanaged and that she was allowed to do that she was hired for. She said, “So just let me do what I need to do. Let me do what I went to school for what I'm in debt for what I paid for, and just let me do it.” Shirley expressed that her curriculum is standards based but leaves her a lot of room to be creative with her students. She enjoyed creating projects where she could see her students understand and are engage in their work. She expressed as a first-year teacher this was very overwhelming because it was hard to know what to do with the students a first, it has gotten somewhat easier for her, but she spent a lot of time outside of school to plan and develop the curriculum. Shirley said, “I suppose I feel more grateful that I didn't choose a tested subject. Sometimes I feel less stressed because my curriculum isn't as important. It's important. But it's not important.” Shirley felt like social studies is a subject that is often overlooked because it is not found on standardized tests.

Brian

Brian had been teaching English for five years, he had moved between high school and middle school and is currently working in his fourth school district. Brian became a teacher

because he found that he was already training others in the jobs that he was doing but without the pay, and the chance for retirement. Brian recalled, “I liked the idea of teaching kids how to speak properly and how to have an intelligent conversation versus how to stack a shelf.” He felt that he wanted to teach students to respect each other and to listen and learn from each other. Brian said that he would like his students to, “take a cue from Star Track, they had it right in those space operas. It doesn't matter what you look like or what you subscribe to. What matters is how you treat somebody else and how they treat you.”

Brian became demoralized with teaching when he was required to adjust student grades even if the students did not earn them. This caused him to feel like he was not being honest with students or helping them to be successful. In addition to this, a lack of teaching staff, in particular special education teachers, caused Brian to have time consuming responsibilities on top of his already difficult work. A lack trust and support from administration during observations caused Brian to feel like he was not a valuable part of the teaching team. Brian wanted to find a district that he could work for and retire from, but felt like he could not find a place where he was respected for his abilities. Brian expressed that he would like to retire from a district that he had put roots into but, “I may very well just keep bouncing around every few years, you know, just waiting out administrators and or riding a wave until they finally say, you know what, this isn't working anymore. Off you go.” Frustration over not having a place to retire from has caused Brian to feel stressed and demoralized.

Brian also struggled with engaging his students in learning. He felt it was difficult to teach many students who were behind grade level. Not being able to teach the content he thought was important because students were not reading and writing on grade level left Brian feeling like he could not do his best work for his students, and led to him feeling demoralized. Brian felt

limited in his abilities to treat students in a way he felt appropriate. Brian wanted to teach and treat his students like young adults and give them the freedom to both make mistakes and learn from them. The districts that Brian worked in had policies that made this difficult, such as making sure students were escorted when they needed to leave the classroom, and the policies the Brian struggled with surrounding grading. To Brian these policies went against his morals and beliefs as a teacher and following them caused him to feel a great deal of stress.

Teaching Requirements. Brian began to feel frustrated because he felt that his job as a teacher was to teach academic skills. It was very important to Brian to focus on curriculum while teaching his students, but he felt the districts he worked in did not value his academic contributions. Brian said,

We are glorified babysitters, the adults are sending their child not to get an education, but because it's a safe place to go with free food while they're at work and they expect us to keep their children safe and fed.

He explained that most of the districts had scripted curriculum that teachers were not able to shift away from, even if students needed extra support in the subject. Recently, Brian was working with a new math teacher who told Brian about the trouble he was having. Brian explained,

He was literally sick when he graded his first test, because the kids did so bad and he feels he can't stop and teach the remedial stuff. He knows that this means, he's going to be put on the microscope.

Brian went on to explain that grading policies have been difficult for him to implement on a moral level in the schools he has worked in. Brian became demoralized because he felt the administrators in his schools were asking him to be dishonest when grading students. He encountered this in the first district that he worked in. He had a difficult class that he was trying

to engage and came up with a what he thought was a great project. There were many creative options for students to choose from, but there were still students who refused to complete the assignments. The administrator of the building came to Brian and told him that it was his responsibility to make sure that every student passed. Brian felt the implication was that he passes students even if they did not complete the work. Brian said, "I can't just give him the grade. You know, that's just going to prove that he can do whatever he wants, and he's never going to go anywhere now." Brian felt that changing grades was not setting up students for being successful in life. This was not the only time that Brian was asked to adjust students' grades.

Brian said, "The lack of faith and the lack of support in in any way, shape or form when it comes to the stakeholders. Complaining was very eye opening." At another district, Brian was trying to teach a very difficult topic that was part of the district approved curriculum. His students struggled with understanding this unit and students' grades went down. Brian explained, "The parents were complaining about the grades administration basically just came in with a sledgehammer and was just like, you got to fix this." This was the second time that Brian was told he needed to change or adjust students' grades. Brian felt demoralized because he felt like changing the grades did not help his students to be successful learning and that by lowering expectations he was asking for less work and effort from his students.

Brian described that his job as a middle school teacher was difficult to balance. He remembered that a mentor once told him that, "You're going to want your classroom be a certain way, the best you can hope for is the last 40% of your career. It takes that long to navigate the waters of practice and theory versus administration needs." Brian went on to explain that it was difficult for him to balance the expectations in classroom such as creating lesson planning, grading, meetings, and data collection with the extra initiatives that the school districts were

pushing. Brian expressed, "...extra things that they wanted us to do on top of the initiatives, muddying the water so much your head was spinning as to what was actually supposed to be part of their look fors in the classroom, just insane." Brian found himself frustrated because he did not know what was expected of him and became overwhelmed with the increasing expectations.

The school districts that Brian worked in had several opened teaching positions that they were unable to fill. Most of these potions were for special education teachers. Due to this staffing shortage Brian found himself having to differentiate for student needs which he found to be difficult and time consuming. Brian said, "So having to differentiate and take care of the needs of the special needs kids and the highflyers who needed that extra enrichment or were trying to improve themselves to status was just very disheartening." Brian felt demoralized because he felt that students were not getting the support they needed before they came to him. Brian shared,

We don't see the light bulbs go off nearly as much because of skill deficiency, because kids are just being pushed along, and then all of a sudden, an issue that could have been fixed in third grade is being passed along to a teacher in eighth grade and compounded to the point where you have to do remedial work basically anywhere from 2 to 4 years ago right now. Just so that they can do the grade level work that I need them to do. And that's not my job at all at this level. I'm supposed to be improving those skills, not teaching them to them for the first time. That's super disheartening and frustrating. That's an entire system problem. That's not even talking about administration or specific teachers. That's just this the national education system on a whole being broken and not knowing what to do to fix it.

Brian felt frustrated and stressed because he was not able to meet each individual students' needs because each student needed something different. This led Brian to feel like he was not doing well at his job which led him to feel demoralized.

Working with Administration. Brian's experiences with administration led him to lose trust in the motives of administrators in the buildings in which he has worked. He explained that he felt most interactions that he had with administration were evaluative even if the interaction was not part of a formal observation. Brian explained that the morale of his coworkers was often influenced by the administration as well. Brian said,

That's when I realized how much administration could really affect a teaching staff. On the surface they seemed like they were all happy but the moment you walk into the staff room on any given day, it was just completely demoralizing because everyone was just like, okay, what's going wrong today? Who needs advice about what kid? Who can step up to try to intervene for that person so that they don't get yelled at by administration, so they don't get put on the watch list for this, that or the other thing.

Brian described the morale of several buildings that he has worked with as demoralizing because the staff were afraid that they were going to lose their jobs. Brian explained that this led him to feel like he was replaceable,

That's where I think the system really fell apart, is when we're looking at teachers as replaceable. They are trying to find someplace that fits where they feel valued as a professional and looked at as basically a big student.

Brian felt strongly that for teachers to want to stay and work at a school that they should feel productive and a valuable member of a team.

Brian did not feel comfortable when administrators that he worked with would come into his classroom. Brian explained, “I never wanted to see them, they didn't know what was actually going on and they were just checking boxes. So the moment a admin entered the room, it was because something was wrong or I was in trouble.” Brian felt a level of stress when he encountered administration because he felt like they were unaware of what was happening inside of his classroom on a daily basis and were only looking at a small, limited picture when they would stop into his classroom. There was one exception to this, Brian had an administrator that would go into his classroom frequently. Brian recalled he, “took an open seat and partook in my lesson as if he was a student and that got the kids even more engaged, that was an amazing feeling. I've never seen another administrator do it quite like that.” Brian felt like this administrator knew what was happening in the classroom and spent time trying to learn his classroom routines. Having an administrator understand his teaching style helped Brian feel supported. Brian said that a way that he could feel supported in his work is with, “An administrative team that treats their faculty like adults rather than students and has honest conversations without the fear of reprisal. As opposed to being treated like one of the students trying to do what the big boss says.” Brian felt frustrated that in all the schools he has worked in he has not been able to find this yet.

Brian acknowledged that teacher observations are a necessary part of the job. He explained that he is always looking to grow his teaching craft to be able to reach and support his students. Brian felt there were things that administration could do in order to make these observations beneficial for everyone. Brian says,

They're a disturbance, I don't necessarily feel supported in the moment. Their feedback is usually accurate and very constructively criticizing where it's not necessarily framed

positively. And sometimes it's actually super blunt and kind of hurtful. But at the same time, it's something that needs to be heard. That kind of support is necessary because at least it's honest, but it doesn't make get any better at my craft because they're not telling me how to fix it. They just tell me what needs to be fixed and hope that I'm going to do it. I need help from the administrator to guide me on what to do next, to fix things. Which would make me feel a lot more supported.

Brian felt strongly that teachers, administration, and families should be working together for the best interest of the students. He felt that in the school districts that he has worked in that these three pieces often work separately, and in the worst cases, against each other. Brian explained that he often felt torn in different directions by each and this caused a level of frustration and stress.

Brian felt that another way to make teacher evaluation and observations more beneficial would be to have teachers sign three-year contracts. He felt that if teachers were not afraid of their contracts not being renewed that they would be more vocal about their opinions and bring new voice and ideas into the school districts where they were working,

Schools have started to offer three year contracts, knowing that you've got a job for three years, barring fireable offenses, would make me feel supported, I would know that I have room to mess up and to voice my opinions.”

Brian wondered if this could help school districts keep teachers from moving from district to district each year. He explained that often teachers do not see year to year raises in their contracts and this leads to frustration as well,

A teacher will see pay freezes happening every other year or so in their contract, they're making the same pay a year for ten years while the cost of everything is going up and administration gets paid more than they do.

Brian felt that if teachers were able to stay in one school it would benefit everyone.

Brian expressed that it was important for administration to support teachers, when stakeholders or parents complained or questioned what was being taught in the classroom. Brian explained that as an English teacher students will ask him about books or bring social issues into the classroom. This has been a problem with some of the administrators that Brian has worked with, who will side with the parent without understanding the entire situation, just to make themselves look better. He stressed, “we're stuck in that nebulous gray area, if you say something, even if it's right, you could be fired, sued or lose your job. Instead of complicating it we should be preaching universal tolerance in the broadest sense.” Brian feels that if he is not able to teach within his moral value system that he is not in a school that is right for him. Brian explains that, “If that's all that administration cares about, like all over many districts. I may not find a place that I retire from.” Brian feels stressed and frustrated that he might never find a school that he can be successful in.

Working with Students. Brian said that the thing that surprised him the most when he began teaching was how disengaged the students were. He made it mission to build relationships with students to help them become more engaged with the curriculum. In one district he explained that “had a lot of IEPs and behavior issues, so they played fast and loose with what curriculum actually meant. And that was actually very motivating because I was able to do what was best for students.” He recalled a time when he had a student who was not doing any writing.

He was able to make a personal connection with the student and the bond helped the student to produce an alternative assignment. Brian recalled,

He wrote a five-page paper and was so proud of it. So it proved that he was paying attention. He just didn't have the motivation to do it because people weren't giving him something that he was interested in.

Brian explained how these small moments were so rewarding but it was difficult to have them because students were often struggling and needed so much extra academic instruction. Brian found that the schools that he worked in focused on scripted curriculum or station work in order to help these students. Brian said, "Having districts want stations to cater to their short attention span is destroying how we teach content. Students will figure out how to pay attention longer if you give them the room to grow work to it."

Brian's teaching style in the classroom was focused on students age and ability. Brian said, "Middle schoolers are much more adult than we give them credit for. If we give them the room to be adults, enough room to make the appropriate decisions, and let them make mistakes they'll mature quicker." Brian thought that students should be able to use the bathroom or see the nurse whenever they needed to. He felt like by micromanaging how students learn or conduct themselves caused students to not learn and mature as fast as they could. Brian said that when he allowed his students freedom, "I liked the relationships that were built a lot better with the students and actually seeing people improving based upon what I was saying." Brian found it frustrating and became demoralized when school policies were put into place limiting student freedom and choice. Brian felt like in order to reach each of his students he needed the freedom to teach the way he knew would benefit his students and it was demoralizing when he was not able to do so.

Themes

After the narratives were restored and member checked they were then manually coded to look for themes. Three themes emerged from the data. The first theme was time and resources as a valuable commodity. As the participants shared their experiences with demoralization, they described feeling frustrated because they did not feel like they had the time and resources to do their job to the best of their ability. The participants felt like they were not able to reach their own expectations of good work and this led to stress. The second theme was the consequences of the nomadic life of a modern middle school teacher. The participants in this study moved from school district to school district in order to find a place where they felt appreciated and needed. The participants described the difficulties of moving to a new district and explained how school culture can be very different from one district to another. The last theme that was identified was a balancing policy, administration, community, and student needs. Participants described the difficulties they had balancing their work with the expectations of others. Each of the themes were analyzed looking at the three components of SDT theory which included autonomy and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1989).

Time and Resources as a Valuable Commodity

A theme that developed from restoring the personal narratives from this study was the idea of how valuable and limited teachers felt their time resources were with the school districts that they were teaching in. Sydney, Elizabeth, Alice, Brian, Shirley, and Anne all expressed frustration with not having enough time to complete the tasks that they felt were most important for their students. This feeling of not having enough time to complete tasks led them to identify themselves as feeling demoralized. Each of the participants expressed that they did not feel they had autonomy in their teaching responsibilities because they just did not have the time to

complete the day-to-day tasks that were asked of them. They were asked to attend meetings or cover for teachers who were not available to teach. When the participants were faced with these extra tasks, they felt frustrated because they did not have time to be creative in their work. The participants counted on their co-workers to help them complete their work, but this was not always possible. When the participants were not able to relate with administration or their coworkers about the tasks that they were asked to do they felt demoralized.

Competence. In order to feel competent in their craft as teachers, the participants in the study expressed that they needed more time than was allotted to them during the school day in order to reach the needs of their students. Both Anne, a special education teacher, and Elizabeth, a teacher of students where English is their second language, taught students who needed supports in more than one academic class. Each describe that their students need individual instruction in order to be successful. Elizabeth talked about how she spent a large amount of her time planning for each of her individual student's needs. She shared, "Each of my students are learning the language at a different pace and each needs individualized strategies and practice." Anne explained that as a special education teacher she had to balance work that never seemed to be complete, "The lengthy paperwork, preparing for parent meetings, and documenting student progress. While still being expected to meet legal minutes of working with students on their individual learning goals is almost impossible to do during the school day." Both Anne and Elizabeth felt demoralized because they felt like they were not able to do the best work because they did not have time to plan and meet each individual student's needs.

Shirley, Alice, Sydney, and Brian each expressed that they spend a large amount of time on the weekends planning for their students' needs. Each explained that when they had well prepared lessons their students were more engaged with the work and there were less

opportunities for behavioral problems during the day. Shirley spent time at home prepping for her classes. She explained that she felt like if she did not spend several hours over the weekend prepping for her classes then her classes will not run smoothly, and she could end up with behavior issues during her lessons. She said, “A lot of my prep time, if it's not physical prep, like printing papers, grading, or making sure that things are organized at school, most of my stuff is done at home on the weekend.” Alice explained that she spends several hours after school and again on the weekends in order to plan for her students. Brian explained that he spent a lot of time crafting lessons focused on helping his students learn in an age-appropriate way, which meant meeting the students in his class where they are at. This can be time consuming because he had to plan the same lesson but slightly different for each class he taught. Sydney said that she felt that if she had more time to spend preparing for her lessons and giving students valuable feedback, she would fee

l much more successful at her job. However, right now she did not feel that she was successful.

Autonomy. The participants in this study felt like they were not able to have autonomy in the classroom because they did not have time to plan for creative and flexible lessons. Brian, Alice, Sydney, Elizabeth, and Anne all expressed that one of the reasons why they did not have enough time to plan was because they had a shortage of teachers at their school. This shortage was for several reasons from teachers being out because they were not feeling well, to school districts not being able to fill positions. Sydney explained that she did not feel like there were teachers who were willing to come work in the district that she taught in, and expressed that teachers looked for districts to work in where they felt respected and appreciated. Sydney said that she never thought about having to cover other classes when she became a teacher.

I thought it was just show up, plan, and teach the children. The reality is I show up, cover for people who aren't there, go to all of these meetings and stay after school for extra commitments. I never have enough time to plan.

Brian explained that he was supposed to co-teach a class with a special education teacher. However, that teacher was only able to join them on an inconsistent basis. Brian said, “This left me planning for my higher-level students who needed enrichment and differentiating for my lower students. No one was getting what they needed, and this is against the law.” Alice also expressed frustration with having to cover for teachers during her planning periods. Alice said, “I try to make organized, engaging lessons, but with teacher coverages I only got maybe 45 minutes, to do all my prepping, grading and respond to emails. I'm taking a lot of work home.”

Shirley explained that she always felt like there was “one more thing” added to her list of things to do and plan for. She explained that she plans for her five academic classes, an intervention block, and a social emotional learning block. She added on top of those things her district has implemented daily meetings which cut into her ability to plan and prepare. She explained that because of these demands she is unable to teach the lessons that she wishes she could teach, and instead needs to lean on more scripted or already created materials that may not work the best for her students.

Relatedness. The participants in this study expressed how difficult it was to complete tasks needed for their job without the help of co-workers or administration. Brian expressed that he needed to double plan for his classes because he was never sure if his co-teacher was going to be available. Brian said, “I already did not have enough time to plan and without knowing if she was going to be available or not, I had to double plan, which sometimes was necessary and sometimes was a huge waste of my time.” Anne and Elizabeth were dependent on the core

teachers that they worked with. Anne found this especially frustrating because her co-worker could not share the curriculum with her ahead of time because there was not one written. Shirley spoke about the importance of being consistent across the grade level team. She felt strongly that she needed her co-workers to implement similar behavior expectations as she did in their classrooms. Shirley felt that this was important because if they did not have consistency, she would not be able to teach her students and instead would have to continuously stop learning for her to reteach expectations. She explained she just did not have time for these types of interruptions. All of the participants in this study mentioned how important it was to be supported both by the team members that they worked with and by their administration in order to get the most out of the time that they had available. When the participants in this study felt like they did not have the time to complete the tasks that they felt necessary they felt frustrated, stressed, and demoralized.

The Consequences of The Nomadic Life of a Modern Middle School Teacher

Four of the six participants in this study, Elizabeth, Anne, Alice, and Brian, each started working in a new school district this year. Shirley also spoke of having moved districts within the last few years. Brian spoke about his observations of teachers moving from one school district to another. He shared,

Try to find a teacher who's gotten their license in the past 35 years and ask them how many districts they've worked in. More than likely, you're going to get an answer, depending upon how long they've been teaching, of a minimum of 10 years and probably with two state moves. They're trying to find someplace that fits where they don't feel like they're not valued as a professionals and looked at as basically a big student, which is super demoralizing right off the cuff.

Each of the participants had their own individual reasons for leaving the positions that they were working in. However, each expressed that they were looking for a place where they belonged, and that they could teach for a long period of time.

Competence. The participants in this study expressed that in order to feel competent in their work they needed to be able to have their opinions be respected in the workplace. Anne spoke of leaving a school district because she felt that administrators were not listening to her when she expressed concerns over a school policy that forced students to take standardized tests regardless of their disability. Anne felt that her students would not be able to sit for time needed for the tests and that these assessments would cause stress and frustration for the students. She also felt that the results would not be helpful to this student learning. She expressed not feeling heard or respected when she brought her concerns to administration. She stated, “It was frustrating to see how they treated my student, and I was scared for the future of special education.” This incident caused Anne to leave the profession of teaching all together, until recently when she entered a new school district.

Starting out in a new school district can be difficult and stressful. Elizabeth expressed that, “each school is a little different, the way people treat you, and the resources available to you. It is so important to learn the little things.” She explained that it would be helpful if administration created a list or pamphlet of information for new teachers so that they can learn about the building that they will be teaching in. Anne felt strongly that in order to understand the teachers really needed to find mentors to help guide them. She expressed that this is difficult because the mentor should not be someone that evaluates the teacher, and it needs to be someone that the new teacher can trust. Shirley expressed that it is difficult to find information when you are starting at a new school,

I understand as a new teacher, you're not comfortable to go up to and ask questions. Even though I'm a veteran teacher it doesn't always feel like I am. I have to convince myself not to be shy and to ask my questions.”

Alice had difficulties adjusting to her new district because she was also teaching a different age group, and her new middle school students had different needs than the high school students that she had when she began her teaching career.

Autonomy. The participants in this study expressed that in order to feel confident in their field they needed to feel that they have choice and creativity in their career. Alice told the story that after she planned an entire unit over several months, she received an e-mail questioning her choice of text that she chose to use as a model. The communication about this issue came by email and several people communicated different information expressing concern. Alice was scheduled for several meetings that always seemed to be postponed or cancelled. She expressed, “So this turned into this whole huge thing, and it was probably the most stressful experience I had ever been through, probably in my entire life.” This incident caused her to question her career choice and ultimately led her to move to a new school district.

Brian expressed that he would feel much more confident in his career if he knew he had a longer contract. He explained that recently some schools in Connecticut are offering teachers three-year teaching contracts instead of the standard one year. He thought that this would help him to feel like he had more of a voice in his school district and could speak his mind more freely without being afraid of losing his job after only one year. Brian also struggled with grading his students. It seemed each district had different expectations of grading that Brian did not always agree with his administrator. The participants in this study expressed feeling

frustrated in not belonging to the school districts that they worked in and the need to find a place where they were wanted and respected.

Relatedness. Each of the participants in this study expressed how important working with co-workers and administration is and how the culture of the school is a large part of feeling like they belong in a work environment. Shirley expressed that she left the school district that she was currently working in because she lost trust in an administrator when they accused her of talking about confidential information. Shirley expressed that the accusations were false and were never proven but she did not feel like she was able to work for the district any longer. She said, “I felt like my job was threatened. I did not feel appreciated. So, what was left for me right now. The only thing I could do was look him in my face and tell him that I quit.” Sydney had a lot of frustration surrounding the fact that her district had difficulty hiring new teachers. She said, “There's plenty of teachers. They just are not getting the respect they deserve. They don't feel safe. They don't feel valued.” All the participants talked about how the school culture and relationships with coworkers helped them to feel appreciated or caused them stress and frustrated over their jobs. Each teacher was searching to find a school district that they could work in for the rest of their careers. They expressed frustration that this did not seem to be an obtainable goal in today's Connecticut education system.

Balancing Policy, Administration, Community, and Student Needs

A reoccurring theme that developed from the restoried narratives is the difficulty that the participants had balancing administration demands, school policies, community input and student needs. One of the policies that led to feelings of frustration and demoralization for many of the participants was state mandated standardized testing. All the participants expressed frustration over student behavior. Brian, Alice, and Sydney expressed that they felt limited in what books

they were allowed to have in their classroom library. Each of the participants expressed having lost trust in the administration that worked in their building. Shirley, Alice, and Brian had personal stories of how their relationships with administration was shaped. Leading each to feel frustration and stress.

Competence. In order to teach well the participants in this study expressed that they needed to be able to balance engaging creative lessons, movement in the classroom, and behaviors in order to help students learning. Each of the participants in the study expressed feeling overwhelmed because they were not able to plan for the quality lessons, they wish that they could teach. Student behaviors in the classroom limited what participants were able to do. Sydney, Shirley, Alice, Elizabeth, and Anne all expressed that student behavior limited the types of lessons that they teach in the classroom. Sydney talked about having to have her students' desks in rows because they had difficulty sitting in groups. Anne explained that she never expected to see as many behaviors in her classroom as she does. Alice noticed that she witnessed more and more behaviors each year, and Shirley expressed that, "I feel we expect less and less of our students each year. They expect more from the teachers but hold the students to fewer and fewer standards." This idea was supported by Brian who expressed that he felt frustrated that he was asked to change student grades to help them pass, even if the students were not completing any work.

Standardized testing is often used to evaluate teachers (Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019); the participants in this study each expressed frustration with standardized testing. Anne left teaching all together for several years after feeling frustrated by testing policies. She was not the only participant who felt these tests were not good for her students. Sydney, Shirley, Elizabeth, Brian, and Alice all wondered how the results of these tests are helpful. Shirley stated

that the subject of social studies is not a tested subject. She said, “I don’t teach a tested subject so I do not get looked at as closely or have to follow as strict of a curriculum as I would if I taught math or English.” Sydney talked about her students having low self-esteem if they do not do as expected on tests. All the participants explained that the stress and pressure these tests put on students were much more harmful than the results are helpful to their teaching. The participants in this study did not find the results of the tests guided their teaching or lesson planning.

Autonomy. The participants in this study felt that it was important for them to have the ability to plan lessons that they felt were appropriate for their students. Brian, Sydney, and Elizabeth each had to teach from scripted curriculum. A scripted curriculum is a pre-bought curriculum that maps out the sequence of lessons and directs exactly what the teacher says and does during each lesson (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). This was difficult because the curriculum did not always meet the individual needs of each of their students. Shirley and Alice were planning from curriculum that was created based on standards. This gave them lots of freedom and flexibility but also made planning longer and more tedious process. Alice expressed,

So long as teachers are hitting the standards that students are supposed to be practicing the vehicle to get them to those standards is less important. I wish that I had the freedom to get them there in the way that I feel works best, just because I’m a young female and so I’m going to do things differently than a fifty-year-old male. That’s okay, one way isn’t better than the other. And I think there’s this stigma where everybody thinks their way is the best way, because of research to this or my ways the best way, because I read this book, and I think it just needs to be virtually accepted that there are different ways to learn, and different ways to teach.

Alice, Shirley, and Brian each expressed that they felt it was important to keep books in their library that represented their students. They wanted to have a large number of books from authors with different backgrounds. Shirley explained, “I want my classroom library to represent the students in my class, so they can each feel respected in the classroom.” Each of the three participants expressed frustration that community members and administration have questioned the books that they want to teach. Brian expressed, “I don’t have to agree with everyone’s ideas, but I want to be able to respect them. Having a library full of diversity is necessary for a classroom.” The participants in the study need to balance their own ideas of what should be in the library with the ideas of members of the community.

Relatedness. The participants felt like it was part of administrations responsibility to lead teachers, and help them understand the policies and procedures that they are being asked to follow. Each participant expressed a lack clear communication from the administration that they worked with. Alice expressed that she felt her administration only gave out information by email, but it would be much better if they came and spoke with her in person. Alice said, “Those interpersonal connections were lost. Nobody really came to talk to you face to face. It was all through email, and it was different emails from different people and no relationships were built, I think that's the key.” Anne expressed that when she asked how her district wanted her to complete paperwork she was told, “look at the manual.” Both Shirley and Sydney expressed that they would much rather speak to their administration by email so that they had a record of the conversation. Shirley talked about the importance of asking questions but also expressed how nervous this made her. Elizabeth expressed that she did not want to communicate with administration unless she had to because, “They had all the power, and could make or break you.”

Brian, Alice, and Shirley told stories in which they lost trust in the administration that they were working with. Brian expressed frustration when he felt yelled at and belittled because his students were not receiving the grades the administrator thought were important. Brian said, “I was treated like a child, not like an adult that needed to be guided and trained.” Alice was told that she did not have the background to teach a novel that she planned for two months to teach. She never received a clear understanding of why this novel was questioned, as it was on the approved reading list for teachers. Shirley was accused of gossiping about private information that made an administrator look bad. She expressed, “It is not my job to make him look better, it is my job to teach the students. I did that well and no one acknowledged that in this situation.” Each of the participants expressed that it was difficult to work with administration but that the key to these struggles was communication issues.

Summary

The participants in this study shared their experiences with demoralization as middle school teachers. Each of the participants shared their motivations to become a teacher and each implied that their expectations were different than the reality. They expressed their frustrations with not having enough time to complete the work that was expected of them, the feeling that standardized testing is more harmful than good, the consequences of being short staffed, and how important communication is to their job. The participants in this study have moved to several school districts and remain demoralized. These experiences were looked at by theme and using the three components of SDT theory, autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1989). Each of the six participants had similar experiences that led them to feeling demoralized. Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding a person’s world and trying to understand their social and cultural conflicts (Tolman & Head, 2021). The experiences shared by

the participants of this study share the social constructs that may have led middle school teachers to feel demoralized. The themes that were identified through analyzing the data collected for this study include time and resources as valuable commodities, the consequences of the nomadic life of a modern middle school teacher, and balancing policy, administration, community, and student needs.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Many teachers enter the teaching field because they want to be mentors to their students and help to make their students' lives better (Bullough, 2011; Lee et al., 2019). Teachers may develop an idea of what they feel their responsibilities are in their teaching practice based on ethical and moral ideas (Butera et al., 2020). Once teachers enter the field of teaching their expectations of what the job is might be different than what is asked of them (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick, 2018). Teachers may not be able to meet their individual expectations of the job causing them to become demoralized (Santoro, 2011a).

Demoralization is a social construct that happens when a teacher feels stressed or frustrated because they are not able to access the moral rewards of teaching (Santoro, 2011a). The moral rewards of teaching can include building strong relationships with students, watching students meet educational goals by adjusting the curriculum to fit their specific needs, and finding creative or fun ways to share learning with students (Santoro, 2018). There may be several causes of demoralization including school accountability policies, non-instructional demands on teachers' time, and poor communication with administrators (Santoro, 2018; Shaw, 2019; Tsang & Liu, 2019). The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to explore the experiences of public middle school teachers with demoralization in the context of their teaching environments.

The research questions for this study were developed to give the participants an opportunity to share their experiences with demoralization within their teaching environments. The following research questions guided the semi-structured interviews and the coding and analysis process.

Research Question 1: How do public middle school teachers describe their experiences with demoralization?

Research Question 2: How do public middle school teachers describe demoralization in relation to their teaching practice?

Research Question 3: How do public middle school teachers describe demoralization in relation to their teaching environments?

Six participants shared their personal stories during semi-structured interviews conducted over Zoom. These interviews were then restoried in a narrative format. The narratives were coded to reveal three themes, time and resources as valuable commodities, the consequences of the nomadic life of a modern middle school teacher, and balancing policy, administration, community, and student needs. The themes were then developed further by looking at the three components of SDT theory, autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1989). This chapter will discuss the findings of this study and provide recommendations for action and further study.

Interpretations and Importance of Findings

Narrative inquiry is a way to explore the personal experiences of a group of people within an institution to look for patterns or shared experiences (Creswell, 2013). A narrative inquiry research approach was used to allow the participants of this study to share their own individual experiences with demoralization. The purpose of a narrative inquiry is to spark conversations about the stories that are being told (Norman, 2020). This section will share the interpretations and importance of the shared experiences of the participants with the social construct of demoralization.

Interpretations and Importance of Research Question One

Research Question One, “How do public middle school teachers describe their experiences with demoralization?,” was developed to explore the experiences of demoralized middle school teachers. Teachers may enter the teaching field with moral or ethical expectations of how they can help their students (Freeman, 2009; Lee et al., 2019; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2021). The participants in this study explained their reasons for wanting to become teachers, and each had moral or ethical reasons for entering the teaching field. Each of the participants interviewed expressed that the expectations they had for the job were different from the realities of being a middle school teacher. The participants individually described disappointment, frustration, and stress when they could not meet these expectations that they set for selves. There were several reasons why the participants expressed frustration in meeting their individual demands of the job including conflicts with administration and a lack of time to complete tasks. According to Tsang and Liu (2016), strong communication and leadership are indicators of positive school culture. Each of the participants in this study expressed having difficulties communicating with the administration of their buildings. Five of the participants left the school district they were teaching in search of a place where they felt accepted and appreciated.

Moral Expectations Verses Reality. Many teachers enter the teaching field believing they have a moral responsibility to their students and hope they can positively impact their students’ lives (Freedman, 2009; Lee et al., 2019). Each of the participants in this study entered the teaching field because they want to positively impact their students’ lives. Each participant talked about why they went into the teaching field. Anne and Elizabeth spoke of wanting to become teachers to help their students reach their full potential. Similarly, Sydney wanted to instill a love for reading and writing in her students, while Brian wanted to help his students

become better communicators. Alice and Shirley expressed that they wanted to help their students become their best selves and make the world a better place. Teachers have ethical values and goals, which can influence how they define their work (Tsang & Lui, 2016). When teachers cannot access the moral rewards of teaching, they become demoralized (Santoro, 2018).

The six teachers in this study identified feeling stressed and frustrated because they could not access the moral rewards of teaching. A teacher's identity includes their moral and ethical views; sometimes, these views are changed or taken away based on individual school policies (Wronowski & Urick, 2021). There were several common barriers that the participants in this study described that made it difficult for them to achieve the moral goals that they had when they became teachers. These barriers included not having enough time to complete all the tasks that were asked of them, communication difficulties, student behaviors, and difficulties adjusting to a new school district. The participants each expressed that the realities of teaching were much different than what their expectations of teaching were. They became frustrated and stressed when they felt like they could not meet their individual understanding of what a good teacher is. Shirley said that her expectations of being able to be a good teacher "died eventually." Elizabeth said that she was "embarrassed because she thought teaching was going to be glamorous" because she would be able to talk about the things that she cared about. Each participant in this study expressed that school policies and culture made it unrealistic for them to achieve the moral and ethical goals they had when they entered the teaching field.

Communication and Trust. Teachers look for clear communication and support from their administrators in areas such as curriculum and behavioral support, along with the training needed to do what they consider to be good work (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016). Five of the six teachers interviewed, Shirley, Alice, Brian, Anne, and Elizabeth, have explained that they

resigned from a school district because they did not feel appreciated or that the district was the right fit for them to teach in. Each of the participants in this study said that in order to feel like they belonged at a school they needed clear communication with the administration of the buildings. The participants each related experiences of miscommunications with the administration. An example of this is when Anne asked her administrator for extra help filling out paperwork for her students and was told: “read the manual.” Communication problems were also evident when Alice was told by her administrator that she would have to change the model text, the book that she would use to model her lessons for her students within the unit of study, that she planned, without warning or a clear explanation as to why this was the case. Alice explained that she would have appreciated this information in person but having it come in the form of an email added to her frustration. Alice expressed that if she had a relationship with her administrator, it would be much easier to have more difficult conversations. Brian spoke about his need to be spoken to like an adult by his administration, he expressed that he is often treated like one of the students. Brian shared, “I would like my opinions and thoughts as a professional, certified adult in a profession to be heard, as opposed to being treated like one of the students trying to do what the big boss says.” He expressed that he often felt like his administration was trying to find fault in his teaching instead of believing that he was capable of performing the job he had trained and was hired for. When there is a lack of communication and trust between teachers and administration it can lead to feelings of demoralization (Santoro, 2011a,2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wang & Ong, 2020).

When teachers can communicate their ideas and thoughts clearly, it can help them feel ownership in the community (Tsang & Liu, 2016). Brain explained that each time he starts in a new district, he is hesitant to express his ideas and thoughts. He suggested if he had a teaching

contract that lasted more than a year that he would feel more comfortable expressing himself and feel more like a member of the community. Elizabeth, Anne, and Brian started working at a new school district this year and explained that one of the reasons that they looked for new employment was because they felt their administration was responsible for creating a negative school culture. A lack of communication between teachers and school administrators is often related to negative school cultures (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). According to Self-Determination theory, in order to find the motivation to do good work employees need to find relatedness in their workplace (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Alice, Shirley, and Anne each stated that they had left their jobs because they had tension with their administration. Alice experienced tension when she was told she could not teach the unit that she planned for several months to teach, even though the book she wanted to teach was on the approved reading list. Shirley's administration believed that she may have spoken of confidential information with coworkers, and Anne had a disagreement with the administration about her district's policy on standardized testing. Schools that have strong leadership and positive school culture are less likely to experience demoralization (Sæbø & Midtsundstad, 2018; Santoro, 2018). The tension that Alice, Shirley, and Anne experienced left them feeling unappreciated, unwanted, and frustrated that they were not being heard, which led to their feelings of demoralization.

Interpretations and Importance of Research Question Two

Research Question Two, "How do public middle school teachers describe demoralization in relation to their teaching practice?", was developed to gather the descriptions of demoralized middle school teachers and how they teach their students. Teachers may not be able to teach in the way that they feel is best for their students because they may be required to do a number of tasks and are not given the time necessary to complete them (Santoro, 2018; Shaw, 2019; Tsang

& Liu, 2016). All the participants in this study expressed feeling frustrated balancing the extra responsibilities asked of them. The participants said she was embarrassed and frustrated because they felt like they were not able to do their job to their expectations which led to their demoralization. The participants were struggling to feel competent in their career and instead felt as if they were underappreciated. The participants in this study felt frustrated when asked to have students take state-mandated standardized testing because they felt like these tests were not in the best interest of their students. The participants felt demoralized because they felt that giving these tests was against their own moral judgment. The curriculum that teachers are asked to use is often focused on school accountability policies and standardized testing (Shaw, 2019; Tsang & Liu, 2016). The participants in this study expressed their frustration with the curriculum that they were asked to use in their classrooms.

Extra Responsibilities. Teachers are asked to spend a large amount of their school day completing non-instructional work that they do not always feel is related to how well their students will do in the classroom (Shaw, 2019; Tsang & Liu, 2016). Each of the participants in this study expressed that they were not able to put as much time into planning for the direct instruction of their students as they would like. Shirley explained that she felt each year she has taught that she has had more demands put on her time. She explained that she was asked to attend meetings, plan for an intervention and a social emotional learning block and keep and track data on her students. She expressed, “At first it felt like every year there was something else, then every month there was something else, and now it feels like every day.” Anne spoke of the amount of time it takes in order to complete the paperwork that is associated with her job. She said, “I was surprised at how much time my day was spent not with students but preparing paperwork.” Each of the participants expressed that there were several duties that they were

required to complete that took away time that they could use for planning. These duties included covering for teachers' absences, data collection, meetings with parents, meetings with teaching teams, and completing paperwork. Alice and Shirley expressed that they were not able to complete their planning during their designated planning time, so they spend a large amount of time outside the classroom planning for their students on the weekends or in the evenings. Sydney explained that she "just wanted to teach," but felt like she had to juggle evening commitments, meetings, and teacher coverages. Each of the teachers explained that they felt like these extra duties left them feeling demoralized because they were not able to devote enough time to instructing their students. Sydney stated, "I have so many hats that I am trying to wear. I just want to teach, and see my students learn." Teachers are being required to do more and more during their school day but are receiving no extra pay or time for their efforts (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). The participants in this study expressed that not having enough time to complete the requirements of the job leaves them feeling embarrassed and stressed. Alice shared, "I don't get nearly enough time at school to plan, there is always a meeting or a class I need to cover. Almost all my planning is on my own time." School accountability policies have required teachers to give state-mandated standardized tests, that some teachers feel do not help their students (Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2021). Alice expressed the need to, "teach in my own voice and style." While Brian said that, "It is so disheartening to see how disinterested my students are in the curriculum. It is hard to get any work completion at all." Each of the participants in the study talked about how their curriculum impacts their teaching practices leading some of the participants to feel like they are not able to teach in a way that is beneficial to their students leading to demoralization.

Standardized Testing. Standardized testing has become a part of school accountability policies and may be used as a tool to measure teacher success (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Anne recalled that she left the teaching field for a time because she was frustrated over her school's standardized testing policy that would force one of her special education students to take a test that she felt would not be able to complete it. She also explained that she did not think that the results would help her student's education. It is difficult for teachers to feel like they are doing quality work if they do not understand how the results of school accountability policies could help their students (Bradford & Braaten, 2018). Sydney described how her students would develop anxiety and low self-esteem when taking standardized tests. She said, "I have seen students have full blown panic attacks because they did not want people to think they were stupid." Shirley explained that she felt the results of standardized testing were not available to her until after her students had moved on to the next grade, which did not help her planning.

State-wide standardized testing is used as a tool to measure teacher success (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). This has led some schools to develop scripted curricula in order to help students do well on this testing (Tsang & Liu, 2016, Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Standardized testing is connected to school funding and teacher evaluation policies (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). The importance that school districts have placed on standardized testing has led to some districts adopting strict, often scripted curriculum, that does not always meet the needs of each individual student (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). The participants in this study had different experiences with the curriculum, some curriculum is heavily scripted, others are based on standards, and some are developed by individual teachers based on student need. Anne and Elizabeth are support teachers who need to work with other classroom teachers in order to support their students' learning. Elizabeth has found a scripted curriculum to be helpful

because she is able to know what will be taught in several classrooms regardless of the teacher. Anne is working at a school where she develops her own curriculum based on her students' needs. Teachers want influence over curriculum and instructional decisions (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Alice expressed that it is important for her to be able to make the curriculum her own and thinks that if teachers are teaching to the standards, they should have the freedom to frame the lessons in a way that is helpful for her students. Brian and Shirley both expressed the need to be able to pause direct instruction, in order to review or fill in skills or knowledge in order to meet their students' needs. Shirley expressed feeling grateful that the subject she teaches does not have a standardized test attached to it. She said, "I need to stop and fill in gaps, they are all not where they are supposed to be. If I had a scripted curriculum, I would not be able to catch up." Each of the participants in this study expressed frustration with not being able to meet each individual students' needs because it is difficult to differentiate to meet the needs of their lowest students, those on grade level, and those students' needing enrichment. When teachers feel like they are not able to do their job well they feel demoralized (Santoro, 2018).

Interpretations and Importance of Research Question Three

Research Question Three, "How do public middle school teachers describe demoralization in relation to their teaching environments?", was developed to explore demoralized teachers experiences of demoralization in the classroom environment. All of the participants in this study expressed how important it was to build relationships with their students. They expressed that building relationships was difficult because they were limited in the way that they could teach because of student behaviors. When the participants of the study were not able to teach to the best of their ability because of student behaviors they felt demoralized. The participants of this study expressed their frustration of not being able to reach

each individual student's needs. They also spoke of the challenges of teaching in a new environment.

Navigating Behaviors. Building relationships with students and gaining their trust is an indicator of success for teachers (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019). All the participants in this study expressed that they had a difficult time meeting the needs of their students because of the unwanted behaviors in the classroom. Sydney explained that when she began teaching the 2022-2023 school year, she had her students' desks set up in groups, however, she had to put them in more traditional rows after only a few days because students were not listening to her lessons. Shirley explained that she felt the need to spend long hours planning because if her lessons are not engaging then her students will experience negative behaviors. Elizabeth expressed that she did not feel safe because students were often running in the hallways, and she thought that she might get hurt. Elizabeth felt like she was not supported by her administrators because they were not addressing the students' behavior and felt instead blamed for it. When teachers feel like they are not supported, and they do not have the ability to do what they feel is right they begin to feel disempowered (Tsang & Liu, 2016).

Brian spoke of wanting to give his students more responsibility and to treat them in what he felt was an age-appropriate way. He wanted to allow his students to leave the room when they needed to do something so that they could return and focus on learning. However, his views were not shared by the administration of the building and so he was not allowed to conduct his classroom in this way. When teachers feel that they are not allowed to do what they think is right for their students they may become demoralized (Santoro, 2018). Anne left the teaching career all together for a short time because she was told she needed to force a student to take a standardized test. Anne said, "My students' wellbeing was not being put first and this made me

question my choice to become a teacher.” Each of the participants in the study expressed that they wished that they could do more in their classrooms but were unable to because they were afraid of student behaviors. Having to limit what you can do based on student behavior has left the participants in this study feeling frustrated.

Reaching Each Individual Student. Teachers enter the teaching field because they want to reach each individual student and make a difference in their lives (Lee et al., 2019). The participants in this study shared that they had difficulties reaching each individual student. Brian, Sydney, and Shirley each expressed that their schools were often short staffed both because of teacher absences, and staff vacancies in their school districts. Teachers were asked to cover for these teachers during their preparation periods which took away time that they needed to plan for their classes. Brian said, “When students need remedial help, we should be able to hit the pause button, but there is an incredible amount of pressure to keep pace with the curriculum, even if no one understands.” Brian was co-teaching with a special education teacher but expressed the teacher was not able to come into his room and teach with him because of other responsibilities. Joseph (2016) explained that teachers see themselves as moral agents, and if they feel that their students are not getting what they need or deserve that they may become frustrated or demoralized. Each of the participants in the study expressed that they wished they were able to do more for their students.

Learning the Environment. Elizabeth, Anne, Alice, and Brian all started in new school districts this year. Each of them expressed the importance of learning where things in the school are kept, learning the school policies, and the school culture. Anne spoke about the need for finding someone she could trust within the school, who is not a teacher’s evaluator, to serve as a mentor for the teacher. Each school district has its own unique school culture that teachers must

adjust to when starting out in a new district (Santoro, 2018; Shaw, 2019; Tsang & Liu 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Teachers are looking for competence, relatedness, and autonomy when beginning their new careers (Santoro, 2011b). When there is open communication within a school district it can lead to a supportive school culture (Tsang & Liu, 2016). Elizabeth expressed that there were a number of little things that she wished she knew in her new school. She said, “I do not want to ask where things are. I don’t want anyone to judge me or think that I am not capable of doing my job.” These included the little things like learning how to use the copy machine, or where to locate supplies. Brian was surprised when entered the teachers break room in one of the districts he worked in, because he felt there was a lot of negative energy there. He said, “Everyone was wondering what they were going to get yelled at for that day, or who was going to be in trouble.” Learning to communicate in a new environment and understanding a school district’s culture could help teachers feel comfortable when moving to a new district (Santoro, 2018).

Implications

This study contributed to the body of research that has been assembled about teacher demoralization by sharing middle school teachers’ personal experiences with demoralization within their teaching environment. Santoro’s (2011a) research was the first to identify the social construct of demoralization, instead of the individual concept of teacher burnout. Teacher demoralization does not focus on the idea that teachers are lacking the perseverance to do good work but instead suggests that teachers are unable to do good work because policies and reforms make it difficult for teachers to access the moral rewards of teaching (Santoro, 2011a). There have been many studies focused on the demoralization of teachers that have contributed to an understanding of the consequences and causes of demoralization (Bradford & Braaten, 2018;

Ibrahim & Alhabbash, 2022; Paetz, 2021; Santoro, 2018; Tecuta et al., 2015; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). This study found that when experiencing demoralization, teachers may not have the time and resources they need to do what they feel is the best work for their students, teachers may have difficulty communicating with the administrators in their building, and they may leave their current district in search of a place where they feel more appreciated or needed.

Some of the current research focused on the causes and consequences for teachers when they experience demoralization (Bradford & Braaten, 2018; Hemmings, 2012; Ibrahim & Alhabbash, 2022; Santoro, 2011a, 2011b, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick & Urick, 2021). However, there is a gap in knowledge of how teachers perceive their self-identified demoralization in the context of their teaching environments. This study asked participants to share their own individual experiences and stories with demoralization during semi-structured interviews. The interviews were then restoried into narratives that shared each individual teacher's experiences with demoralization within their classroom environment. The narratives were then analyzed, and several themes were developed. The themes include time and resources as a valuable commodity, the nomadic life of a modern middle school teacher, and balancing policy, administration, community, and student needs.

This study benefits middle school teachers because it can help share information about the social construct of demoralization and how it is affecting teachers and students. Understanding the participant's experiences can help start conversations about demoralization, which could lead to less teacher attrition, and better school culture (Santoro, 2018; Yildiz & Kiliç, 2021). Middle school students are at an age where they are having many biological changes and have a need to develop trust, and in order to develop trust students need consistent teachers (Herman et al., 2020).

It is important for students to have healthy, well-trained teachers, that are dedicated and motivated by students' educational growth, and that is consistent over time (Santoro, 2018). School initiatives focused on communication and positive culture might help to retain teachers for longer periods of time.

Recommendations for Action

After reviewing the participants' experiences with demoralization there are several recommendations for further action. The participants in this study explained that teachers starting in a new school district may need extra support to get familiar with their new position. The participants in this study were looking for a school district where policies and procedures are created and communicated with teachers and students in mind. School administrators and educational policymakers should consider the causes and consequences of demoralization when developing new policies (Santoro, 2018). Policies should be put in place that encourage teachers to stay in one school district to teach, instead of moving from district to district. Asking teacher be a part of the decision-making process could be helpful. The policies should show an understanding that teachers need time and resources to do the best work for their students.

The first recommendation for action is that teachers starting in a new school district be offered a non-evaluative mentor regardless of their previous experience. Five of the participants in this study expressed that it was difficult to start over in a new district. Anne talked about the importance of having a non-evaluative mentor for each teacher that is entering a school district. She suggested that it would be helpful to have one person who could answer all the questions about the school, such as the policies and procedures, where supplies are kept, or how to use certain pieces of technology. Teachers who are new to the teaching field often receive a mentor to help them (Tsang & Liu, 2016). However, veteran teachers who are entering a new district

may not receive the same support. It is important for school culture to make sure that every teacher regardless of experience receives support (Tsang & Liu, 2016; Sæbø & Midtsundstad, 2018; Wronowski & Yruck, 2019). Building administrators need to focus on good communication and building trust between themselves and teachers (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu 2016).

The second recommendation for action is for each teacher be given access to important information that is specific to the district that they will be working in. The participants in this study explained how difficult it is to find the information that they need when they begin working in a new school district. Elizabeth was one of the teachers who had a hard time adjusting to her new teaching environment. Elizabeth shared that she felt that new teachers should receive a pamphlet with information in it that it was important to know about the school. The pamphlet could include items such as emergency procedures, a school mission statement, and a list of important phone numbers. Elizabeth explained that as a teacher in a new district she had a lot of questions but did not always feel comfortable asking them. Having open communication with teachers helps to create a strong culture and positive environment (Santoro, 2018; Shaw, 2019).

The third recommendation for action is to reevaluate the time frame of teacher contracts to include multiple years. A longer contract could encourage teachers to stay in the district for as long as possible. Teachers may feel more supported, greater job security, and voice in the school district they are working in, because they may not be worried about being asked to leave a district after only working there for a short time. Brian suggested that teacher contracts be created to last three years. He expressed that this could give teachers time to feel comfortable in their teaching environments, and he said that he would feel more ownership in the school if he

felt like he would be part of the school community for a longer amount of time. This may also encourage teachers to stay teaching in the same district for several years in a row. It is important for teachers to feel like they are appreciated in the school community (Joseph, 2016).

The fourth recommendation for action that was developed after considering the participants' experiences is for administration to be open to each teacher having the autonomy to teach in the style that works best for them. Each of the participants expressed creating and building relationships with students that are built on trust. In order to do this, they need to be authentic in their craft (Santoro, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016). Alice thought that teachers should be able to teach in a way that expressed their own individual style. She suggested that each individual teacher use the same skills and strategies but the methods in which the lessons are delivered should be individualized based on the teacher. She suggested that the teaching will be more authentic to students. It is important for teachers to show creativity and style as they present their lessons to their students (Santoro, 2018; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). Each of the participants felt that if these small changes were made it would help them to feel re-moralized.

Recommendations for Further Study

Many studies have been conducted surrounding demoralization, including studies based on the causes and consequences of demoralization and the impact that it has on teachers (Bradford & Braaten, 2018; Hemmings, 2012; Ibrahim & Alhabbash, 2022; Santoro, 2011a, 2011b, 2018; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2021). Each of the participants in this study described difficulties with communication with the administration in their buildings. Several of the participants Alice, Anne, Brian, Shirley, and Elizabeth each related how conflicts with administration made them feel as if they were not appreciated within the school district that they worked in. It would be beneficial to conduct a qualitative narrative study with

administration to further explore the perceptions that administrators have in relation to communication with the teachers in their building.

The participants in this study spoke often about finding a school district in which they felt supported and appreciated. Sydney, Alice, and Shirley each spoke of the extra responsibilities that they were given because their school did not have teachers to fill open positions. It may also be beneficial for a phenomenological study to be conducted in order to understand why teachers are leaving the school districts they are working in, to search for other work. Merriam_and Tisdell (2016) says that phenomenological studies look to understand the essence of shared experiences. In this case the experiences of those teachers who are moving to new school districts.

This study had several delimitations including only using a small sample of middle school teachers who self-identified as being demoralized. The study only interviewed middle school teachers who self-identified as demoralized and only focused on teachers in Connecticut, who were able to access the recruitment flyer on Facebook. It may have been helpful to post the flyer on other forms of social media in order to recruit even more participants. The interview questions in this study focused on learning about teachers' perceptions of their experiences with demoralization, in relation to their teaching environments and teaching practices. A quantitative study could help to reach more teachers. With survey data more teachers of different age groups of students or teachers from different states could share their experiences and these could be compared and analyzed to add to the research on demoralization.

Conclusion

Many teachers enter the teaching field because they wanted to make a positive impact on their students' lives (Lee et al., 2019). When teachers enter the teaching field, they may be met

with unexpected challenges (Wronowski & Urick, 2019). These challenges could include school accountability and reform policies, a lack of communication from administration, or a lack of time and resources that are needed to complete their work (Tsang & Liu, 2016; Wronowski & Urick, 2019). When teachers are met with these challenges, they may feel like it is impossible to meet their own expectations of the job, causing them to become demoralized (Santoro, 2011a; Tecuta et al., 2015). Demoralization is a social construct that occurs when teachers feel stress and frustration because they are unable to access the moral rewards of teaching (Santoro, 2011a).

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to explore the experiences of public middle school teachers with demoralization in the context of their teaching environments. Six participants completed hour-long semi-structured interviews on Zoom. These interviews were transcribed and restoried in a narrative format. Once the narratives were created, they were manually coded to look for patterns and themes. The three themes that emerged from the narratives were time and resources as valuable commodities, the consequences of the nomadic life of a modern middle school teacher, and balancing policy, administration, community, and students.

This study explored the experiences of middle school teachers had with demoralization. All the participants in this study entered the teaching field for moral and ethical reasons. Each described frustration when they realized that school policies, administrator expectations, and school culture made it impossible for them to reach their own expectations. The participants in this study were looking for relatedness with their administrators including strong communication and trust. When they did not receive these things, they actively moved to other school districts in search of a district where they felt appreciated. The participants expressed how demoralization affected their teaching practices. They were unable to have the time and resources they needed to

do what was best for students, and they needed to move from district to district often in order to find a place where they felt they were appreciated. All the participants shared frustrations with not having enough time to complete all of the tasks they are asked to complete in a day. The participants spent long hours in the evenings and on weekends planning their lessons. The participants felt the focus on standardized testing added stress and anxiety to their students and took up valuable teaching time with little to no benefits to the students. The participants in the study would feel more competent in their work if they had more time to plan for their students.

Demoralization affected the participants teaching environments. The participants in this study have moved to several different school districts during their career and had to learn to adjust to new school cultures, expectations, and policies. They needed time to plan creative engaging lessons so that their students would have limited behaviors in class. They struggled with finding autonomy of their teaching craft while balancing the expectations of each new school district. Each of the participants in this study expressed that they enjoyed building relationships with their students, and seeing their students learn new academic material. The stress and frustration that they expressed was based on the number of expectations they were given along with the lack of time and resources they had available to them. The narrative experiences that the teachers in this study shared can help open conversations and further research about the social construct of demoralization of middle school teachers.

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Appendix A

FACEBOOK RECRUITMENT FLYER

1. Are you a middle school teacher in the state of Connecticut? Are you 18 years of age or older?
2. Do you feel frustrated and unable to meet your own expectations of being a teacher?
3. Do you have trouble accessing the rewards of teaching that come from feeling like you do good work, and made a difference in your teaching career?

If so, you might be experiencing demoralization: Feeling frustration and stress because you are unable to access the moral rewards of teaching.

If you answered yes to the above questions, you meet the criteria for this study.

I am a doctoral student at the University of New England. This is a research project and participation is voluntary. The purpose of this research project is to explore middle school teacher's experiences with demoralization within their teaching environments. I am seeking eight to 10 participants to share their stories in a one hour-long recorded interview conducted via Zoom. Please refer to the attached Participant Information Sheet for further information about this research study.

If there are more than 10 people who express interest, not everyone will be selected to interview. You will also be asked to review your restoried narrative that I will write after the interview.

All names of participants, schools, and any other identifying information will be kept confidential, and removed from the narratives. If you are interested in sharing your story please email Jessica Alfieri at jalfieri@une.edu or send me a private message.

Version Date: 9/1/2022

Appendix B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction:

I want to thank you for participating in this interview with me today. I appreciate you taking time to share your personal stories related to your experiences with demoralization within your teaching environment. For the sake of this study, a teacher is experiencing demoralization when they feel frustration and stress because they are not able to access the moral rewards of teaching. You have self-identified as being demoralized.

I am excited to learn about your experiences with demoralization. This interview will take about an hour, during this time I encourage you to tell me your personal stories and feelings about demoralization.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Before the interview takes place I will go over the Participant information sheet with each participant., and I let them know that I will answer any questions that they may have about the content of the Participant Information Sheet.

Do you have a pseudonym you would like to use? _____

Do I have your permission to record this interview using the Zooms recording feature?

Okay I am going to start recoding now

Each question will be explained, introduced, repeated or rephrased as requested. Any question can be skipped at any time.

Questions:

Let's start with some background information.

1. Tell me about why you became a teacher? How long have you been teaching? Can you explain how the realities of the job matched your expectations, and how these realities may have differed from your expectations? What surprised you?
2. Please share what experiences or events led you to feeling frustrated or stressed in the teaching environment.
3. How would you describe the communication between yourself and administration? Can you please explain how new school initiatives and policies are communicated to the teaching staff?
4. Describe how you feel supported in the classroom. What could be done in order to help you feel more supported in the classroom?
5. Can you tell me a little about the curriculum that is used for your class? How do you think the curriculum helps meet each students' needs? What do you think could be done to improve ~~on~~ this curriculum?
6. How do you prepare for your classes? How much planning are you able to do in the school day? Where and when do you complete most of your planning? How much time do you spend a day planning for activities?
7. How do you assess students to know that they are being successful in the classroom? What are your thoughts on the assessments that are used?
8. Can you explain any classroom behavior management changes you've made due to feeling frustrated and stressed?
9. Can you share with me how you view your relationships with your students, colleagues, and administration?

10. What types teaching practices that you would like to integrate into your classroom that you may have not been able to?
11. Since first feeling frustrated or stressed in the teaching environment, have you sought out any professional development, training, or additional resources that could help you grow in your teaching practices? Can you describe these?

Version Date: 9/1/2022

Appendix C

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Information Sheet Version Date:	09/01/2022
IRB Project #:	0822-23
Title of Project:	A Narrative Inquiry on Public Middle School Teachers Experiences with Demoralization
Principal Investigator (PI):	Jessica Alfieri
PI Contact Information:	jalfieri@une.edu , (860) 383-6516

INTRODUCTION

- This is a project being conducted for research purposes.
- The intent of the Participant Information Sheet is to provide you with pertinent details about this research project.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions about this research project, now, during or after the project is complete.
- Your participation is completely voluntary.
- The use of the word ‘we’ in the Information Sheet refers to the Principal Investigator and/or other research staff.
- If you decide to participate, you have the right to withdraw from this research project at any time without penalty. If you chose to withdraw from this research project all of your information and data that has been collected will be deleted and will not be used in the project.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT?

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry is to explore the experiences of eight to 10 public middle school teachers, by collecting stories about demoralization in the context of their teaching environments. This study is being conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation. Demoralization is a social construct in which teachers feel frustration and stress because they are unable to reach their individual expectations of being a teacher.

WHY AM I BEING ASKED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT?

You are being asked to participate in this research project because you are a public middle school teacher in the state of Connecticut that are 18 years old or older and you have self-identified as experiencing feeling frustrated because you are not able to meet your expectations of being a teacher.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT?

You will be invited to participate in one semi structured interview with the principal investigator that will last approximately one hour over Zoom.

You will choose a pseudonym to be used in place of your name for the study.

You will be given the opportunity to leave your camera on or off during the interview, and your interview will be recorded using Zoom.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS INVOLVED FROM BEING IN THIS PROJECT?

The risks involved with participation in this research project are minimal and may include a loss of confidentiality or anonymity. This risk will be minimized by using pseudonym for each of the participants names and by eliminating any identifying information from the study. Participants will have the opportunity to read their restoried narratives for accuracy and will be given the choice to have their cameras off during the interview. Participants have the right to skip or not answer any questions, for any reason.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS FROM BEING IN THIS PROJECT?

There are no likely benefits to you by being in this research project; however, the information we collect may help us understand the demoralization of middle school teachers in the context of their teaching environments.

WILL YOU BE COMPENSATED FOR BEING IN THIS PROJECT?

You will not be compensated for being in this research project.

WHAT ABOUT PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY?

We will do our best to keep your personal information private and confidential. However, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Additionally, your information in this research project could be reviewed by representatives of the University such as the Office of Research Integrity and/or the Institutional Review Board.

The results of this research project may be shown at meetings or published in journals to inform other professionals. If any papers or talks are given about this research, your name will not be used. We may use data from this research project that has been permanently stripped of personal identifiers in future research without obtaining your consent.

The following additional measures will be taken to protect your privacy and confidentiality:

- Data will only be collected during one on one participant interviews using Zoom, no information will be taken without participant consent, and restoried narratives will be checked by participants for accuracy before they are added to the study.
- No identifying information about participants, schools, or other staff members will be used
- Pseudonyms will be used for all participants.
- All names, e-mails, and contact information gathered during recruitment will be recorded and linked to a uniquely assigned pseudonym within a master list.

- The master list will be kept securely and separately from the study data.
- Zoom interview will take place in a private setting so that it cannot be overheard.
- Participants are given the option to turn off their camera during Zoom interview.
- All personal identifiable information will be removed as the restoried narratives are written. A pseudonym will be used instead of participants names.
- Once member checking of the restoried narratives is complete the recorded Zoom interviews will be destroyed, along with the master list of personal information.
- All other study data will be retained on record for 3 years after the completion of the project and then destroyed, where only the researcher's advisors, and IRB committee at the University of New England will have access to it.
- All data collected will be stored on a password protected personal laptop computer accessible only by the principal investigator.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS PROJECT?

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research project. If you have questions about this project, complaints or concerns, you should contact the Principal Investigator listed on the first page of this document.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact the Office of Research Integrity at (207) 602-2244 or via e-mail at irb@une.edu.

Appendix D
IRB EXEMPTION LETTER



INNOVATION FOR A HEALTHIER PLANET

Institutional Review Board
Julie Longua Peterson, Chair

Biddeford Campus
 11 Hills Beach Road
 Biddeford, ME 04005
 (207) 602-2244 T
 (207) 602-5905 F

Portland Campus
 716 Stevens Avenue
 Portland, ME 04103

DATE OF LETTER:	September 1, 2022
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	Jessica Alfieri
FACULTY ADVISOR:	Andrea Disque, EdD
PROJECT NUMBER:	0822-23
RECORD NUMBER:	0822-23-01
PROJECT TITLE:	A Narrative Inquiry of Public Middle School Teachers Experiences with Demoralization
SUBMISSION TYPE:	Exempt Project
SUBMISSION DATE:	8/26/2022
ACTION:	Determination of Exempt Status
DECISION DATE:	9/1/2022
REVIEW CATEGORY:	Exemption Category # 2(ii)

The UNE Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has reviewed the materials submitted in connection with the above referenced project and has determined that the proposed work is exempt from IRB review and oversight as defined by 45 CFR 46.104.

Additional IRB review is not required for this project as submitted. However, if any changes to the design of the study are contemplated (e.g., revision to the protocol, data collection

instruments, interview/survey questions, recruitment materials, participant information sheet, and/or other IRB-reviewed documents), the Principal Investigator must submit an amendment to the IRB to ensure the requested change(s) will not alter the exempt status of the project.

Please feel free to contact me at (207) 602-2244 or irb@une.edu with any questions.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bob Kennedy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bob" and last name "Kennedy" clearly distinguishable.

Bob Kennedy, MS
Director, Research Integrity