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Union Representatives’ Stories: From Leading the Classroom to Leading a District

Holly Magaditsch
University of South Florida, hmtabak@mail.usf.edu

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Union Representatives’ Stories: From Leading the Classroom to Leading a District

by

Holly M. Magaditsch

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership
Department of Leadership, Counseling, Adult, Career, & Higher Education
College of Education
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Vonzell Agosto, Ph.D.
Ilene Berson, Ph.D.
William Black, Ph.D.
Zorka Karanxha, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

While much is known about what contributes to teacher attrition, there is less research on those who leave teaching positions to work as a union representative. The purpose of this study was to explore how three teacher union representatives frame their experiences with mobility, leadership, and advocacy in education. The research question was: How do former teachers enter and perform the role of teacher union representative? The sub-level questions were: a) How do they story their transition from teaching students to representing teachers? b) How do they frame the responsibility of teacher unions and teacher union representatives to advocate? Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, examined for story elements and plot, and interpreted using a framework on working conditions (House, 1981). The major theme was that educators left their positions as teachers in response to emotional, instrumental, informational and appraisal factors, namely discrepancies between what they wanted and what was provided as part of their working conditions. The findings are: 1) Working conditions pushed educators to pursue union leadership, 2) Professional responsibilities of a Union Representative varied 3) Issues for which Union Representatives advocated involved the improvement of working conditions. The findings are discussed, as are implications for revising the theoretical framework for use in future studies with regard to the fluidity of the advocacy process, and the long-term sustainability of American Educational Unions. Recommended are longitudinal studies to determine how teacher union representatives’ frame their narratives of working conditions and advocacy in response to changes in legislation, including union decertification, over time.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the history of education, there have been countless strikes and marches led by educators as a means to fight for better working conditions, wages, and benefits. Teacher union representatives, especially those who were once teachers, play an interesting role in leadership and advocacy as they add to the attrition rate but then contribute by reducing it. The purpose of this study is to explore how former school-based educators (classroom teachers), who became teacher union representatives, frame their stories of mobility, leadership, advocacy, and barriers and supports affecting educator attrition.

Teachers, in comparison to other professional roles such as lawyers, engineers, architects, professors, pharmacists, and nurses have a high turnover rate (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Today, educators are exiting the teaching profession at an alarming rate. Current research shows that 50% of educators nationwide will exit their current position within the first three years (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). In Florida alone, it is estimated that 15% of new teachers will exit the classroom after the first year, 40% of Florida teachers will exit within the first five years, and more than half will exit the classroom by their tenth year of service (Haynes, 2014). Given the high rate of attrition, it stands to reason that educators are dissatisfied with the work and working conditions, and the provisions in place to retain them are inadequate.

Teacher attrition is a costly affair (Buchanan, 2009). High teacher attrition rates can in turn create a weak infrastructure that ultimately leads to a collapse in the building blocks
necessary for students to learn from dedicated teacher professionals who choose to remain in the field of education (Henteges, 2012). Financial costs associated with teacher attrition reoccur each time new teachers are recruited, inducted, mentored, and professionally trained (Exstorm, 2009). In an American study of teacher attrition completed in 2000, the individual cost that is lost when a teacher exits the field is approximately $8,000 when one calculates the total training and onboarding costs (Rinke, 2007). When this per teacher cost is then calculated in accordance with national attrition rates, the total cost of replacing public school teachers, for instance, who have exited the profession was nearly $2.2 billion, it can only be inferred that with rising costs, that this figure will only continue to grow over the coming years (Lindqvist, Nordanger, & Carlsson, 2014). Teacher attrition, along with teacher recruitment and retention practices, have a direct impact on school districts’ ability to fill available teaching assignments for the academic school year (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006). In the literature are histories about the formation of teachers unions and their efforts to promote better working conditions and wages often by way of striking and protesting, along with a wealth of information and literature on educators who have left the field of education to further their studies and to embark on other careers. However, much of it is contained within attrition studies.

Often the reasons educators give for leaving the classroom begin and end with the principal. Meaning that, on one hand, a lack of administrative support has been one of the most frequently cited causes for teacher attrition in education (Schilichte, Yssl, & Merbler, 2005; Prather-Jones, 2011). On the other hand, teachers deciding to exit the teaching profession typically share that decision with the principal who then puts protocols in place to relieve the teacher of their duties and begin the hiring process to fill the vacancy. Principals have also been found to gloss over educators’ (not only teachers’) reasons for leaving by replacing them with
more general statements such as the educator has gone back to further their education or have left to pursue other professional goals (Buchanan, 2012).

Unlike the business world, where it is common for companies to have employees complete an exit interview when their employment ends, educators may not have access to a formal exit process to share their experiences and the reason for ending their employment with the district. There are very few formal or informal practices that allow teachers to share the reasons behind their decision to exit their employment in schools. Furthermore, in the research, there is not much information on the policies and procedures that may have caused or prompted them to pursue other leadership positions aside from traditional school or district-based administrative positions. While the problem of attrition continues to deplete the pool of educators, not all who leave a teaching position leave the field of education or their commitment to the profession. The educators who leave the classroom, but not the profession as a whole are educators who have experienced mobility within their profession.

Mobility tracking of educators was initiated under the No Child Left Behind legislative movements (Feng, 2014). Educator mobility was tracked as a means of seeing where the highly-qualified teachers were teaching. Studies, such as those by Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2004) and Imazeki (2004) evaluate teacher mobility across school districts as well. Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2004) found that public school teachers generally prefer teaching students who are: high-achieving, non-minority, non-low-income students. This finding was true regardless of the teacher’s sex, race, or level of expertise within the field of education. Studies completed by Imazeki (2004) report similar results reporting classroom characteristics, students’ standardized test performance, and the number of disciplinary incidents as playing a large role in the determination of teacher attrition from the field, or mobility within. Mobility tracking, or
following teacher placement across the field of education is influential in seeing where highly effective teachers work in the classroom, as well as determining next professional steps within and out of the educational field for those who have decided to transition from the classroom.

**Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Research**

There is minimal research that accounts for the percentage of educators who exit a teaching role to pursue employment in other leadership roles within the field of education and that which exists typically ignores their individualized stories of leaving their teaching roles. Furthermore, they are included in attrition statistics, but the percentage to which they contribute the attrition rates over time is unknown. Also unknown, and perhaps more significant, is the extent to which they contribute to reducing the attrition of other educators through their leadership in teacher unions.

The purpose of this study was to explore how former school-based educators (classroom teachers), who became teacher union representatives, frame their stories of mobility, leadership, advocacy, and barriers and supports affecting educator attrition. Learning from their stories of transition, advocacy, and performance within the role of teacher union representative can inform the development of teacher leadership, administrative support, and teacher retention strategies.

Through this study, an overlooked pool of educators will be brought to the forefront; those who have taken a less traditional leadership role as a teacher union representative.

**Research Question**

The overarching research question is: *How do former teachers enter and perform the role of teacher union representative?* The sub questions are

1. How do they story their transition from teaching students to representing teachers?
2. How do they frame the responsibility of teacher unions and teacher union representatives to advocate?

This central question and its two sub-questions allow me to explore how former teachers/teacher union representatives portray the contexts, supports and barriers, and their overall transition into a leadership role in which advocacy is central.

Rationale for Study

This qualitative study is significant because it addresses what is lacking in two particular areas of the knowledge base. The first area concerns the reasons why teachers leave the classroom to pursue employment outside of the district that affects education. In studying why teachers step away from the classroom, but not away from the field of education as a whole, there is much to learn. There is a need to understand the individual growth and professional development that occurs within a teacher that allows them to imagine themselves and perform in a leadership role outside of the classroom that requires them to represent and advocate on behalf of educators and the profession. Historically, educators have been regarded as being passive. Despite having large numbers of educators within the field, large displays of power via collective action and involvement in political affairs has not been characteristic of many educators within the field (Oakes, 1960). However, there is a subsection of educators within the field who actively bargain and spark movements in the field as a means to build coalitions and create changes in working conditions (Roberts & Siegle, 2012).

The second area concerns the gap in the literature on who local union representatives are and how, as part of their role and responsibilities, they advocate for teachers to remain in teaching. Shedding light on who becomes a local union representative, the qualifications necessary to serve in that role, why and how they work as leaders and with leaders to reduce
teacher attrition is the intent of this study. A thorough understanding of what made teachers leave the profession and work to prevent others from leaving can inform the knowledge base on the role of union representatives and their leadership as a means of preventing teachers from being dismissed or exiting as well as escorting teachers back into the profession (Buchanan, 2012).

**Background of the Study**

The unionization of workers and the formation of labor unions were key components of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal legislation that was enacted in the United States during 1933-1938. To further complement the New Deal, the Wagner Act of 1935 established collective bargaining rights and fair labor practices (Scribner, 2015). While many laborers enjoyed the protections and provisions of the legislation, public employees were excluded from the initial legislation. It was not until 1962, after nearly a quarter of a century of lobbying and organizing, that federal, state, and local employees were fully included and protected under the act that allowed for the unionization of workers (Scribner, 2015).

While the process of unionization took decades to trickle down to the field of education, educators were vocal in showing their disdain for conditions within the field early in the 1900s. Between 1918 and 1954 there were only ten years, not in succession, that passed without a large teacher strike in the United States. Six of these strike free years fell during the 1920’s; while the other four, 1931, 1932, 1938, and 1939 fell during a time in which the average teacher salary was high in comparison to the average cost of living (Oakes, 1960). The remaining decades between 1940-1960 were plagued with teacher strikes as a means to fight for better working conditions and wages. In 1946, 1947, and 1948 over 12,000 teachers in forty-eight different communities struck for an average of 9.6 days. In 1951, 4,510 teachers in ten different communities went on strike for over twelve days. From 1918 to 1960 the United States has been the target of more
than one hundred and twenty teachers strikes (Oakes, 1960). Teacher strikes became more frequent with teachers crying out for better working conditions and wages. While the strikes ended seemingly amicably, not all teachers returned to the classroom once they placed the picket signs on the ground and the doors to schoolhouse reopened.

The beginnings of unions within the field of education, was seen as a step forward for the profession as educators now had rights in the collective bargaining process. However, the strength of educational unions would be compromised due to an Act that passed fifteen years before educators were even given rights to unionize. In 1947, with the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act, the power of unions started to become undermined in favor of the private sector. With the passage of this Act, right to work laws began to be passed weakening the compulsory closed shop union membership that existed in much of the northern United States (Scribner, 2015). While education has more unionized workers than the public or private sector combined, educational unions have yet to gain enough strength to curb attrition rates (Winkler, Scull, & Zeehandelaar, 2012). The strength of union, and its potential to improve working conditions for educators, is relevant to the question of how teacher union representatives encourage and demonstrate leadership and advocacy for those who teach.

In 2012, a nationwide study of teacher unions was conducted as a means to rank local union’s strength in terms union size, dues, and involvement with policy creation and implementation. The unions were ranked on a scale from one through fifty-one. The closer the ranking to one, the greater is the union’s strength. The three highest-ranking states, in terms of local union strength, were Hawaii, Montana, and Alabama (Winkler et al., 2012). The two contributing factors thought to have influenced their rankings were: the number of school districts within state boundaries, and the unification date of the teachers unions. Hawaii, which
was consistently ranked highest in the United States, had one school district. As a result, the work of their union has been highly unified and seemingly progressive. Furthermore, Alabama while geographically a large state had only 133 school districts within it. Winkler et al., (2012) suggest that the smaller numbers of districts within these states had strengthened their local unions as more unified members can easily mobilize in an effort to create a unified front. Montana and Hawaii benefit from having an early unification date, as both were unified in the early 1940’s. Having a structured teachers union in place for decades has afforded their teachers unions, the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, more time to build infrastructure, develop leaders, amass resources, gain allies, and establish a position within the political culture (Winkler et al., 2012).

Florida, Arizona, and South Carolina rounded out the three lowest states in terms of the strength of their teacher unions as a result of limited people, resources, and legal rights. South Carolina for instance had a 26.9% membership rating of their teachers in both local and statewide teachers unions. In addition to low membership, which interferes with larger demonstrations and protest marches, the annual membership dues for South Carolina educators was $51.75, a small fraction of the $1,370 membership dues in states such as Alaska charge their members. As of 2012, the three lowest ranking unionized states prohibited collective bargaining. The only state of the three that strayed from this was Florida. Still, Florida received rather grim ratings. The overall rank and strength of Florida teacher unions was 50 out of 51, with 1 being the strongest and 51 being the weakest. The results of this study placed Florida essentially last in the nation in terms of union strength, followed only by Arizona (Winkler et al., 2012). It was noted in the research that union members in the weaker states often report feeling as though their needs and wants were easily cast aside for the benefit of stronger groups such as school boards,
governors, and private businesses (Winkler et al., 2012). As such, it is not uncommon for members of teacher unions to feel as if their needs are being overshadowed by the needs of more influential groups such as school boards, governors, and private businesses (Winkler et al., 2012).

**Researcher’s Background and Assumptions**

In the fall of 2016, I participated in a district on-boarding training for the novice teachers entering the district. While at the event, I began to interact with the local union representatives for the district. Although I am a union member, I was surprised at how little I knew about the representatives and their background in the field. It was my naive assumption that the local union representatives were all union employees that had only worked in the union. This was not the case as an overwhelming majority of the union representatives had started their teaching careers in the district and had transitioned into becoming a local union representative. Throughout the course of the week, I would drop by their table, where they recruited new members, to learn more about these individuals. While I was unable to hear their stories of transition due to time, the representatives were all very blunt in stating that they remembered the exact moment and conditions that made them decide to leave the district as a means to pursue this role.

My initial interest to narrative inquiry came by way of affording those who have been seasoned in the field of education to share their story of transition from one role to the next. However, upon further reflection, I also began to realize that I as a researcher was fitting into what I am researching. Many of the teacher attrition stories and statistics pertain to teachers who match my demographic, and work in an educational setting close to mine. Though I have seemingly defied the odds and made it past the five-year mark in the classroom, the research
states that attrition is somewhat U-shaped in distribution, and again I began to realize that I again would be in a prime position in my career to leave (attrite) my position as teacher.

I began to serve as a pedagogical coach, after having been in the field of education for ten years. My experiences and views pertaining to teacher attrition and mobility have been shaped by current evaluative methods and stories about educators teaching out of field. Stories of my experience, including two stories that have shaped my views on leading in education and leaving education shared next using a narrative style reflect some assumptions I bring to the question why teachers exit teaching positions and the role of advocates in creating the conditions under which such career decisions are made.

The two stories are shared as a means to illustrate how I have been impacted by two educators who were exited from the field as a result of circumstances they deemed to be beyond their control. One educator represents an effective teacher with strong pedagogical background that ultimately leaves as a result of evaluative practices. The other educator represents attrition from the field as a result of teaching out of field. Both narratives exemplify work place conditions that led to attrition. I cannot help but wonder what impact these teachers would have made had they advocated for self, or moved into a leadership role and as a result of their struggles in the field made efforts to help teachers much like themselves as a means to curb attrition.

**Evaluating Self-worth**

It was the first day of pre-planning, teachers eagerly walked into the media center swapping stories of summer adventures while waiting for the staff meeting to officially commence that day, which was my first day at that school. As a hybrid teacher, I taught kindergarteners for two hours in the morning and worked with teachers on improving their
practice in the afternoon. While waiting in line to sign in for the meeting, a man in his mid-40’s approached me and asked, “Are you the new hybrid teacher?” I smiled and replied yes, upon introducing myself I learned that Mr. Robinson had been at the school site for seven years after having transferred from a state in which he taught for eight years. He asked if I could drop by his room later that day to schedule our work together. On my way to meet him after lunch I began to think to myself: I have been here for less than a half an hour and already I am building relationships with teachers to improve practice. This year is off to a phenomenal start!

Walking into Mr. Robinson’s room I was surprised to see his gray barren walls, which was not typical for elementary rooms. The hallway that I had walked down to enter his room was alive with decorations of a safari motif corresponding with the school theme for that year. Mr. Robinson was at this desk looking at his cell phone when I arrived. He quickly greeted me and stated, “Well, I guess you’ve heard all about me”. The next hour of conversation took me through the saga of his nationally acclaimed teaching practices that led him to receive many awards and recognitions, his need to move down to Florida to be with his ailing parents, and his turmoil of going through a divorce ending a marriage that had lasted over twenty years. Then he spoke of how after his father passed he sought to place his mother with caretakers. These stories helped me see that Mr. Robinson was dealing with much more than simply his teaching career. Sympathetic towards his situation, I waited patiently though I wondered when the topic of “educators luck” was going to come around again. Then he said, “On top of it all, I am probably going to be fired this year too.” This was his roundabout way of asking me to serve on his professional review committee as a means to help him stay in the profession.

Two hundred hours of professional development, coaching, modeling lessons, and reflecting were done with Mr. Robinson during that year. The days were long, his desire to learn
was there, but he continually referred to his less than proficient markings on the district’s evaluation tool. He could not comprehend how his teaching practices that had once landed him a State Teacher of the Year award could be perceived as far below expectations in his new district. He continually questioned his self-worth and professionalism when he received each of his evaluative makings, which occurred twice a semester. Mr. Robinson sadly did not make it through the entire school year. Through a breach of ethics, which he stated occurred as a result of stress and unrealistic expectations set by the district, he was faced with resigning or being terminated mid-year. When Mr. Robinson did eventually resign, it was in response to the dehumanizing process that, in his final days in the profession, left him acting as a mere aide to the recent college graduate the administration had already selected and hired to replace him. Mr. Robinson, an award-winning teacher, unfortunately became a part of the teacher attrition statistics.

**Intent to Earn Agreements**

Middle school teaching is definitely a calling. While walking down the hallway of my school in the fall of 2015, I saw a younger teacher in jeans creating her outer bulletin boards. As I said hello she turned to greet me and had on a shirt that read, “Straight out of Middle School”. Knowing the humor behind this shirt I asked her if she had taught middle school and she shared that she was alternatively certified. She graduated with a degree in history and completed a fast paced online alternative certification program for teaching over the summer. She had added history to her certification but was still waiting to take the Elementary K-6 certification test needed by the state.

She seemed eager to teach first grade. “They still like going to school!” she’d say daily as the children left campus for the day. She strongly believed that her previous middle school
students dreaded coming to school. Ms. Tabatha seemed excited to apply her new learning in the classroom. During September and October, I would pass by Ms. Tabatha’s room after school and could see her through the windows as she sat at her guided reading table with a large book in front of her. Though curious about what she was doing, I kept walking. Once November and December passed Ms. Tabatha began to look tired and act less enthusiastic. Still, not knowing her well, I went about my routines. In January, I noticed that Ms. Tabatha began missing days of school, and when she would show up to meetings the principal seemed to be very standoffish toward her.

Early in February, when I passed by the room, Ms. Tabatha was cleaning. I popped my head in and said, “Hey looks like you are starting to do some spring cleaning!” She turned around and said, “I wish it was that…do you have a minute to talk?” While sitting at the guided reading table where I had seen Ms. Tabatha perched every afternoon, she shared that she was packing her classroom bit by bit. She had been taking the Elementary K-6 certification test monthly since school began as a means to meet the requirements of the intent to earn agreement she signed as a condition of her employment. Her studies, online preparations, and tutoring from grade level team members had all rendered useless as she could not pass the certification exam. “The Principal doesn’t want to keep me here, I can’t pass the test. I am getting moved back to middle school, but I do not want to go.”

As Ms. Tabatha prepared to re-take her certification exam one last time she packed her room and sadly she told her students goodbye as they left for spring break. The red-faced line of first graders waiting to say goodbye and give a dismissal hug to their teacher was more than I could take. I sensed she clearly cared about her students, and had a created a community of respect, and care. The students pleaded with her on that final day not to leave them. But alas, the
district dictated her move back to middle school, which meant it gave her a day to move her classroom with the understanding that the Tuesday after spring break she would return to work with middle school students.

When school ended in June, Ms. Tabatha left all her things in the classroom, turned her key into the office and signed her resignation paperwork. She left the field of education and went back into the field of business. Although her time with students was brief, she connected with them. While an *intent to earn* agreement allowed her out of field dream to commence, her inability to meet the requirement of passing the certification examination resulted in a harsh ending in which a talented educator who came into the field through an alternative pathway decided to leave a profession in education to return to a profession in business where she was more comfortable and more accustomed. Ms. Tabatha experienced career mobility as she moved from elementary to middle school as a result of having to sign an intent to earn agreement. However, due to her disdain for her middle school position, she opted to leave the field of education and consequently contribute to the growing educator attrition statistics.

These two narratives aim to show my beliefs about educators. The narratives showcase educator mobility within the field as well as attrition from the field. Ms. Tabatha experienced mobility when she transferred from an elementary position to a middle school position. While this mobility, which was brought on by the district, was done as a means to help move the educator into an environment in which she could be more successful, it ultimately ended in the teacher voluntarily leaving the profession. Mr. Robinson exhibits mobility within the field as he moved from out of state to take a position within Florida. In his home district, which he left as a result of needing to tend to his ailing parents, he would count towards the attrition statistics. However, he remained in the field of education and experienced mobility in his transition to
Florida classrooms. Due to his experiences and actions within Florida, Mr. Robinson was dismissed from the classroom, and once again will count toward attrition statistics. His story in and of itself exemplifies how skewed data from the field about teacher retention and attrition can be as a single individual contributed to the attrition statistics in two separate instances.

With attrition rates within the field of education being very high, I believe that many educators who are in the field choose to be there as a result of love of the profession, or as the result of a personal need or desire. The research is very clear in stating that educators will leave the field for professions with lower salaries and fewer benefits. Given that, I believe educators are in the field out of choice, I also believe that educators work within a flawed system that operates without regard to the individual’s wellbeing. Essentially, I believe that educators enter the field to make a difference, but as a result of poor working conditions or circumstantial practices within the field, they are pushed out of the profession and become part of the nationwide statistics for teacher attrition.

**Definitions of Key Terms**

*Advocate* refers to an individual who intercedes and acts on behalf of others.

*Advocacy* will be used to describe the causes and work an advocate participates in. Advocacy is the literal act of the individual advocate interceding on behalf of others. Advocacy can take on a variety of causes, and may be described slightly differently from one advocate to the next.

*Collective bargaining agreements* refer to a binding contract between a union and a school district. This contractual agreement is only open for negotiation at certain times, typically every three years. Any disputes arising over the contract are settled by outside arbitration.
*Educator Mobility* refers to an individual within the field of education taking a different placement than their current. This could include the transfer from one classroom to another, and or a transfer out of the classroom to another capacity within the field of education.

*Local unions* are those referring to district level employee organizations that work to secure the rights and benefits for educators within a specific district.

*Novice teacher* will be used to describe an educator who has taught for a total of one to five years.

*Right-to-work states* refer to those states within the United States that allow unions to form and operate within their geographic boundaries. Right-to-work laws stipulate that no union has the authority to require membership as a condition for employment. In addition, should employees elect not to become members of the union, should it be their choice, the union cannot charge them involuntary agency fees in lieu of membership dues. Essentially, the union in a right-to-work state operates within the parameters and budget that has been set and created by the coalition of willing employees who have opted for membership.

*Teacher union* is used to signify state-level affiliates of either the National Education Association (NEA) or the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

*Union*, is used to refer to an organization or group that has been granted collective bargaining rights. The rights are essentially the terms of teacher employment that must be negotiated between this group and the school district.

*Veteran teacher* will be used to describe an educator who has been teaching in the field of education for six or more years.
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework defining the parameters of this study comes from a compilation of pre-existing research on job security, satisfaction, and career mobility into an advocacy role. In the diagram below, each of the three areas for examination have been placed respectively to have the ideas work in conjunction with one another. Working conditions in the field of education is directly coupled with the advocacy work of the local union. These two then have an impact on the attrition and retention of teachers, in the conceptual framework, this is shown by the arrow emerging from the coupled work of the union and working conditions in the field. To describe the professional journey that educators pursue, it is important to note that the progression between areas of the conceptual framework are neither linear nor sequential. Rather, the formation illustrates the influence of barriers and supports in the workplace, when coupled with advocacy practices from a union, can influence an individual’s desire to stay within their current role.

Educator career mobility from the district to the position of a union representative is often based upon a set of barriers and supports that are present at their school site. These supports and barriers over time may become perceived as having more barriers than one can handle in the workplace. With the perceived lack of supports, an educator may be left with the decision to leave the field, or to pursue a position that allows them to advocate for themselves and others. These supports and barriers often influence the educator to pursue a role in which they can advocate as a means to create supports within the field of education for others still active in the classroom. Consequently, the advocacy work that is done by those who leave the classroom as a means to build educator supports within the field, may ultimately impact the current attrition rates by encouraging individuals to stay within the field. As such, the arrow between attrition and
advocacy is double headed to reflect the role of advocacy, when focused on breaking educational barriers, in supporting educators and curbing attrition.

Figure 1. Mobility and Advocacy Affecting Teaching Conditions and Careers

**Teacher Union Advocacy for Educational Profession/Professionals**

The role of the local teacher union enters the conceptual framework for this study as a result of the working conditions being paired with an educators’ decisions to leave or stay within the field. When assessing how the local teacher unions respond to the district working conditions and the impact they have on educators, an advocacy framework will be used. Roberts and Siegle (2012) created the three P’s of advocacy framing: purpose, preparation, and persistence. Through their study, if purpose, preparation, and persistence is taken into account when advocating, than the advocacy work has a greater likelihood of being successful when presented to an audience or forum for the cause/issue being pursued.
When pursuing opportunities to build supports within the field of education, local union representatives are tasked with presenting and framing their ideas in such a way that the educator’s within the field, as well as district leaders and school board members understand the change they are hoping to enact. When a union representative begins advocacy work, it is essential that they remember to frame advocacy work around purpose, preparation, and persistence so that one is able to successfully advocate on behalf of educators/education (Roberts & Siegle, 2012).

When looking at the purpose for advocating, it is critical that the union representative construct a clear goal for how the advocacy work will look. Rather than merely stating that they would like equitable practices for all students, they would stop to think about what that really means, how equity could look in the classroom, and how they will know when they have reached an equitable state? Having an understanding of the purpose and cause for which one is
advocating is essential, as well as, understanding the potential possibilities that may serve as alternatives to the status quo.

Preparation points to the importance of information and research in the success of advocacy work. To prepare, union representative collects data that supports the requests for change to be made (Roberts & Siegle, 2012). For example, principals and site-based administrators may require student data sources, budgetary drafts, and case studies of other implementations as data sources to sway them to see the unions’ recommendations as a sound next step for their school, and district. If advocating amongst legislators and policy makers, data will need to be supplied as well. As a union representative, confidence is built in framing by knowing what data is available to the general public, and using this information to prepare for potential questions that may be asked, as well as to solidify the foundational need for change that is being brought to light as a result of advocacy. Data collection is central to preparation, but relationship building is also an instrumental preparation taken by advocates. Through relationships, support and change occurs (Roberts & Siegle, 2012). It is through the building of relationships that union representatives can begin to create a climate for change. Through repeated conversations or just the resurfacing of ideas for change, union representatives can informally plant the seeds that shape their advocacy work into the minds of others.

Next is persistence. Collecting data and building relationships while simultaneously framing the overall goals of the advocacy unions are pursuing is often a long and painstaking process. Advocacy is a continual process that relies upon interpersonal relationships and various forms of communication. When pursuing advocacy it is undoubted that there will be roadblocks to overcome, as a result Roberts and Siegle (2012) suggest that those who are called to advocate take on the warrior mentality by remembering the following analogy:
(a) all battles are local; (b) resistance and support can come from unexpected corners; (c) timing is critically important and frequently beyond your control; (d) expect to be attacked and wounded; (e) do not burn any bridges; (f) know that you will eventually want to live and work alongside your present enemies in peace; and (g) remember your efforts are for social justice and the future of children (p. 60).

Purpose, preparation, and persistence are important words for local teacher union representatives if they want their advocacy efforts to be effective. While remembering the three P’s of advocacy is relatively simple, these words need to become engrained in advocates as a means to continually shape, pursue, and change the elements of curriculum that are not currently serving as what is best for students. Having a strong network of support helps those who pursue advocacy work to feel support while they work towards successful advocacy pursuits.

**Working Conditions**

An individual’s decision to pursue non-site based educational roles often comes as the result of having more barriers present in the work place than supports. The looming barriers that impact veteran teachers lead to an individualized reflection on next steps on the career ladder and thoughtful steps out of the classroom. Lack of support has been used in the field to describe variety of conditions currently harming the field of education. Some current barriers include competing priorities with school administrators, their inattentiveness to teachers’ needs, and teachers having to pursue their own professional growth opportunities without clear direction from leadership (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013). The conceptual framework focuses upon the current supports and barriers within the field of education draws on a study by House (1981) who identified four specific factors that contribute to teacher definitions of support and lack thereof at the site-based level.
The original study conducted by House addresses the supports and barriers within the field of education that impact teacher retention and attrition. Albrecht, Johns, and Olorunda (2009) reference to the House study as they identified similar working conditions as factors for educators working with students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. In 2011 researchers Boyd et al. and Ladd (2011) surveyed teachers about their working conditions and their future career path/career ladder within the field of education. During this study, the researchers found that teacher attrition and retention within the field was significantly impacted by working conditions, in addition to salary and benefits. Given that current studies are still referencing the original House study from 1981, I too would like to refer to the original study as part of my conceptual framework. The study by House has become a seminal work, continually referenced in the literature, yielding common and consistent findings. Thus I incorporated the original work into the conceptual framework of my study.

![Figure 3. Workplace Conditions Impacting Retention](image-url)
House (1981) conducted a study called work stress and social support. During the study teachers were interviewed and asked about the level of support they received, and the impact this had on their decision to stay or leave their current job. These four categories used by House will again be used in this study as a means to determine which components of support, or lack of support resulting in barriers, contributed to the educator’s decision to leave. The four components of support have been defined using the original descriptors used by House.

**Emotional Support**

Administrators as well as colleagues show teachers that they are respected, trusted professionals and worthy of concern by maintaining open communication, showing appreciation, taking interest in teachers’ work, and considering teacher recommendations (House, 1981).

**Instrumental Support**

Administrators as well as colleagues directly assist teachers with work-related tasks, such as providing necessary materials, space, and resource, ensuring adequate time for teaching and nonteaching duties, assisting teachers with parental difficulties, helping with managerial-type concerns, developing forum to support the day-to-day frustration of a teacher of students with difficulties and providing flexibility for consultation time (House, 1981).

**Informational Support**

Administrators as well as colleagues provide teachers with information that they can use to improve classroom practices. For example, administrators provide opportunities for teachers to attend staff development, offer practical information about effective teaching strategies, and provide suggestions to improve instruction, classroom management skills and strategies to identify signs of stress and burnout and strategies to alleviate the stressors (House, 1981).
Appraisal Support

Administrators are responsible for providing ongoing personnel appraisal, such as frequent and constructive feedback about their performance, information about what contributes to effective teaching, and clear guidelines regarding job responsibilities (House, 1981).

Advocacy and Attrition

Advocacy and attrition, for the purposes of this study will be thought of in direct relation to one another. Through advocacy pursuits, attrition can be curbed. Essentially, if advocacy is aimed at creating educational supports in the workplace, it is likely that educators will stay within the field as a result of feeling supported. Athanases and de Oliveria (2008) define an advocate as “one who views all aspects of school as problematic rather than given”. Further definition from the *Oxford English Dictionary* is to advocate is “to intercede on behalf of another”. When looking at how the term advocacy is defined using the romance languages – *abogado* (Spanish), *avogado* (Portuguese), *avocet* (French) – meaning attorney, or representative of others who cannot represent themselves, which in turn requires taking actions on their behalf (Athanases & de Oliveria, 2008).

Overview of Study

This study explores a subsection of educators who have left the classroom in order to pursue full time union representative responsibilities, including their transition from classroom teacher to union representative. Through learning the reasons behind educator’s decisions to leave the classroom, the learning curve and adjustment to the new role as union representative, the desire is to see how and if their professional background in education shaped their work for advocacy today. A qualitative research approach using narrative inquiry will be conducted using interviews as the primary data generation method.
Delimitations of Study

The delimitations of this qualitative study include the following. It will be conducted using only three local unions in the United States. Two of the unions are located in the Southeastern United States in Florida, and the other is located in the Midwest in Minnesota. The usage of three local unions may provide only a narrow understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a union representative. Furthermore, the advocacy efforts union representatives pursue may be similar to those pursued by others within the small and seemingly homogeneous sample drawn from neighboring local school districts. As such, the diversity of experiences may be limited across their stories and therefore more contextually alike that representative of the variations one might see if the sample were drawn from districts of greater proximity to one another.

Another delimitation of the study is the timeline that has been set for the study. The study will span the course of a year during which interviews are being arranged and held. Though this is a significant amount of time, the work of the representative at the local, state, and even federal level may vary greatly. Essentially, there is no guarantee that there will be any politically contentious events occurring throughout the course of the study. As a result, union representatives may need to rely upon past events as a means of telling their narratives, or conversely, if something significant or controversial is occurring, then all of the stories may revolve around the current focus and efforts of the representative. A delimitation of the study is that the timeline of the interviewing has not willfully been orchestrated around politically contentious events of concern to the teacher unions under study.
Anticipated Outcomes of Study

The anticipated outcome of this study is that it will contribute to the literature base on teacher leadership trajectories and the development of advocacy among former teachers who became union representatives. More specifically, the stories of union representatives will provide insight into how teachers decide to make the career change from working as a teacher to working as a teacher union representative and how they frame stories about advocacy and leadership responsibilities and commitments that have benefitted them or they have demonstrated for the benefit of other teachers.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides a review of literature in two parts. It first addresses common organizational structures for teacher unions that are described in relevant literature. Second, it addresses novice and veteran teachers exiting the field of education. For the purpose of this review, studies included those that focused on educators currently or previously working within the field of education and were published within the last ten years, 2006-2016. The bulk of literature reviewed in journal articles such as reviews, studies involving human subjects, conceptual essays, and others types of work that provide context (i.e., legal, policy, and standards of practice).

Also, included are significant studies conducted more than ten years ago and a few seminal books that were repeatedly referenced in the articles written within the last decade and spanning countries such as United States, Australia, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In looking at trends from various nations, it was found that in these countries, a significant factor in teacher attrition rates was not a lack of teacher education graduates, but rather an inability of the educational system to retain the teachers who enter the field (Dupriez et al., 2016). When searching through the database at the University of South Florida, I used the following keywords: teacher attrition, alternatively certified teachers, teacher retention, advocacy, union representation, working conditions, administrators, first-year teachers, mentors, teacher’s rights, and professional integration.
Organizational Structure of Teacher Unions

In the history of teacher unionism, major thinkers in education have advocated for teacher leadership and advocacy in the schools (Dewey, 1903). The hope has been that through advocacy, unions will flourish and strengthen the profession, as opposed to unions being viewed as mere ploys to strengthen professional security for educators not meeting the marks (Brameld, 1977). Ideas of teacher leadership and advocacy were easily pushed aside in the 1900’s as the principal was seen as the sole leader of a school and ran the school house in a very hierarchical, and top-down method. During Dewey’s life, teachers had little, if any authority, to make decisions that impacted the school site, and sparse opportunities for leadership were presented. Today, administration, school districts, and local unions collaborate as a means to meet needs within the field of education. However, due to the late unionization of educators, a series of acts and regulations were passed to disempower the strength of labor unions well before strong union foundations could be enacted for educators.

The two national unions for educators are the National Education Association (NEA), and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The National Education Association was established in 1857 with a mere 100 members making up the initial union. Today, the NEA has grown in size and power to include approximately 3.2 million members in their national organization. The AFT began in Chicago in 1916, with eight members. The union began to quickly charter smaller local unions and grew their membership exponentially. Today the AFT has 1.6 million members within their national affiliates. Between the NEA, and the AFT, teachers unions have a membership totaling over 4.8 million individuals, these members are comprised of teachers, public school employees, administrators, and retirees from the educational system (Winkler et al., 2012). Given these large quantities of membership, teachers
unions probably have more influence on the public school system than any other group known in current American society (Moe, 2001). Despite extensive membership, and a perception of strength, the national chapters of the NEA and AFT lack the ability to organize or prioritize the agendas and workings of local teacher unions that are run by elected presidents and boards (Johnson, Donaldson, Munger, Papay, & Quazilbash, 2009). As a result of not being able to be tightly coupled and run in a top down fashion, the strength of educational unions is compromised as individual local chapters create custom agendas based on needs.

Union leaders, whether they are the president or a lesser ranking area representative, are solely defined in terms of their legacy as a voice for the teachers. The leaders are also defined by the quality of information on which they base their actions, and their capacity to meet the range of teachers’ needs and wants. Union leaders manage the needs of their constituents through two roles: traditional labor unionists and advocates for the profession. Essentially, teachers want the benefits of union membership, which includes: protection of benefits, and economic and/or legal security (Roseamelia, 2015).

Unions, as they are considered in this study, use liberal recognition as an approach to inequality in their districts (Rottmann, 2008). This means that union leaders advocate for human rights within their district without regard to race, gender, sexual orientation, class, disability, and privilege. Unions act for their members and for the teachers in their district regardless equally as a means to celebrate the diversity of the educators that make up their members. Union leaders continually build relationships with local community members and groups, reframe government policy into digestible chunks, support teacher working conditions, provide professional development opportunities, and create opportunities for teacher leadership within the field as well as within the union (Rottmann, 2008). Reframing of government policy is integral in the
role of the local union. In districts that are split, or often change in political party leadership, unions are continually operating under rotating governmental leadership. Consequently, reframing government policy into a sustainable plan of implementation for their district is essential as the next round of voting could change the party in charge. Consequently, unions are forced with finding a place in the middle of government policy that allows for consistency with minimal interruptions to their district as the political tide is ever changing (Rottmann, 2008).

In the organizational structure of teacher unions illustrated in Figure 4, the double-headed arrow between the union president and the union representatives symbolizes the close and fluid relationship these two bodies have with one another.

![Organizational Structure of Teacher Unions](image)

**Figure 4. Organizational Structure of Teacher Unions**

**Union Presidents**

Teacher union presidents are elected by union members to lead local unions. Teacher union presidents must be skilled in their position as they create and defend the union’s agenda while offsetting the numerous complaints that will be lodged against the union and its members throughout their term as president (Roseamelia, 2015). A leadership board within the local union
is inclusive of local union representatives that serve to support the president. The union representatives work closely alongside teachers and other educational union members to determine and meet the needs of the members.

The union president, along with other representatives, work in conjunction to determine the needs of the members so as to establish an agenda. The president is a position that influences the current conditions of the school system by shaping local priorities. The selected priorities are used as a springboard from which the local union’s agenda is created and pursued. Given that these local union leaders serve in elected positions, a majority of the work involves convincing union members that the elected leaders are doing a satisfactory job of representing and responding to the needs, interests, and views of the various educators who create the body of members within the union (Johnson et al., 2009). The job-related activities of the representative are shown in the framework as jetting off from the union president. Although it is the responsibility of the union president to create the agenda, local union presidents rely heavily upon collaboration with members, the local school board, and the school district as means to work through various agenda items that meet the needs of the members and uphold the agenda that has been set. The leadership of a local union primarily focuses upon bargaining, defining teacher’s roles, evaluation practices, and professional development. I discuss the following job-related activities below: bargaining, defining teachers’ roles, evaluation, and professional development.

**Bargaining**

Collective bargaining laws were primarily adopted in the 1960s and 1970s. To date forty-five states permit teachers to bargain directly with the local school board (Cowen & Strunk, 2015). The purpose of collective bargaining laws was initially to establish and define the process
by which teachers would organize, create unions, bargain, and of course settle disputes against employers. A priority of the bargaining process is the negotiation and ratification of the teacher contract. This is done on an individualized basis given the lengthy process of ratification for which local unions are often criticized and the public often deems to be insufficient and redundant (Johnson et al., 2009).

Local union presidents and representatives are given the opportunity to contact their state affiliated chapter or the NEA or AFT as a means of receiving clarification on the bargaining process as well as seeking legal advice and counseling. These collaborations between local chapters and state chapters of unions allows for a sort of uniformity in the collective bargaining process. Another option that union presidents and leaders have when questioning collective bargaining practices is to call upon the aid of neighboring local union leadership. These geographically neighboring chapters of local unions can be assets as the educators in a particular area maybe facing similar issues that need addressing (Johnson et al., 2009).

While union assistance from others can be called upon as a means to continually grow and glean bargaining expertise, the bargaining priorities are solely left to the decisions and responsibility of the local union leadership. A former Palm Beach, Florida local union president reported the relationship with the state and national unions to be similar to that of checking in, to make sure the local union is operating on the same page, or that the efforts being taken are on the right track. However, the president noted that from time to time his tactics were deemed to vary greatly from the norm, but noted that to stray from what other local unions are doing is all a part of the ebb and flow of leadership (Johnson et al., 2009).

The bargaining agenda is crafted as a result of the identified needs within the local chapter (Johnson et al., 2009). While the local union is fully aware of the state and national
affiliate’s agenda for the overarching union, the individualized needs of the local teachers working within a specific district are taken and given priority on the local union agenda (Johnson et al., 2009). There have been instances in which the local union has taken a stance counter to that of the state or national chapters of the union in response to their member needs. When this occurred in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the acting local union president reported feeling resistance from the other chapters of the union, and was made to feel unwelcome and uncomfortable at the state and national events that were being sponsored (Johnson et al., 2009).

**Defining Teachers’ Roles**

The job description and responsibilities that are required of a teacher are described in depth in the teacher contract. While teachers often go far and above the call of duty, the basic description and duties of the positions are outlined in their contract. It is from this document that the local union holds site based administrators, as well as district leaders accountable for meeting the minimum requirements of the job. Once the assigned roles of teachers have been established, the job of the local union is not complete. Having established the foundation of educational working conditions, the local union turns their attention to compensation and benefits that teachers will receive as a result of fulfilling these roles.

The standard contract for teachers is inclusive of a salary schedule. This schedule is defined in terms of lanes and steps, which depict how teachers are to be compensated for their experience or seniority within the field of education (West, 2015). For instance, the lanes of the salary schedule allow teachers to receive greater compensation for continuing education (West, 2015). Additionally, teachers are able to receive differentiated pay based on their educational credentials even though they may have the same years of service, which is depicted by steps. Each step signifies a salary adjustment: a step up in an increase in salary.
Local unions have worked with their affiliates to ensure that years of experience will transfer across other districts and states when educators relocate to another district in or out of state. However, this process is not as streamline as intended, as educational budget crises within the United States often leave local districts no choice but to freeze educational professionals on their current step of pay. In addition, years of service may or may not be able to be calculated toward a teachers years of service depending on the type and accreditation of the previous institution at which they worked.

A perceived drawback of the lanes and step salary schedule is that teachers with equal experience and education are paid the same without regard to other characteristics of their teaching or teaching assignment (West, 2015). As a result local unions have to work in conjunction with various districts that are experimenting with different incentive funds and national initiatives to increase teacher pay. Some of the most recent programs have been: Race to the Top, the Teacher Incentive Fund, and Pay for Performance. These programs contain policies that link teacher compensation to student performance and teacher actions (West, 2015). The Teacher Incentive Fund incorporates many requirements that directly counter long held beliefs of the union such as basing large portions of an educators evaluation scores off student standardized test scores (Cowen & Strunk, 2015). For instance, the Teacher Incentive Fund requires the creation of a large data system that links teachers to their student’s performance, as well as evaluation systems that calculate teacher compensation based on their teaching performance and student achievement levels on standardized tests (Cowen & Strunk, 2015).

**Evaluation**

In December of 2015, President Barack Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This newest piece of educational legislation is essentially a
reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Educational Act (ESEA) that was originally signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965. However, in the fifty years that have spanned between the passage of ESEA and ESSA, there have been a variety of accountability measures that have been passed. Measures such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top are two of the accountability movements that have strived to track the success of what was then considered to be educational best practice by way of examining teacher practices and student learning gains. A central tenant of all legislative and accountability movements of the past decade has been teacher effectiveness and professionalism. Through the use of evaluative techniques, teaching practices and student scores are combined to create teacher effectiveness ratings. It is believed that if the teaching force is strong and ranked as highly effective on their respective evaluation, then students will be directly impacted. As a result, teacher growth, leadership, and practices have become core components of success ("United States Department of Education," 2016, para. 2-7).

ESSA, while not an entirely new idea, does support the growth of the educational profession in ways never before experienced. While there is a heavy emphasis on student achievement; teacher quality and effectiveness remains in the forefront of the core components of the current legislation. Teacher practice is now being shaped by seemingly unorthodox evaluation measures that are newer ideas within the field of education. There is a growing desire to focus on building the capacity of classroom teachers by way of implementing many site based enhancements including: model classrooms, site based professional development, distributed leadership practices, and models of teacher leadership.

One of the most persistent criticisms that unions receive is their failure to quickly dismiss low performing teachers from the profession (Johnson et al., 2009). These teachers have been
deemed low performing as a result of their yearly evaluation scores. Collective bargaining laws require that local unions fairly represent teachers, who may or may not be members, when their contractual rights have been compromised (Johnson et al., 2009). This does not include teachers who are upset with the evaluative ratings that have been received from an administrator as a result of an observation, or a district decision to dismiss the teacher from their position (Johnson et al., 2009).

**Professional Development**

Professional development has long been regarded as a cornerstone necessary to ensure that teachers continue to grow as professionals. The importance of continued professional development is further solidified by states requiring teachers to earn various amounts of professional development credit or points to renew their teaching certificates. However, the effectiveness of professional development that is being offered to our nations teachers is continually being called into question. A study into the professional growth of teachers revealed that professionalism and expertise increases steadily for the first six to nine years a teacher is in the profession. After this window closes, the professional growth appears to plateau until the teacher reaches eighteen years in the profession. After the eighteenth year, the levels of professional growth continue to increase again (Watt, Huerta, & Mills, 2009).

Professional development, in its current state, is offered in a variety of formats and forums for teachers. Professional development may be offered as: university coursework, district-sponsored professional development and on-the-job training, National Board Certification, and Advancement Via Individual Determination training institutes (Hunzicker, 2010). However, current research shows that professional development alone does not adequately prepare teachers for leadership roles and responsibilities. It is a trend to see that
teachers partake in a multitude of professional development activities, but then fall short when implementing the learning in their classrooms. Here it is seen that teachers are growing professionally as a far as certification and renewal processes are concerned; but in actuality teachers are not using their professional learning to continually groom and align their daily practice in their classroom to what is considered to be best practices.

When asking teachers to give feedback on the current state of professional development, the findings were quite dismal. Teachers characterized the current professional development offerings as being: fragmented, overloaded, top-down/hierarchical, lacking collaboration, and disjointed from their existing professional development models and standards (Jensen, 2012). With teachers failing to see the benefits of current professional growth offerings, the need to meet teacher’s professional growth needs is becoming a harsh reality. Something must be done to improve the quality of professional development in the field of education considering the ultimate goal of many current pieces of legislation is to foster continual professional growth throughout a teacher’s career. The question educational leaders are left asking is, what do teachers want from professional development opportunities to make them meaningful, and impactful?

In a study, teachers were asked to give feedback on what would be considered quality professional development that would serve to impact their practices in the classroom. As a result of the study, it was seen that teachers wanted professional development opportunities that: required prolonged contact, offered a model to follow, had opportunities to follow up, content specific, needs/data based, utilized inquiry based learning, offered collaboration, and topics that could be continuously evaluated in their classrooms (Jensen, 2012). When looking at the qualities of these professional development attributes many of these demands could be met
through the dedication of site based teacher leaders who alter the professional development workshops to meet the needs

National, state, and local unions offer professional development training and conferences sponsored by their affiliates to their members (Johnson et al., 2009). Professional development offered by local union can take on a variety of different forms. Some districts offer traditional professional development opportunities where teachers come into a classroom setting and are instructed on various topics pertaining to practice and pedagogy, while other professional development opportunities include mentoring programs for teachers who are entering into the profession as a part of the onboarding (Johnson et al., 2009). Teacher education opportunities should help the teachers to understand the broader political context that they work within as a means to equip educators with analytical skills necessary to interrupt the current hegemony experienced within school districts (Picower, 2013). Through local union professional development, teachers are afforded the opportunity to engage in critical self-reflection as it pertains to practices and pedagogy while simultaneously becoming aware of their own misunderstandings (Picower, 2013).

**Union Representatives**

The role of the union representative has one critical primary responsibility that entails representing school based teachers as members of the union. In this role, union representatives primarily ensure that teachers are protected by specific collective bargaining rights stated in their contract (Coddett, 2014). When serving in this capacity, union representative’s partner with site-based administration to ensure that all components of the teachers’ contract that has been ratified is being satisfied daily on their school campus. The dilemma that teachers’ union representatives often face comes from administration, more specifically administrators desire to collaborate and
ability to meet union demands (Coddett, 2014). Little significant research has taken place concerning the effect of collaboration between teachers’ unions and school administrators on school reform and or teacher attrition rates (Coddett, 2014; Rubenstein & McCarthy, 2010).

**Teaching and Learning: A Zero-Sum Relationship**

Educational decision makers strive to create a zero-sum relationship between teaching conditions and student learning (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011). In this zero sum relationship, no one side is given preference over the other. Essentially, teaching conditions are held in the same regard as student learning. The idea behind a zero-sum relationship between teaching and learning is valid in a sense. The very premise of a zero-sum relationship is that teaching conditions will be considered as heavily as student learning. In this balanced state, excessive attention will not be given to working and teaching conditions at the detriment of forgetting about student learning. In turn, student learning will not be given large amounts of attention thus neglecting working conditions for teachers in schools.

Teaching conditions in this instance refer to the factors that teachers continually state as being problematic for producing high quality work within the field of education: class size; workload; time balance; resources; professional support and collaboration (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011). Student learning is referred to as: teachers’ and other educators’ ability to meet the unique and individual needs of each student; meeting the emotional, social, and academic needs of the students; student opportunities for peer interaction and choice in education (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011).

The balanced relationship between teaching conditions and student achievement is theoretically supposed to impact teacher satisfaction in the profession and retention across the field (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011). However, in light of recent legislation such as Race to the Top
where teachers were released from their teaching responsibilities as a result of failing to impact student achievement in the classroom (Yakabuski, 2010), it is seen that the proposed zero-sum relationship between working conditions and student learning remains as a theoretical proposal. Decisions made by the State and Federal Government, as well as by Educational Law Makers, err in favor of student learning to the point of detriment of teacher working conditions. This imbalance of working conditions and student learning is primarily responsible for fueling educators decisions to exit the field of education.

**Novice Teachers Preparing to Enter/Deciding to Exit**

Pursuing the career of an educator places similar demands on veteran and novice teachers alike: planning lessons, familiarity with content based standards, classroom management, communicating with stakeholders, and endless grading are all activities that teachers continually experience when leading a classroom (Moore, 2016). The work of a teacher is largely done in isolation of their colleagues resulting in a “sink or swim” experience for novice teachers in the classroom (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Johnson, 2006). Teachers are being prepared at the university level by a variety of programs and graduating from them with differing amounts of knowledge of pedagogy when entering the classroom (Heineke, Streff Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014). Teachers, theoretically have a substantial knowledge base of classroom management and student needs when entering the classroom, however the application of theory into practice can prove to be difficult (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Teachers, through their work with students, knowledge of best practice, and reliance on collaboration with colleagues, have the ability to become experts on student needs and have the ability to meet these needs once they have been identified (Lozinak, 2016).
The themes found in the literature address teacher preparation programs. The two that will be discussed in depth are traditional pre-service preparation programs, and alternative certification programs. A traditional pre-service teacher preparation program will be considered as a program housed within a College of Education at a two or four year university (Heineke et al., 2014). As a result of completing this program of study, teachers will have completed internships within the field of education, and will have received a degree, which qualifies them for state certification. Pre-service essentially refers to the education and preparation that teaching candidates receive before employment, such as clinical training and student teaching experiences (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

The second program by which teachers enter the field is through alternative certification programs. These programs are often hosted by community or online colleges (Heineke et al., 2014). Teachers completing an alternative certification program are those who have previously completed a degree in another field, and then enter into the alternative certification program as a means of attaining a second degree in education. These programs are characterized as being shorter than the traditional pre-service preparation programs offered by universities, and they may or may not have given graduates the opportunity to have an internship within the field before graduation.

**Preparation Techniques: Traditional & Alternative Teacher Certification Programs**

According to Buchanan (2009) a portion of new teacher attrition can be due to a lack of preparation at the university level. Through studies conducted, Buchanan (2009, 2012) believes that traditional teacher preparation programs need to focus on: classroom management and discipline, dealing with ranges of student ability in the classroom, interactions with parents and stakeholders, and fulfilling clerical duties contractually required by the teacher as a means to
decrease the raising rates of teacher attrition currently being experienced. Teacher preparation programs, for the most part have been organized into generalized, limited, and surface level trainings and classes (Clark, 2012). This quick approach may be the direct result of universities having a limited amount of time to work with teaching candidates, while being tasked with providing many required courses as a means to meet graduation requirements for the institution and state (Clark, 2012).

Emerging in the 1980’s, in an effort to respond to teacher shortages across the nation, alternative teacher certification programs were founded (Heineke et al., 2014). Over the past thirty years these programs have continued to flourish and now graduate as many teachers as the traditional pre-service teacher preparation programs in some areas of the United States (Heineke et al., 2014). Alternative certification programs, differ from traditional certification programs in a sense that they select from a different pool of candidates, as these programs are looking for individuals who already have one degree, and they are looking to receive an advanced degree in the field of education (Heineke et al., 2014). Furthermore, these programs differ from traditional preparations in a sense that the program is expedited. The total hours of coursework that needs to be completed, in addition to the amount of internship or practicum experiences offered in the field is substantially shorter than those requirements for traditional teacher preparation program candidates (Heineke et al., 2014). These teacher candidates who were lured into education as a result of pursuing alternative certification measures are often looking for a change in career, as a result, many young professionals seeking change pursue alternative certification programs as a means to enter into the field of education (Lindqvist et al., 2014). These degree-holding professionals are offered the opportunity to receive explicit training on how to teach, and quickly
make their professional transition into the classroom as a means of completing an alternative certification program.

As of 2004, over forty three states in the Unites States offered some form of alternative certification process as a means for professionals to enter the field (Zhang & Zeller, 2016). Since this study was conducted, more states have included an alternative certification option for potential candidates to enter the field of education. States that have housed alternative certification programs the longest, such as California, New Jersey and Texas, are now recruiting more than 20% of their new teaching force through alternative certification programs (Zhang & Zeller, 2016).

**Mentoring**

Teacher induction programs come up continually in the literature as a means of transitioning the novice teacher from the pre-service preparation program into the field of education. It is through varied induction programs that teachers are acquainted with the different needs and demands of the classroom, school, and district in which they will be working. Large sums of money are allotted by districts annually as a means of creating and providing teacher induction programs for their newest employees (Buchanan, 2012). Additionally, there is much backing in the research to show that the quality of teacher induction programs impacts rates of teacher attrition within the particular district (Clark, 2012).

Teacher induction programs are intended for teaching candidates who have already completed required educational and pre-employment certifications. Induction programs, as a result, serve as a bridge from being a student of teaching to being a teacher of students (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Teacher induction programs serve to provide beginning teachers with support during their first few years of teaching as a means to integrate these teachers into the professional
culture of their schools (Hentges, 2012). The overarching goal of teacher induction programs is to improve the performance and retention of beginning teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

The benefits of a superior teacher induction program is, at the very foundation, the ability to attract better teaching candidates to the classroom, cut down on growing attrition rates, improve teacher job satisfaction, enhance personalized professional development, and improve teaching and learning practices as a whole (Lozinak, 2016). When attempting to curb teacher attrition, districts usually turn to the aid of an induction or mentoring program as a means of meeting diverse teacher needs. It is commonly accepted in the field of education that one aspect of superior induction programs is a strong mentoring relationship with the novice teacher (Lozinak, 2016). When implementing a mentor program, research has shown success when, there is structured time allotted to working with a mentor teacher who also serves as a peer colleague to the novice teacher, and through permitting time for team collaborations (Clark, 2012). Teacher mentoring programs give newcomers a local guide for fielding questions about the profession and the larger site based procedures (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Mentoring programs can look different from district to district, in terms of their arrangement between having a single mentor to mentee relationship that lasts a year, to a mentor and mentee relationship that span several years (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Another element that can alter the success of a mentoring program is how the selection, preparation, assignment, and compensation of mentors is handled (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). District-level, site based, and effective mentoring programs for new teachers aid in growing teacher efficacy, creating positive dispositions towards education, and acquisition of subject area knowledge and skills (Lambeth, 2012).

When teacher induction programs are setup in a scaffolding manner to meet the needs of teachers entering the field, it would be considered best practices to make the novice teachers
integral in giving input into how the program will look, and what areas of need the program will address (Henteges, 2012). A district often experiences troubles with induction programs as a result of limited allocations for time, resources and funding (Henteges, 2012). The greatest strength of these programs has proven to be face to face interactions with teacher assigned mentors to encourage teachers to take on new feats within the classroom and grow professionally based on their professional needs and observed student needs (Henteges, 2012). A fallacy of these induction programs being implemented across the United States is a failure to maintain long-term relationships with the teachers. Often these induction programs, and opportunities for mentoring, last only the first year of teaching. It is during the second year, in which the teacher loses the additional support that attrition rates begin to rise once more (Henteges, 2012). The quality of the mentoring and induction program that beginning teachers receive has a direct effect on teachers decision to stay within the field of education for a continued period of time.

Veteran Educator’s Decision to Exit

Teaching, often considered to be an art, is developed over a series of years as professional growth and development occurs within the individual leading the classroom. A United States study on teacher attrition showed that the most likely candidates to leave the teaching profession after multiple years in the classroom are female, white, and married individuals. These teachers often work within special education, or teach math or science at urban schools with large numbers of poor, minority, and low socio-economic status students (Borman & Dowling, 2008). While there is some research to suggest that financial incentives are reasons behind a teachers choice to leave, contextual factors within schools such as administrative support, student discipline, and the power to make decisions at the site based level often outweigh the financial incentives (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Through the research it was
seen that teachers who leave the classroom, but stay within the field of education, often pursue a hybrid teacher leader position, or a coaching position. If a teacher opts to leave the classroom altogether, it is often due to issues concerning working conditions and administrative support.

**Teacher Leadership and Hybrid Roles**

From the 1990’s to present day, leadership theories have continued to grow and evolve. The principal is no longer seen as the sole authority at the site based level. Principals are now encouraged to take part in distributed leadership practices at their school site. Distributed leadership was essentially explored and implemented as a practical measure to help school leaders who were becoming too bogged down with increasing responsibilities. Essentially, as the job responsibilities and workload of the principal became too cumbersome, there was a need to defer some of the leadership responsibilities to others (Gronn, 2002; Robinson, 2008; Spillane, 2006; Storey, 2004). It is through distributed leadership practices and delegating certain leadership opportunities that the idea of teacher leadership could be explored.

Current teacher leadership theory relies heavily upon the work of Leithwood and Mascall (2008). After completing various research studies there was striking evidence that reflected a positive outcome for the school when principals delegated power. When a principal delegates power, it allows for other leaders to influence individuals at the school site. As a result, the majority of the parties involved in distributed leadership are benefitted. Teacher leadership theory, has continually evolved since its inception in the field of education. In order to address the need for teacher leadership, there has been a marked increase in the number of studies conducted around teacher leadership, job embedded professional development, and changes in the way school administrators, especially teachers, do their jobs (Berger & Forgets-Giroux, 2012). Teacher leadership, is gaining credibility in the field of education and is seen as an
essential element to school success and achievement (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998; Smylie, 1995; Wasley, 1991). The concept of teacher leadership has existed in the field of education for quite some time (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007). Newer studies being conducted in the field focus on the formal and informal leadership responsibilities taken on by educators to contribute to the overall improvement of schools (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2010; Muijs, Chapman, & Armstrong, 2013; Nolan & Palazzolo, 2011).

The most generic definition of teacher leadership is a model that provides teachers with leadership opportunities within their profession. Harris and Muijs (2004) added to this existing definition by proposing that teacher leadership is an opportunity for teachers to develop themselves and affect change in their school without having to change sites, or even fully having to leave the classroom. The teacher leaders at a school site are perceived as strengths, it should be the desire of the administration at the school to cultivate and groom these leaders in such a way that these teacher leaders become committed to the growth and success of the school site. As a result of these informal leadership opportunities, it is more likely that these heavily committed teacher leaders will stay at the current school site for many years. With the commitment of teacher leaders increasing, schools will be able to benefit from the extremely valuable and rich resource of their teachers’ growing expertise and experience.

Charlotte Danielson first developed the informal style of teacher leadership (2006). She suggested that teacher leadership is not solely based on the formal assignment of roles; rather she suggested that true teacher leadership emerges informally by actually being earned by an individual. A perceived teacher leader may earn the ability to lead from their peers by completing specific actions. This style of teacher leadership essentially draws upon a set of skills that affords them the opportunity to be effective teachers in the classroom while fostering their
ability to exert influence well beyond the four walls of their classroom. Essentially, these informal teacher leaders that this study addresses lead change from the classroom (Reason & Reason, 2007). These teacher leaders skillfully weave their pedagogical practices into relationship building with other teachers to positively impact a school site.

York-Barr and Duke (2004) expand upon Charlotte Danielson’s working definition of the informal teacher leader by adding that teacher leadership is a unique form of leadership that borrows from multiple conceptions of leadership that focus more on collaboration than on authority vested in one person. Essentially, the teacher leader can be seen as an individual who is rather skillful at showing their professionalism and success in the classroom while still being able to build and maintain trusting relationships with peers. As a result of these two strengths, the counsel of teacher leaders is often sought after by peers, including advice on next steps on how to continue to grow their practices to be reflective of what the teacher leader has already implemented.

Often, veteran teachers will pursue teacher leadership roles within the field of education so that they have the power to lead and make site based changes without having the full responsibility of being a site-based administrator. Often, veteran teachers who have been in the classroom for a while seek out teacher leader positions or hybrid positions that enable them to still work within the field of education, but not be fully committed and tied to the classroom setting on a day to day basis.

**Exiting the Profession**

The decision to leave the classroom is often left to the decision of the individual educator. The decision to leave the classroom, though thought filled, may be one that is necessary to decipher. Some teacher attrition is desirable. As such, the quality of one’s teaching is a variable
that needs to be explored when determining the cost of teacher attrition (Latifoglu, 2016). If the quality and effectiveness of the teacher in front of the classroom is not high, then there may be more harm than benefit in allowing the teacher to stay in the classroom (Guarino et al, 2006).

The leading reason for why teachers voluntarily opt to leave the classroom comes as a result of burnout and working endless hour preparing for student instruction (Torres, 2016). Many teachers who are willing to accept high professional expectations and work long hours are younger individuals who have yet to settle into having a family of their own (Merseth, 2009; Wilson, 2009). Younger teachers, elated with the prospects of teaching often give oversight to working conditions that bother their veteran counterparts. Johnson (2006) explicitly defined working conditions that contribute to teacher attrition as those pertaining to physical conditions, sociological status, cultural values and norms at the site based level and educational resources available for instruction.

Physical conditions contributing to teacher attrition primarily deal with the school building. Building design and features are indicative of the eras in which schools were built. Small multi-story, brick structures were built in the 1930s and 1940s whereas single-story, buildings with various wings were constructed in the 1950s. The 1960s and 1970s brought about the idea of “open” schools with minimal internal walls. The contemporary schools seen widely today that are arranged in a cluster or pod formation were 1980s and 1990s (Johnson, 2006). Well-designed facilities have the ability to enhance good teaching, when the design of the building is aligned with the mission and vision of the organization. Teachers, who work countless hours in the classroom are less concerned about what arrangement their classroom is in, or if they are in a wing or a main building. Rather, what matters is how well maintained and functional the space is. Overall cleanliness, paint, air conditioning, and safety within the building
is of much greater concern to teachers than the age of the building itself (Johnson, 2006). Often the perspective of teachers is that a school facility that is carefully maintained signals respect for those who teach there. Similarly, neglected building maintenance conveys an indifference to those who work at the school as the environment interferes with effective instruction (Johnson, 2006).

Sociological factors that contribute to a teacher’s decision to leave the field include ideas related to status (Torres, 2016). There is a certain status that comes when speaking in social circles; being able to state that one is an educator could be perceived as a way of showing prestige. Educators are often seen as a key element in the betterment of society. The prestige that came with being a teacher began in 1983, with A Nation at Risk. During this time period, it was believed that the current state of education had failed to deliver high levels of learning as a means to increase student achievement (Johnson, 2006). As there was a pressing desire to grow the intelligence of America’s children, school reformers turned to teachers to act as the agents of reform. In doing this, teachers were engaged in key decisions about policy, budget, school personnel, and were granted opportunities to climb educational career ladders becoming leaders amongst their peers (Johnson, 2006). Teachers since this time have fought to retain control of important instructional decisions within their classrooms while partnering with administrators to make decisions that impact the entire school site. If educators feel that a career ladder is not available to them, and that their career has simply plateaued, then the desire to leave the field becomes more imminent (Johnson, 2006).

Cultural values and norms at the site based level impact an educator’s decision to stay in the field of education, or leave. Not too long ago teachers worked in isolation from their peers. Building designs and daily schedules left teachers in a seemingly egg crate like atmosphere. In
other words, when the classroom door closed, the teacher was left to work with the students for the majority of the day with little to no interactions with other adults at the school site (Lortie, 1975). Veteran teachers in the field of education may have entered the field at a time when working in isolation was common practice. The field of education has morphed over time and has consequently adopted many collaborative practices. Changing veteran teacher’s perceptions to reflect value in collaboration can be a very difficult process. A veteran teacher who works in isolation will either comply with the ideals of the collaborative culture permeating the field, or they may leave as a result of their desire to continually work in isolation (Johnson, 2006).

The availability of educational resources available for instruction is another reason why teachers may leave the field of education. Previously, an educator’s desire to teach in a clean and functioning building was discussed. In addition to cleanliness, teachers also desire to have classrooms stocked with instructional resources as a means to deliver the state mandated standards to their students. Standards based curriculum with a heavy reliance on assessment has a long history in the field of education.

With the introduction of standards-based reform, teachers have found it seemingly imperative to secure curriculum that is aligned with state standards and assessments (Johnson, 2006). The desire to have a well laid out curriculum to present to students in addition to professional development opportunities that supports in teaching of the curriculum to their pupils (Johnson, 2006). A detailed curriculum that offers the teacher options for presentation that aligns with their individual pedagogy is important, if a teacher has to relearn or retrain their current pedagogical techniques, there is a higher risk that the teacher will leave the classroom as opposed to trying to alter their teaching style that has been groomed for years. Research suggests that
teachers expect, but often do not have, a curriculum that is well developed, aligned with standards, and flexible (Johnson, 2006).

Connection between Advocacy and Attrition

There is strong evidence in the research that states improved working conditions for educators can be a key strategy for keeping teachers in the profession (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011). Fullan (2011) provides compelling evidence that many educational reforms and policies that directly impact the working conditions of educators become ineffective as a result of their failure to change the day-to-day culture of schools and the broader educational system for the better. The implementation of practices that lead to the betterment of the overall working conditions at a school site can come by way of advocating by educators and union representatives. Basically, there is much known about the reasons behind teachers decisions to leave the field in their early years, and after they have been teaching for some time. Advocating for the resolution of issues surrounding the main causes for teachers leaving the classroom has the potential to curb the attrition rate.

KaiLonnie Dunsmore (2015) presented the need to have an integration of both top-down and bottom-up approaches to advocacy in the field of education, as a means of maintaining a balance. A top down movement would refer to a national, state, or district wide initiative that has been passed. When a decision has been made to alter the current working conditions, a committee ideally should work together to map out the implementation of the legislation at the site-based level as to not disrupt or worsen the current working conditions. Bottom up movements would be considered to be the more grassroots movements, in a sense, the site specific actions taken to better the school climate and culture based on needs that individuals see
within the organization. These bottom up movements are often led by leadership teams, teachers, or spur from multiple complaints made to the local union representatives.

Dunsmore clarified the two types of movements by stating that top-down and bottom-up movements should not be seen in opposition to one another, rather the two work together to create lasting change. Bottom-up efforts call upon teacher expertise in the field as a means of creating change. Through bottom-up efforts, teachers are granted agency and become committed to the changes being enacted in their schools and classrooms (Dunsmore, 2015). Top-down implementations are those led by government, state, and district level personnel. Typically, these movements are taken as a means to ensure equity for all students across multiple educational levels (Dunsmore, 2015). Essentially, the beauty of top-down and bottom-up movements working together ensures that teachers within the field do not solely make decisions that may hide or negate inherent inequities present within the current educational system. On the other hand, balancing top-down movements ensures that one size fits all answers to curricular and social injustices are not the only answers our systems receive (Dunsmore, 2015).

A single practice, or even similar set of practices, cannot begin to meet the needs of every school, as a result teacher advocates and local union representatives, within the field of education are encouraged to develop and increase their awareness of the multifaceted and diverse needs of students with whom they come into contact (Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004). As a result, teacher advocates should possess a disposition that addresses social justice advocacy and embrace changes needed within the system (Theoharis, 2007).

The teachers who act as a part of larger advocacy pursuits play an important role in changing the narrative about teachers and teaching (Fleischer, 2016). These teachers, for the most part are veterans in the field that have a working knowledge of how working conditions
have changed for the better or worse over the years. These veteran teachers may earn the ability to lead from their peers by having a skillset that affords them the opportunity to be effective teachers in the classroom while fostering their ability to exert influence well beyond the four walls of their classroom. Essentially, these individuals lead change from within the classroom but then allow it to permeate the school site (Reason & Reason, 2007). These teachers skillfully weave their pedagogical practices into relationship building with other teachers to positively impact a school site. A teacher’s first line of advocacy may be found within the classroom. Here the teacher may find him or herself advocating for various bottom up purposes: the curriculum being taught to students, student needs, and collaborating between professionals. Advocacy outside of the classroom may take a different approach, more relaxed per se. When advocating outside of the classroom educators may find themselves talking to people in grocery store lines, or to state and national leaders about trends they have seen sparking a need for change in schools (Kirkpatrick, Houser, & Thompson, 2016).

While many veteran teachers often become involved in various pursuits as a means to better the working conditions, these same teachers may often rely heavily upon union membership and representatives to meet needs that are still not being attended to. It is through collaboration with veteran teachers, union leaders, and site based leaders that efforts can be made to better working conditions and consequently lessen teacher attrition due to poor working conditions, the number one reason why teachers leave the field (Boyd et al., 2011).

**The Role of Leadership in Exiting**

The role of administration was heavily studied in relation to how administrators have the ability to curb or heighten teacher attrition rates. Many of the studies noted the need for novice teachers to have: supportive school leadership, engaged stakeholders, safe working
environments, sufficient resources, regular time for planning and collaboration, high quality professional development, and an atmosphere of trust and support (Exstrom, 2009). Given that basic working needs of novice teachers have been revealed in the literature, it is then the responsibility of the school based administration to try to meet some, or if possible all, of these needs (Heineke et al., 2014). While veteran and novice teachers have different professional needs that must be satisfied, the role of the principal and school leader is a shared need. Both novice and veteran teachers base their decisions to stay or leave a site based on administrative support, this support is defined as the extent to which principals and other school leaders make teachers’ work easier, and the help that is provided to improve their current pedagogy (Boyd et al., 2011).

From the very conception of the role, the principal has been seemingly synonymous to head teacher, schoolmaster, and preceptor (Rousmaniere, 2014). Given these descriptors, there was a perception that the early principal was a very authoritative leader and schools, as a result, operated in a top-down manner. This seeming lack of shared decision-making and democratic ideals prevented principals during these times from thinking about considering other leadership options, or individuals at their school site. Essentially, during this time the teachers at school sites were working as a means to comply with the demands of their principal.

The role of the principal is to continually maintain a balance between administrators and the administered (Rousmaniere, 2014). Unique demands placed upon the school principal as they are examined for their work as administrators of the school building. For instance, they are assessed for how well they oversee the day to day functioning and demands while responding to policy directives administered to them from central offices and a variety of other stakeholders. Principals are still often perceived as middle managers working between the needs of the community and governing authorities (Rousmaniere, 2014). This dynamic role of the principal,
to exist in the middle and seamlessly switch between modes of administrator and administered, is largely responsible for shaping the American school system and creating the leadership styles of the principals who currently serve our schools.

The most important influence on school culture is the site based administrator, or more specifically the principal (Hentges, 2012). Poor administrative practices and leadership is one of the most prominent reasons given by teachers for leaving a specific school site, or the profession of teaching as a whole (Hentges, 2012). Teachers entering the field of education, from traditional or alternative certification paths, require greater amounts of mentoring and advising as they transition from being a student teacher, to a fully professionalized teacher (De Stercke, Goyette, & Robertson, 2015). Site based administrators, or principals, often fill this role at schools. However, this is not to suggest that the principal needs to set aside time to work one on one with new teachers. Rather, the principal, in knowing that novice teachers are joining the faculty, enlists the help of other stakeholders in the building who can serve to meet needs of the teacher.

Beginning teachers require a solid team foundation, when this network of professionals is granted regular time to collaborate as a team, the new teacher will benefit greatly (Clark, 2012). Having an administration that schedules common team planning times that are inclusive of the novice teacher, will aid in the troubleshooting and problem solving needs that the novice teacher is experiencing as they transition into the classroom (Clark, 2012). In working conditions such as these, the novice teacher will grow collegiality amongst their team and be able to ask day to day questions of things pertaining to the classroom, and ask for clarification on policy and procedure related to the larger functioning of the school site. Essentially, if beginning teachers are not left in isolation, but rather have an expansive support network in which they can meet and interact
with regularly, then attrition rates decrease substantially (Clark, 2012). Knowing this, administrators across the United States are then tasked with taking best practices for supporting novice teachers and putting them into regular, and daily practice, as a means of providing regular and consistent support.

It is not uncommon for administration to assign novice teachers to classrooms full of challenging students (Clark, 2012). Studies show that schools with larger proportions of students representing disadvantaged backgrounds, or students who make up ethnic minorities or have learning disabilities play into a novice teacher’s decision to leave the classroom within a few years of starting (Dupriez et al., 2016). To partner with student behavior and classroom management woes, teachers often leave the field as a result of being hired to instruct some of the least desired core areas of curriculum, the combination of seemingly lack luster curricular topics in conjunction with potential classroom management problems leads to feelings of teacher isolation, which in turn can lead to attrition (Clark, 2012). When selecting students for classroom placement, before or after the novice teacher is hired, it appears to behoove the administration at the school site to ensure that the classroom of the new teacher does not become the catch all for students that other grade level teachers, with years of experience did not want (Dupriez et al., 2016).

Two of the greatest curricular areas that experience teacher attrition is science and math (Dupriez et al., 2016). Out of field teachers are increasingly appointed to teach science and mathematics classes despite having told administration that they are not prepared to teach these content areas (Lambeth, 2012). Novice teachers assigned out of field assignments early in their careers are at heightened risks for leaving the profession as there are no real familiarities professionally speaking for these teachers (Edwards & Nuttall, 2015). Administrators who offer
a job to a teacher in which they would have to sign an intent to earn agreement as a stipulation of employment given that they would not be certified to teach the area in which they instruct, should essentially be pursued as a last case scenario. Research shows that many teachers who are hired out of field lack the support system to successfully become certified in the field and stay in the classroom for a long period of time (Lambeth, 2012). If a teacher needed to sign an intent to earn form for certification purposes, providing the teacher with a support system at the school site would make the first few years of transitioning into the classroom easier. This need could be met through assigning the novice teacher to a mentor. Allowing the novice teachers the opportunity to have structured meeting times with a mentor, who has been trained in working with new teachers is essential, having the input of a mentor relationship has been the leading aspect for altering teacher attrition rates in schools (Clark, 2012).

Table 1. Sample of Literature by Topic

| Current Conditions | Clark, 2012; Edwards, & Nuttall, 2015; Exstrom, 2009; Lambeth, 2012 |
| Induction w/Mentoring | De Stercke, Goyette, & Robertson, 2015; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Lozinak, 2016; Moore, 2016 |

Findings

Teacher leadership comes as a result of growing professionalism in the classroom. This professional growth and capacity to lead often spurs veteran teachers to leave the classroom to pursue another education related job, this was another trend seen in the literature (Borman & Dauling, 2008; Danielson, 2006; Leithwood & Macsall, 2008; Sergiovanni & Stratt, 2007; Reason & Reason, 2007). Countless qualitative studies relied heavily upon interviewing veteran
teachers in the field of education and found there was a career ladder present in the profession that encourages teachers who have mastered classroom management, pedagogical techniques, and those who possess leadership abilities to leave the classroom as a means to build up the professionals around them. These teacher leader and coaching style roles allow for educators to remain in the field of education after leaving the classroom, resulting not in attrition, but rather growing professionally to focus upon leading within the field.

There was much literature on why veteran teachers left the field prior to retirement without the intent to return (Johnson, 2006; Latifoglu, 2016; Torres, 2016). These qualitative studies relied upon interview and at times narrative techniques and brought to light that financial reasons have little if anything to do with a teacher’s decision to stay within the field of education. Rather teachers who have been in the field for years leave as a result of burnout from the excessive number of hours required to complete tasks within the field, and as a result of working conditions that are not up to par with their expectations. Building facility maintenance, working relationships with colleagues, and overall organizational structures within the school site were all mentioned as key predictors as to whether teachers would leave or remain in the field.

The final two themes in the literature dealt with the ability of individuals to lead within the field. The first section of leadership was advocacy coming from teachers and local union representatives (Dunsmore, 2015). Here top-down and bottom-up movements for change were seen as equally important measures to curb teacher attrition as a means of meeting the concerns and dissatisfaction with working conditions that is known throughout the field. The second type of leadership dealt with that of administrators. Administrative leadership, out of the two, was seen as having a heavier emphasis on a teacher’s decision to stay within the field. The role of administration in trust, facility maintenance, culture and climate were explored as a means of
gaining a complete picture on the daily operations and makeup of the typical American school (Clark, 2012; Exstrom, 2009; Heineke et al., 2014; Rousmaniere, 2014).

Teachers have been interviewed regarding why they left the classroom, and how that exit process looked to the overall faculty and staff at the school site (Buchanan, 2009; Clark, 2012; Dupriez et al., 2016). The teachers, novices and veterans, were seemingly able to place themselves in stories about exiting the classroom. However, there was not as much information about the overall educational system, or policies and procedures that may have caused them to leave. In a sense, the teacher story for leaving the classroom was seemingly egocentric and at times brought in needs of the student, or classroom management. The stories were limited due to the fact that the teachers did not meld their stories into the overall practices of their school site or the educational system in which they worked. This leaves one to question whether the plight from the classroom was caused by a policy or procedure that was made apparent at time of employment or induction, or if teachers leave as a result of more hidden aspects that they only encounter after time has been spent in the field.

Many of the studies followed teachers from the end of their teacher preparation program through their first few years in the classroom. For instance, only about a third of teachers were leaving after their first year in the classroom (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). The third and fifth year of teaching also brought large amounts of turnover in the field of education. Having teachers share their experiences as a teacher in their first three to five years, potentially using narrative research methods, could lead to new understandings about the phases of induction, emotions, and processes that novice teachers experience when entering and exiting a teaching position or accepting a teacher union representative position. Having the literature be more descriptive as to how teachers narrate and
frame their switch to a position more focused on advocacy would be very beneficial in explaining experiences or trends for novice and veteran teachers.

Generally, the literature that has been reviewed is in agreement on why teachers leave the field of education. The most common causes that have been mentioned are: supportive school based leadership practices, engaged stakeholders, safe and trusting environment, planning and collaboration time, and teaching in a content area that the teacher is certified to teach in (Exstrom, 2009). Furthermore, the literature is also similarly in agreement on the range of percentages of teachers that leave within the first, third, and fifth year and beyond (Guarino et al, 2006; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). With regards to teacher qualification and attrition rates a finding was that those most qualified to teach actually become the most mobile and leave the classroom (Dupriez et al., 2016).

Gaps in the Literature

One of the gaps in the literature is on the positive outcomes that could result from teacher attrition. Not all teacher attrition is negative or detrimental. For instance the early departure of a low-caliber teacher can be beneficial for the teachers, students, and schools (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). A second gap concerned the research on teacher turnover rates. Teacher turnover is being used as an umbrella term to include teachers who have left the profession (attrition) and for teachers who have moved around (migration) within the profession (Lindqvist et al., 2014). The literature is very thorough in discussing why novice teachers leave the field of education. Many teachers reported feelings of isolation in the classroom as they worked all day to meet the educational needs of their students and were left with little, if any, time to work with their teams and colleagues to plan, collaborate, and troubleshoot ideas and information off of one another (Clark, 2012; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). However, there was little research on teachers who
leave the classroom to fulfill other leadership roles within the educational realm but outside district leadership positions, the avenues they take, and whether or not they feel fulfilled in the position they take after teaching. For example, we know little about teachers who stay within education but not within the classroom and district.

The third gap in the literature revealed that there are few studies focused on teachers’ experiences with administrators before exiting teaching (Buchanan, 2009; Rinke, 2007). All too often teachers who leave are given a common smoothed over story. Essentially, site based leaders tell remaining staff members something along the lines of the teacher has left to follow their dreams, or they have gone on to further professionalize themselves by pursuing graduate studies (Schaefer, Downey, & Clandinin, 2014). Often, teachers leave the field without prospects of another job, but they are simply too worn down or lack the desire to continue in the classroom (Buchanan, 2009; Clark, 2012). A teacher’s story of exiting the classroom that has not been edited by administrative leadership may not portray the events leading up to a teacher’s departure as a smooth or happy transition.

A fourth gap in the literature is on the role of the union representative. In the literature, there were very few studies that looked at the role of union representative. A majority of the studies looked at the role of the union building representative (Coddett, 2014; Rubenstein & McCarthy, 2010) or at the role of the union president and board of leadership (Johnson et al., 2009; Roseamelia, 2015). There is still little research that has been done that looks at the seeming middle manager role of the union representative. Essentially, if this were to be thought of in a hierarchy, it would be as follows: union members → building union representative → local union representative → local union president. In this, it is seen that the roles build upon one another. So while much is known about union members, and union presidents, less is known
about supporting the development of teacher union representatives who serve multiple school sites within the district.

A fifth, and final gap in this research was that none of the teacher attrition studies integrated teacher interviews and reasons for leaving, with interviews from the teachers’ mentor and or site based administration. Triangulating data from interviews given by a novice teacher who has left the field, the teacher’s mentor, and the teacher’s site based administrator could be very telling about the views about why the teacher left. It could be that several individuals would have strikingly different, or potentially eerily similar stories to describe the teacher’s departure from the classroom. To hear the unedited stories of teachers exiting from the classroom could essentially go into the shaping of future induction practices or leadership practices involving novice teachers.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of this study is to explore how former school-based educators (classroom teachers), who became teacher union representatives, frame their stories of mobility, leadership, advocacy, and barriers and supports affecting educator attrition. The overarching research question is: How do former teachers enter and perform the role of teacher union representative? In addition, there is a desire to learn what has compelled them to stay in this current role of local union representative. Situated in the interpretive paradigm, narrative inquiry has been used, relying upon a combination of knowledge and experience of individuals to create understanding (Coulter & Smith, 2009).

Narrative Accounts

The use of narrative inquiry and qualitative research methods comes as a result of my saturation with the literature. In many studies, it appeared that educators were followed while in the field, or after having exited the field. There were a few novice educator pieces that followed teachers through their first year in the classroom. In these beginning teacher pieces, the use of narrative accounts and vignettes were used as a means of presenting the data. This technique allowed myself as the reader to feel as though I had a thorough understanding as to why these educators prematurely left the field as a result of being able to hear their words through the stories that were shared on the page. The stories shared by teachers were often real, raw, and reflective into what made them feel that leaving the field of education was a better choice than
staying. These stories allowed me to make parallels to experiences and students that I have had during my career as an educator, and it also afforded me the opportunity as reader and researcher to see how these stories fit within the conceptual framework that I constructed for this study. It was through continued reading that I began to realize that veteran teachers were seldom afforded the opportunity to share their story as to why choices are made to continue or discontinue their work within the field.

I began to gravitate more towards the use of narrative inquiry for it is a methodology that fosters the conversation between the researcher and participants in such a way that they work together to create a shared meaning. While I question next professional steps, and have been in contact with those who can recall moments when transition was necessary due to working conditions, my desire to hear the stories of individuals grew greater. Narrative inquiry is markedly different than the standard interview protocols that encourage isolated facilitation and response techniques (Reissman, 2011). Having honest conversations with educators who have transitioned out of the classroom and into a union representative role has helped me to address a current gap in the literature and determine my next professional steps in my career ladder. Having open conversations has challenged me as a researcher as I gave control to the participant by way of following their stories as a means to make genuine discoveries into the themes and trends resulting from their transition from one job title to the next (Reissman, 2011).

The narratives in this study aim to take an introspective look at the lived experiences of educators who have left site based positions as a means to lead at the district level for the local teacher union. Narrative inquiry uses a variety of analytic practices to focus upon individual events and stories shared by individuals, as a means to find the meaning of those experiences (Creswell, 2007).
**Epistemology**

Narrative research, a qualitative research method, is often questioned in terms of reliability and validity (Shenton, 2004). Narrative inquiry is often questioned due to the questioning technique that is required during data collection and due to the interpretation and presentation of the data that is completed by the researcher. Initially, when interviewing participants, the questions on the interview protocol were phrased in a leading way that encourages the participants to answer in the form of a narrative. Requesting narrative answers from participants essentially limited the responses of the participants to those events and stories that they feel met the demands of the question. Essentially, the researcher in their forming of questions is already guiding the participants to share those experiences that can be phrased in a narrative manner rather than a simple response. Narrative inquiry relies upon the researcher’s use of literary devices to enhance the practice of storytelling, allowing the reader to make sense of the study as it related to their own beliefs and emotions. Given the subjective manner in which narrative methodology situates itself, it is imperative to understand that narratives shared this way, in the form of research, do not establish truth or reflect the truth of an event or experience. Rather, narratives create the events that one reflects upon.

**Ontology**

Narrative research seeks out the lived experiences of individuals as a means of coming to understand their lives and phenomenon as narrated. The very premise of narrative research is to share the subjective experiences individuals have as they live and interpret the everyday events that occur in their daily lives (Miller, 2005). Essentially, narratives are reflections on the world as it is known at that particular time, to the individual(s) involved (Coulter & Smith, 2009). The sharing of narrative stories causes individuals to question their values and ideals as they pertain
to the phenomena being studied. This can be done through the combination of appeal to reason and emotion (Barone, 2001; Coulter & Smith, 2009).

**Research Design**

There is a qualitative design to this study that calls upon a narrative approach for the collection of data. Storytelling, and narrative inquiry relies upon a relational methodology that allows an individual, in this case myself, to understand the decision-making, thought process, and series of events that another individual went through. The sharing of narratives further allows individuals involved to retell and relive stories from the past.

However, the aim of narrative inquiry is not to merely accept the story of the individual at its face value. Rather, narrative approaches begin with a story that then allows me to engage in conversations with participants to essentially unpack the lived experience as a means of meaning making. For this study, the interpretation of individual narratives was used to gain insight into the role of union representatives and their individual or organizational focus for the agenda that they pursue on behalf of the students, teachers, and the betterment of the local union and school district. Essentially, narrative inquiry and themes arising across narratives serve to show that people live out stories and tell stories about their living. “Narrative inquiry values the signs, the symbols, and the expression of feelings in language and other symbol systems, validating how the narrator constructs meaning” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p.153).

**Participants & Setting**

**Sample**

The participants for this study were selected from states in which the two national unions, the NEA and the AFT, work in conjunction with one another. The two states that were selected were Minnesota and Florida. The districts considered vary greatly in a sense that they service
anywhere from 39,000 students to 350,000 students. Given the disparity between the number of students within each of the districts and the total number of local union members varied greatly between the three districts as well. However, a commonality that all participants in this study had was the structure and organization of the local union chapter. These union representatives are assigned to the corresponding numbered areas within each of the three districts. The role of these representatives requires them to work in conjunction with building union representatives and administration as a means of meeting member’s needs and ensuring that collective bargaining agreements are being upheld daily. Regarding selection criteria, the three representatives were considered as participants due to the fact that all representatives began their educational pursuits in the classroom and have since transitioned into the role of union representative.

The unions have experienced and endured teacher strikes, segregation, and countless educational reforms and mandates. Over time the local unions have been successful in securing a permanent building centrally located in their district from which they operate. This building houses the representatives, union board, and professional development trainings that are made available to teachers in the district who are members of the local union. While I initially desired to have one local union studied for the purpose of this research, I decided to use three unions in an effort to ensure that there is a sufficient amount of participants in this study. Opening the participant pool up to the three unions allowed the study to be more representative to local union chapters across the United States.

**Sampling Technique**

The sampling procedures that were used for this study relied heavily upon internet searches. I searched websites beginning with the two national educator unions, the NEA and AFT. Once the search was complete I was able to find local unions that were affiliated with the
national chapters, this was important as the unions included in this study needed to be certified and nationally recognized as a means for ensuring consistency in comparison. Once the search had been completed, I then began to look at the websites of the local unions within the state of Florida and Minnesota, two comparable ranking states in terms of union strength (Winkler et al., 2012). In searching, approximately twenty-five unions were seen as candidates meeting the criteria for this study. A recruitment email was sent to the union provided email address for each of the union representatives listed in their website. In the recruitment email I began by introducing myself to the union leader via email and generally explained the purpose of the research study, and the time commitment that would be needed from the participants. The email included a recruitment statement that explained to the invited teacher union representative the purpose of the study and the necessary elements to fit the criteria needed to participate in the study. The information in the email invitation aimed to provide transparency concerning the time requirements/commitments needed to complete the study. Once the prospective representatives communicated an interest in participating, the interviews were scheduled at a mutually agreeable time.

**Role of the Researcher**

Throughout the course of the study I was instrumental in the collection of data from the participants. During the interview time I created dialog and conversation with participants as I prompted them to share stories of their career mobility and responsibilities in their current role. After each of the interviews, I transcribed each of the interviews with the participants to have a working document on which to code, find themes, and analyze the data that was shared from the participant. My interactions with the participants required me to interview, listen, transcribe, analyze, and share the data that was shared with me by way of narrative accounts.
Prior to engaging in the interviews with participants, I obtained the needed permissions from the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study. The participant first agreed in writing via email to participate in the study, and then the participant was sent the consent documentation from the IRB. The signed forms were then sent back to myself. In order to maintain compliance for university regulations, I ensured that all participants had been informed of the time commitment and intent of the study. The invitation to participate further informed the participants of my intent to submit the research as part of the requirements for my doctoral program of study. To note their agreement to participate, all participants had a signed consent form to agree to our collaboration in the study. All data was maintained electronically in password protected digital spaces as a means to protect identities. Furthermore, the data is secured by passwords on the computer as a means to further protect those involved in the study. Per IRB guidelines, I will destroy all data after three years.

Before the IRB application was submitted, and before the first participant had been contacted, I engaged in reflexivity exercises in order to bring to my awareness how my personal biases and professional experiences and knowledge up to this point has influenced my design of the study and might influence data generation and its reconstruction. This is what is commonly referred to as bracketing, which entails “recognizing where the personal insight is separated from the researcher’s collection of data” . . . allowing “the researcher to perceive the phenomenon” anew (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 97). My attempt to bracket is an attempt to suspend judgment and acknowledge biases that will potentially influence my interpretation and re-presentation of participants’ experiences.
**Data Collection**

During the [semi-structured] interviews, an audio recording device was used to capture the dialogue between the participants and myself. Once the interviews were completed, the audio clips were transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were used in transcriptions and analysis to protect the anonymity of the participants. The usage of the audio recording device in the arranged semi-structured interviews allowed for the nuances of the participant(s) to be picked up verbatim for the purposes of transcription and coding data collected during the interview (Briggs, Coleman, & Morrison, 2012). Consequently, upon meeting the participants, I needed to include some surface level “getting to know one another style” questions in the protocol as a means to know the individuals better with whom I am speaking.

The ultimate goal of the interviews was to gain an understanding as to why these educators chose to exit the classroom as a means of pursuing the position of union representative. Furthermore, the interviews served as a means to learn how advocacy work within their current role, as well as the impacts made to the local district, function as a support to keep them in their current positions. The interview protocol for the union representatives (Appendix A) has been included for reference. The interviews with union representatives lasted approximately sixty to one hundred minutes. While the interviews will serve as the major sources of data, additional data was generated in the form of journaling as I recorded notes about the study, its participants, and my experiences (i.e., biases, judgments, observations, interpretations).

**Fitting within Conceptual Framework**

The first phase of the interview with participants focused primarily upon their current role as a union representative. In Chapter 2, the organizational structure of teacher unions was presented. The responsibilities and role of the union president were well known, while that of the
union representative was more generalized. The information from the first phase of the interview was used as a means to expand upon the organizational structure of teacher unions and information presented in an effort to understand the role and position of local union representative on a more sophisticated level.

The second and third phases of the interview relied heavily upon the conceptual framework that had been created for this study. During the second phase of the interview the goal was to see which of the working conditions (House 1981) were present and influential in prompting the educator to leave their current position as a means to pursue full time advocacy work. The third phase of the interview was used to address Teacher Union Advocacy for the Educational Profession/Professionals. During this phase of the interview, more was learned about advocacy pursuits, framing, and preparation.

Through a series of phases during the interview, the participants touched upon all aspects of the conceptual framework in an attempt to shed light on educator mobility within the field of education, and what drives advocacy work for those individuals who fill site based positions within the districts these unions serve.

**Interview Techniques and Rapport**

For the purposes of this study, I interviewed the participants once as a means of generating data related to the study. The initial design of this study called for a series of three interviews with each of the participants. However, due to the busy schedules and the inability to commit to a series of interviews, the three interviews were condensed into one longer interview. The interview was planned in such a way that the participants had opportunities to share narratives pertaining to the multiple research questions presented in the study. Grinyer and Thomas (2012) suggest using multiple interviews as repeated visits and interactions with
participants play a critical role in establishing rapport between the researcher and participants. They claim that participants often answer questions in a way that they perceive the researcher would like them to respond, but that behavior gradually diminishes in subsequent interviews as the researcher builds a relationship with each of the participants in subsequent interviews as participants share private and more meaningful accounts as they begin to trust the researcher. Given the availability of the participants, multiple interviews were not possible. However, I was able to interview the participants and then remain in communication with them while working with the data as a means to clarify any ideas emerging from the collected data.

The first part of the interview began with me discussing my background in the field of education to date. During the beginning interview questions I became acquainted with the participants on a personal level by building rapport and creating a trusting relationship. I believe it is a necessity to stress the importance of familiarizing myself with not only with the participants, but also with the topic and purpose of the study. By allowing the beginning minutes of the interview to be a time of rapport building and sharing, the participants began to understand why I was conducting the study and how I worked to choose participants. The focus of the beginning interview questions was on the roles and responsibilities in which the individual is currently serving. The beginning of the interviews purposely began with more surface level conversations with the participants as a means to foster the growth of our relationship. The interview questions became more personal in nature as the rapport was built between the participants and myself.

The second phase of interview questions looked more in depth at the roles and responsibilities of the individual in their current job role. During this phase of questioning I was interested to see why the educators left their position in the classroom to pursue the role of a
union representative. I believed that waiting to hear their story for leaving until later in the interview was beneficial to the participants as they had come to know me and we had started to establish a rapport with one another. I also believed that having known each other for a little bit, the participants were more apt to share the true details for their mobility within the field.

The third and final phase of the interview focused upon the story of exiting that was shared, and what brought them to this position as was shared earlier in the interview. Aside from merely bridging the gaps between the second and the third phases of the interview, I also used this opportunity to question the representatives on how their story impacts their advocacy practices within their current role.

The interviews with participants consisted of two phases: narration phase, and conversation phase, during the interviews I prepared myself accordingly to transition my role depending on the type of answer the participant was giving (Kim, 2016). The narrated phase of the semi-structured narrative interview occurred when a participant was sharing a narrative. During that time, I kept my conversation and questions to a minimum in order to allow the participant to share their story in response to the question. My silence afforded the participant the opportunity to logically construct a narrative in a causal way as a means to share a perceived experience with myself. It is through the narrative phase that I felt the majority of my data collection occurred.

The second phase is referred to as the conversation phase (Kim, 2016). During this phase, the interview became more semi-structured in nature allowing myself and the participant to interact directly with one another as a means of clarifying or looking more deeply into the information they shared. During the conversation phases, I worked along with the participants to co-construct meaning from the narratives and events that have been shared as data. It is
important to note that each interview had both the narrative and the conversation phase. There was a natural ebb and flow between the two as rapport continued to build between the participants and myself.

**Software Usage for Data Generation and Analysis**

The narrated stories shared by the participants were audio recorded in two formats as a safeguard for ensuring that the interview was captured, the Skype audio recording software program and an IPhone voice memo application to ensure a backup file of the data. During the interviews I collected voice recordings of the participants using Skype Audio Recorder. This software works in conjunction with Skype to record voice conversations and save as an mp3 file. The secondary recording device was a voice recording application found on the iPhone as a standard application that included a default voice recorder, and was part of the factory settings. A digital recording was created as a result of this recording. This format served as a secondary recorded file as a backup in case of any technical issues that may have arisen with the Skype Audio Recorder.

Once the sound files of the interview had been collected, Dedoose, a data management program was used to transcribe and code data. Another feature of this program focuses on data sorting. The narrative stories, once recorded, were placed within Dedoose and labeled with the participant's pseudonym and date collected. This served as another platform in which to store the data. This allowed me ease in going back to the audio files as needed to ensure that vignettes and other information being collected for the findings section was representative of the participant's response.
Data Analysis

It is during the data analysis process that I continually reflected on the data collected. Reflection informed how I responded to data, found themes in the narratives, revised the research questions, and crafted the narrative vignettes. Transcribing and analyzing data as it was collected allowed me to check in with the participants to share what I interpreted with them as a means of member checking to increase the internal validity of my findings through establishing verisimilitude and clarifying information if the need should arise. My data analysis involved thematic coding of transcripts and reflections on my journal entries recorded throughout the study. The data collection and analysis ceased once a point of saturation had been reached. I knew this point had been reached with the interview data and analysis of the narratives when my coding and reviews failed to yield any new knowledge. A secondary measure to cross check that a point of saturation had been reached (Suarez-Ortega, 2013).

Structure of Narratives

The narratives in this study were analyzed by the plot and story elements included by each of the participants. Plot in this study refers to the main events that occur within a narrative that are sequenced by the author. When considering the plot of each of the narratives the following questions from Cinematique (2012) were asked: How and when is the major conflict in the story setup? How and when are the main characters introduced? How is the story moved along so that the characters must face the central conflict? How and when is the major conflict set up to propel the narrative to its conclusion? The final three questions have been combined to note when the climax of the narrative was shared.

Story elements, for the purposes of this study, include the setting and characters. When considering the story elements within the shared narratives, the following questions from
Cinematique (2012) were considered: Where is the story set? What event starts the story? Who are the main characters? What conflict(s) do the characters face? What is at stake? What happens to the characters as they face this conflict? What is the outcome of this conflict? What is the ultimate impact on the characters? The story elements have been included in each of the narratives as shared in Chapter Four, however, they are addressed again in the table below. I have decided to further define the characters, sequence of events, and keying techniques used by the participants as it further examines the various components of the narratives shared through interviews for the purposes of this study.

**Constructing and Framing**

**Constructing**

Narrative storytelling is indicative of an individual’s attempt to create a fit between a lived situation that has occurred in their life, and a story schema that consists of telling who, what, when, where and why the event occurred (Kim, 2016). Narrative thinking provides the opportunity for other individuals, who have not had the same lived experiences to understand and analyze events of the past as a means to gain understanding.

When working with the participants, I was able to learn about the participant’s narrative schema (Kim, 2016). Through hearing stories shared by the participants, I learned the storytelling techniques of the participants. Essentially, I became more familiar with how the participants constructed the story map from which they construct as a means to tell the stories they are sharing. I learned how they use causal relations, sequence of events, and use of detail as a means to share their lived experiences.
Once the stories had been generated with the participants, I the transcription and coding process. During this time, I assessed each narrative telling to see what type of story was shared, questions for analysis, and fitting the stories within the conceptual framework.

**Type of Story**

When coding the stories and reviewing the narratives shared by the participants, I began by deciphering what type of story had been shared. The narrative inquiries that came as a result of stories being told in response to interview questions asked to the participant serve to represent living, telling, retelling, and reliving (Clandinin, 2013). Once I had an understanding of the type of story that was shared, I then relied upon the research related to workplace conditions as a means to see at what point the educator felt their current position was too much to endure. The lived narratives of the individuals were shared and respected, but then conversational phrased questions were asked as a means to gain further understanding of the narrative shared. Basically, once the type of story had been determined, I saw how the other components of their narrative fit within the conceptual framework of this study.

**Questions for Analysis**

When reading and transcribing these narratives I began asking myself a series of questions as a means to gain a thorough understanding of their account. I asked myself questions pertaining to the elements of plot and story used by each of the participants. The plot related questions that guided this thinking were: How and when is the major conflict in the story setup? How and when are the main characters introduced? How is the story moved along so that the characters must face the central conflict? How and when is the major conflict set up to propel the narrative to its conclusion? Story elements were questioned using the following questions as a guide: Where is the story set? What event starts the story? Who are the main characters? What
conflict(s) do the characters face? What is at stake? What happens to the characters as they face this conflict? What is the outcome of this conflict? What is the ultimate impact on the characters? What do the stories do? What tropes do they represent? How do the stories change?

In addition to story elements and plot, overarching questions were asked of the narratives. These questions included: What imagery was used in the story? What metaphors did the educator include? How was the story told (problem/solution, cause/effect)? Were there characters in the story who monopolized the retelling? Who continually came up as a character in the stories?

It is through this series of questions that I began to gain an understanding of the narratives that had been shared. I was able to see how the participants naturally told stories, and gained an understanding not only of their actions within the narrative, but also gained an understanding of other characters present in the narrative who may have led them to respond in particular ways.

Framing of Narratives

When framing the narratives the participants shared for all three of the research questions in the primary framework, guided doings, and meaning making techniques used by the individual were all taken into account. The table below describes the narrative techniques used by each of the participants in their telling of the narratives. Following the table more is discussed in accordance to the keying techniques used as a means to construct the participant’s reality as referred to in the narratives. It does stand to note however, that each participant told their narratives using their primary framework, they were active characters in the storied experience and relied heavily upon the social interaction of characters. The participants common reference to what they thought or perceived which is reflective of the guided doings, and commonly the

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participant would add their thinking or internal monologue that occurred when the narrative was
taking place as a regrounding or justification for their actions (Goffman, 1974).

Table 2. Framing of Narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framing</th>
<th>Guided Doings</th>
<th>Meaning Making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Framework: Social Construction</td>
<td>Individuals telling what they see</td>
<td>Regroundings - Reasons and motivations for acting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human players were involved in each of the stories shared</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Primary Frameworks**

When considering how the narratives given by the participants were shared, I relied upon the narrative framing work of Erving Goffman (1974). When looking at the narratives that have been collected as sources of data, I assumed that all narratives are told using the participant’s primary framework, this framework, is what is naturally used by a human being to make sense of an occurrence. The primary framework can be broken down into two segments, the natural and the social. Goffman described the natural occurrences in an individual’s primary framework to be these events that are unanimated and unguided. Essentially, these happenings are purely physical, with nothing willfully interfering with the process. An example of a natural occurrence in a primary framework could be the naturally occurring phases of the lunar cycle. There is nothing that can be done to interfere with these happenings. I would not expect any narratives to fall beneath this element of the primary framework.

The second portion of the primary framework is social (Goffman, 1974). In the social area human players become involved with events, there is background to an event, occurrences can be coaxed, faltered, affronted, and threatened. An example of an event falling in this category would be meteorologists delivering the weather forecast. The social portion of an individual’s primary framework is the origin of the narratives shared within the study. The social
framework can be broken down further into two categories of guided doings: manipulation of the natural world, and special worlds (Goffman, 1974).

The guided doings help an individual make sense of events and interactions involving individuals other than themselves, as well as gain an understanding of their own role in the event. These guided doings were a primary focus in framing the narratives shared, as it is within this portion of the primary framework that an individual links sense making to events involving themselves and others. Manipulation of the natural world refers to physical movements and reactions that occur as a result of an event. Seeing how educators physically react and act in the field was primary in this research. The other guided doing addresses special worlds where an actor is involved. A common way to gain understanding of these guided doings would be to think in terms of a game, in this case, I will use chess. The manipulation of the physical world when playing chess would involve the players reaching onto the board and physically moving their arm as well as the piece. The special world would address the strategies of the game that the players think, and would account for the creation of good moves and bad moves as deemed by an individual’s interpretation.

I have great interest in listening to individual’s narratives shared from their primary framework and determining the social construction through the use of both guided doings as described by Goffman (1974). Table 2 addresses the five areas of meaning making within the primary framework of an individual. The narratives shared primarily were from the Segregation Issue Expressed in Tension and Joking.
Table 3. Distinctive Matters within the Primary Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Astounding Complex</th>
<th>Things an individual cannot make sense of or comprehend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cosmological Interests</td>
<td>Stunts, or unnatural happenings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muffings</td>
<td>When the body, or another body that is under guidance, breaks free and deviates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortuitousness</td>
<td>Incidentally produced events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segregation Issue Expressed in Tension and Joking</td>
<td>Individuals telling what they see</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Essentially, in this study, the participants shared their narratives from their individual primary framework. Given their perception of schema built in the Segregation Issue Expressed in Tension and Joking, much was learned about their social practices and the guided doings that were described in their interactions. Goffman (1974) accepts narratives and accounts from the primary framework to be real events.

**Keys and Keying**

Keys, are non-literal or make believe events that are not actually occurring. There are five basic keys present within society (Goffman, 1974). When listening to the narratives shared, I asked conversational phased questions to gain clarity in areas of the narrative should any of the following keys be sensed in a collected narrative.

When interviewing the participants, it was essential to listen for keys within the narratives being shared. Keys, in their very nature, create a competitive, protective, or vested element in human beings to arise. Individuals tend to connect value to keys and as a result of values and emotion can turn a narrative from the actual occurrence to one more laden with droppings of keys throughout the story and descriptions of their perceptions and response as a result of feeling threatened or as a result of having their core values shaken. Listening for keys in the participants stories out of the classroom, and their stories into the position of union representative are very telling in sorting the emotions of keys from the social construction of guided doings. Essentially, I understand the use
of keys, emotions, and values in storytelling, however, the narratives that I am collecting will be looked at through a lens in which the primary framework is used, and keys are omitted as a means to see factual reasons behind educator attrition and mobility, as opposed to a perceived occurrence that made the educator decide to move from the classroom.

Table 4. Key and Keying in Narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Make Believe</th>
<th>Fantasizing, entertainment, nothing practical will come of the doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contests</td>
<td>Events where there is competition, sports per se</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceremonials</td>
<td>Ritualistic occurrences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Redoings</td>
<td>Events occurring out of their usual context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regroundings</td>
<td>Reasons and motivations for actions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Introduction to Participants**

The participants in this study are introduced in a series of vignettes based on the narratives shared by each of the participants. I have crafted the vignettes below in response to the research questions and sub questions that have guided this study. The vignettes vary in length, and have been abbreviated from their original form, but have not been reduced to a mere series of statements. Keeping the vignettes close to their original form was intentional as a gap in the literature is the lack of voice of the educator in their decision to leave the classroom to fulfill union work and responsibilities. An underlying goal of this research was to create a forum in which veteran educators were given the opportunity to share their decision to leave the field. In an effort to allow the participants in this study to justly share their reasoning for professional transition, I have placed their narratives in a chapter of their own as opposed to presenting the information in the findings.
Meghan McGuiness structures her professional narrative as a cooperative journey of a classroom teacher and union member who ultimately wanted more. Her growth within the union was always closely coupled with her continued education and advanced degrees and her professional growth at her school site. Catherine Hughes abruptly joined the union as a result of a run in with administration and since joining, her involvement with the union has been a whirlwind of vertical movements and increased responsibility. Randolph Planko describes his journey with his local union as a constant ebb and flow throughout his professional journey. His desire to serve within the union, and the capacity in which he has led has varied over the years, but the constant that remains is his unwavering membership within the union.

The participants in this study each identified a distinct moment in their professional careers that became a point of transition for them. The transition being referenced is that professional transition from being a full-time classroom teacher to assuming an active role as a local union representative. Beside their names, a summative statement has been given as the driving behind the participant’s decision to leave the classroom. It does stand to note that Meghan is the only participant to date that has fully left the classroom. She is still very young in her union role and is exclusively performing this role. Catherine and Randolph began very similarly with their exclusive work with the union; however both have now been involved with local union work for two to three decades. They have found opportunities throughout their career with the union to serve in the union as well teach as a means to remain current with the concerns and expectations of the classroom teachers in their respective districts. However, at other times, they will step away from the classroom completely to fully dedicate their focus to teacher rights and union negotiations and bargaining of contracts.
I introduce the participants in a series of three distinct vignettes based on what they shared during their interviews. It was these narratives that compiled the data and led to a series of coding and saturation. The first story shared is the participant’s professional journey up to this point in their career. Participants reflected upon their various titles and roles held in the field of education prior to accepting a titled position within their local union. The second narrative shared is split into two distinct portions. The beginning portion of the narrative highlights the participant’s story for seeking the title of Union Representative within their local union. The second portion of the narrative focuses upon the participant’s journey within the union. This portion of the narrative includes a glimpse of the participant’s time spent serving in various roles at the local union level, that has in turn afforded them the opportunity to step away from the classroom full or part time. The third story shared is each participant’s definition of advocacy and an explanation of how their role within the union provides opportunities for each participant to advocate for the educational profession.

This chapter aims to paint a portrait of each of the three participants who took part in this study. In sharing portions of the narratives collected during interviews with the participants, the voice of the educator has finally been included in studies of attrition. In the literature, much is known about teacher attrition and the impact on the field as a whole, however few studies, if any, highlight the story of transition of the educator within the field of education and allow their narratives to be shared. The individual use of narrative has been highlighted as a means to allow one to gain a more thorough understanding of each of the participants and their stories of transition throughout their professional careers.
Meghan McGuiness: A Stagnant Career Ladder

Meghan: An Urban Coastal County in Florida

Meghan is a Union Representative in a larger urban coastal county in Florida. The union that she works in has over 11,000 members which are comprised of Teachers, Paraprofessionals, Technical Service Professionals and Charter School employees. The union prides itself on being supported to its members and supporting grassroots efforts that are brought up by their members. Meghan is one of six Union Representatives that serve the members in her county. This union is affiliated with both the NEA and AFT.

Description of Educational Background

I am currently in my 17th year in the field of education. My journey to becoming a union representative has been rather long. I began my career in teaching in 2000, when I graduated from the University of Iowa with a degree in Special Education. From the onset of my career I was elated with the prospect of helping our neediest students in the classroom find success. I was continually implementing new practices and skills in an effort to make education work for my students. My students of course, were not the typical students who would come to mind, no…my students were between the ages of 14-18 years old. Many days we focused on daily living skills as a means to give these students a chance. My devotion to special education eventually landed me a job as an Exceptional Student Education Specialist. While holding this position I went back to graduate school to earn subsequent degrees. I have now successfully earned my Doctorate and decided that I needed to use my degree in my profession. Let’s be honest, that was one EXPENSIVE piece of paper! I think back to my hours of writing, interviewing, collecting and coding data, and then one of the happiest days of my life being graduation. Notice, I said one of the happiest days, let’s not forget getting married and the birth of my children, but my Ph.D.
graduation was definitely in the top three best days of my life! I knew I had to use my degree, too much skin was in the game to just let my degree hang on the wall.

**Entering the Local Union**

I always envisioned myself as being the Principal of a large school in our district. I felt that as a site based administrator I could make a large impact on my students, their families, and the surrounding community. I saw myself transitioning from a classroom teacher, to an ESE Specialist, to an Assistant Principal, to eventually a Principal. However, that was not in the cards for me...or maybe it just hasn’t been in the cards for me yet. My transition from the classroom was really rather simple. There were no administrative jobs available to me in which I could use my degrees.

I have not always been in this role, like I said earlier, I have only served in this capacity for the last three and a half years. However, I have been affiliated with our local union for the better part of two decades. When I began my teaching career I immediately joined the union. While being a union member I can honestly say that I never had to call upon the services of the union. I knew my rights, and I stayed up to date with negotiations that were being done between the union and the district, but I never required any representation from the union as a member. I never really thought about moving up within the union, it was actually my colleagues who encouraged me to grow. When my co-workers would have a question about their rights as an educator, or wanted clarification on various aspects of our contract, they began coming to me. Personally, I was interested in the work of our local union, but it was because my colleagues sought me out informally to receive answers to their union questions that I decided to run for our building steward or building representative position at our school when it became vacant. I was voted into that position by the staff at my school site and I stayed in that role the rest of my time
at that school site. I actually only stayed in that position for two years, which was shorter than I anticipated, but then my current position became available to me and I jumped at the opportunity to become involved full time with the union.

Having been an active union member and a building representative, I saw the opportunity to move up administratively speaking within the union. The position that opened up for me was titled a Field Staff Representative. Basically, it is a Union Representative position where I represent the coastal schools in our district. This was a step up, or a vertical move, from the Site Based Representative position that I held previously at my school site. This site would allow me to be over my current school and many others in our area. This position within the union that I applied for and eventually accepted was a risk to me. I felt that when I began to move up into the administrative rankings within our local union I would be sacrificing ever working as an administrator in our district. Turns out my worry was for not! I took the chance in taking the job and love, love, love the opportunities I have to help teachers like you and me and give back to the field. Going back as a district administrator has not crossed my mind since I accepted the position and I am excited to see how where I go and how I grow within the union.

Journey Within the Local Union

I started here at the union full time in 2014...September 2014 to be exact. I have been in my current position about three and a half years. My current title is similar to that of an Area Representative, within our state I am called a field staff representative and I would say sometimes around the country they would call it also a Uniserve director, so it depends but I call myself a field staff representative. Basically, some of my responsibilities are that I am assigned to approximately fifty schools, we are a large district which you know, and we are in the top three districts in our state when looking at size (number of students and employees). So, we have
quite a few schools to look after, and there are only seven of us staffers, so I have fifty schools that I work with. The other staffers each have between forty-five and fifty schools that they work with. When working with the schools some of my responsibilities are: filing grievances, mediation, membership recruitment and retention, organizing local member recruitment fairs, holding meetings, training new stewards, which are the site based leaders for the union, these individuals are also referred to as building representatives. I also work with the district, problem solving and creating favorable outcomes for our members, that is just a couple of things that I do in my current role, I mean the list can probably go on and on.

**Advocacy Pursuits**

Advocacy to me is a win! Essentially, every time I can involve myself with keeping a teacher in the classroom and keeping their professionalism intact, I have advocated for a win in the teaching profession. Having said that, a win, or saving a teacher’s job, requires that all parties involved go through a very thorough investigative process. For instance, there was a circumstance in our district where personnel were being required to take courses on Sunday afternoons as a means to keep their employment and current position. One of the many problems here, is these were non-classroom instructional personnel. Why is that important? I’m glad you asked! These individuals had accepted a series of promotions that took them out of the classroom, these experienced educators were ready to lead their colleagues in the field of education from a non-classroom based job, but were being threatened with being placed back in the classroom should they not comply with this egregious training schedule. The legal allegations, which there were a ton, took multiple years to settle. We spent hours as a union researching, talking to the media, and educating the individuals in the positions before we could
settle the case. However, in the end, all parties involved were compensated and permitted to keep their positions regardless of completing the required course work.

Catherine Hughes: Blindsided Union Member Seeks to Promote Knowledge

**Catherine: A Rural Coastal County in Florida**

Catherine is the Union President of a small rural coastal county in Florida. The union is very clear in establishing the mission and vision as it desires to meet the needs of their members. The union strives to empower and support all members, provide professional development opportunities, advocate for each and every one of the member’s concerns and negotiate to the best of their ability. This union is affiliated with both the NEA and AFT.

**Description of Educational Background**

*Teaching, well that would be a second career for me I guess you could say. I had been working out in the real world I guess you could say, and I got riffed and decided to move to the beach and begin teaching. I figured if I am going to have to look for a job, I might as well move to the beach. My husband’s parents during this time were getting older and getting sickly and unable to care for themselves so we moved up to where they lived and really decided where we needed to live geographically to take care of them and then I began searching for a job. I actually took the first job I heard of which was selling Insurance. So I was sent to the schools to sell insurance policies to teachers and while I was working in the schools I thought to myself, I bet I can do this.*

*I have been a teacher for twelve years now. One of the school’s I was selling to needed a Reading Teacher. I thought this may be my opportunity. I had worked in the reading lab in college and I was familiar with adult literacy. This worked out well because the vacancy was at a high school. I spent ten years teaching intensive reading at the high school level.*
I then picked up my Exceptional Student Education Certification at the request of my former Principal and then I experienced some family health issues. The district I had been working in was larger but I had to commute an hour each way to and from work. Seeing as how I needed to be home sooner, or at least more often to help take care of relatives, I had to change schools and districts. I now have transferred to a middle school that is a mile from my house and now I teach shorter people. Turns out I love seventh grade, the age really resonates with me and I feel like I am making a difference in the classroom.

**Entering the Local Union**

Teaching, well teaching couldn’t exist without the help of the union! Teachers would be completely powerless without the help of the union, come to think of it, if teachers think things are bad now...imagine how bad it would be without having the union. I remember it like it was yesterday...my first year...a brand-new teacher...entering my second semester...and...I did something stupid. To say I wasn’t prepared is an understatement! One day during class change, I was at my door supervising students and my Principal walked by and stated to me, “Please don’t teach that lesson again.” I heeded the advice and went about teaching. Then it happened, the next day I was teaching my class and the Reading Coach came into my room to unexpectedly cover my class. I was being called to the Principal’s Office.

When I walked in, I saw my Principal and the head of Human Resources in the office. As I walked into the office our union building representative was there trying to help represent me. I was not a member at the time and consequently could not be represented by a union per human resources. As I sat and listened to the discussion taking place in the office between the head of human resources and the principal, I began to realize they were here to take my job! I began to refute their questions asking if it was typical for verbal reprimands to be given to a teacher in
front of students during the switching of classes, and if written warning was also required before termination. Through asking clarifying questions that I had learned in my previous career, I quickly learned my rights as a teacher that day. I left with my job, and with a mere letter in my file.

When I walked out of the office and saw our building union representative I quickly secured the necessary paperwork to become a formal member of the union to ensure that I would never have to face another situation like that alone in my professional career in education. It was that day fifteen years ago that I learned my desire to pursue a career in education would be with the union as opposed to with a district. The unethical actions of administration were far too much for me to handle as a professional. I now make it my goal to inform educators of their rights and fight to keep our teachers in the classrooms with our students. My transition out of the classroom and my growth within the union happened rather quickly upon my entry to education.

I am thankful that I entered the world of education as a second career so that I had experiences in the business world and knew my rights as an employee. I believe that identifying that my rights were being violated is what ultimately saved me in that meeting with my administration fifteen years ago. I now make it my mission to ensure all of our members know their rights, or at least that they know we will provide them with a union representative who fully knows their rights and can professionally and legally advise them in times of need.

Journey Within the Local Union

My history with the union, well it has been an interesting one to say the least! I told you that I made a quick decision to join the union after walking out of a very uncomfortable situation in the Principal’s office. Looking back, it almost angers me that I was not approached and or
recruited by members of the local union to join when I became a teacher in the district. After I joined the union I began serving as a member in very small ways. I actually began by volunteering to stuff teacher mailboxes with updates and flyers from the union. I then increased my serving in the union by attending membership recruitment fairs and talking to potential members.

At the recruitment fairs I would share my experience with the union, the benefits of joining, and then offer the potential members a little something...usually it was candy bars we were handing out. I was very happy teaching and doing little things in the union to get my feet wet and become a bigger part of the organization. I then decided that I wanted to begin serving on voluntary member’s committees. It was after about a year of my committee work that I was appointed our district high school representative. We are a small district so we have our representatives organized by level of school. Well really, to get technical we have one association or building representative for every twenty members. In our district, serving at this level makes you part of the executive board. I was moving up quickly within the union and moving further away from my classroom.

It was about this time that our union became very divided as our Vice President and President were not getting along. In the interest of the members the Vice President stepped down and nominated me to fill her vacancy. Just like that I was the Vice President of our union. This next part, well it is really astounding! I was Vice President for a mere fourteen days before our union President’s husband was tragically killed in an automobile accident. Per our by-laws if the President is unable to serve for whatever reason, the Vice President shall step in and assume all duties. Now I find myself as President of our local union chapter, it has been a whirlwind and I am still adjusting to the roles, demands, and expectations set forth for a local union President.
Whirlwind…yes that is what I would describe it as, let me put it to you this way, I am looking at all of the responsibilities of being a union President and telling myself I am doing a good job of learning my new role. However, with all the time I have spent learning my duties, I have failed to learn or even consider that our union building runs on a septic tank…well a full septic tank and the issues stemming from that…let’s just say my first few months on the job have been rather stinky!! When our last President walked out of the union, a huge piece of knowledge left with her that day, and we are here scrambling to piece it together to be quite frank.

Advocacy Pursuits

Advocacy, well it is definitely a process. Advocacy is ensuring that our members have the rights that they are guaranteed by both contract and law. When I act as an advocate for my members, I am willing to put myself and my job on the line for them. I am fully committed to the work of the union and what it is we do, and stand for. Now, let me tell you how I typically like my advocacy sessions to go. I begin by meeting with my member and having a very honest discussion with them. It is here I learn the ins and outs of what I am about to involve myself in.

I always think back to an advocacy case…one in particular…almost the cliché case of a teacher having inappropriate relationships with a student. My member was distraught when we met, and understandably so. His face was plastered on all the newspapers and even news programs in our district. An underage female on a sport team he coached had made allegations that he had relationships with her and she had been to his home. Now, while we were making great headway in the case, the events got to be too much for the teacher and he resigned his position. In my heart of hearts, I knew we could have created a winning situation for him, however he left the profession before we were able to do so. This case, the one left incomplete, still stands out in my mind because I knew the teacher in this case was not at fault. I mean, I
think I can say with a clear conscious that the teacher was not at fault, but I will never really
know. I guess that is one part of the advocacy pursuit that you are never really ready for...how
will your member respond to all the media attention and headlines that go along with highly
contentious cases.

Randolph Planko: Strengthening a Weak Union

Randolph: An Urban District in Minnesota

Randolph is part of a union that has over one hundred years of history which, in a sense,
could imply one hundred years of expertise to advocate for the members that the union
represents. The union represents over 3,000 Teachers, Educational Assistants, and
Paraprofessionals and maintains an affiliation with both the NEA and AFT. Randolph is
currently waiting to see what position within his district, as well as within the union, that he
would like to pursue next. He feels that this is a time for professional growth and transition, he is
simply being mindful before stepping into a new position for himself in the coming 2018-2019
school year.

Description of Educational Background

I love teaching, I think it is the best thing! I have been a teacher in some facet for the last
thirty-six years. I graduated from Washington University, not to be confused with “that other
one” as we call it (Washington State University). When I graduated from college I had a degree
in Elementary Education and my certification in Remedial Reading. Throughout my career in
education, I assumed many roles: hall monitor, substitute teacher, and classroom teacher. I have
taught in over twenty-five different schools, a lot of my movement within various school districts
was due to my following of a Principal that I really liked working for.
Entering the Local Union

When I began working in my state there were two different unions, the State Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers. My history with the union is kind of unique. I have had the opportunity to teach within the state when we had two separate unions, and I have had the opportunity to teach and work within the state when the unions have merged together. In working under both conditions, it was very obvious to me that the merger had led to a weaker and politically correct union. What I mean by that is the union became politically weaker favoring administration as opposed to the well-being of the union member. The merging of the unions urged me to step out of the classroom for a stint and become more active in our local, state, and national educational unions. At times, it is hard to remember if I am working for one union, two unions, three unions...I mean it gets ridiculous sometimes, and really it is all at the expense of the member. While we sort out who we are, our members are the ones paying the price.

Journey Within the Local Union

The union and I go way back. Actually, let me be more specific, the union and I go way, way back, thirty-six years back to be exact. I have been involved with the union for as long as I can remember. Let me think back to how it all started. Well, I began teaching remedial reading many years ago and was a union member as a teacher. During my time in the classroom I served on and off as our site building representative. It seemed that if teachers had a question about the contract or their rights, they would come to me. I loved serving in this role, however over the year’s other people would be interested in serving as the building representative and I would gladly let them take over the responsibility.
When I wasn’t serving as our site based union representative, I had more free time on my hands. Well, I wouldn’t really call it free time, but I was able to dabble in other union business. For instance, I was able to work as an Integration Program Worker that allowed me to work with pre-service teachers who were completing their internships. In this role, I was responsible for creating a cultural piece in the interning experience that would prepare our newest teachers to work with the diverse student population in our district upon their graduation from university. It was through my work with pre-service teachers, and being a member of the union, that I was able to go to Washington DC and work with the American Federation of Teacher’s national chapter. It was during my work with the national chapter that I was privileged to work on issues circulating around the inclusion GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender) students in the public-school classroom. During my time with the national caucus and involvement with pre-service teacher preparation, I was a member or the union...sometimes served as a site based building representative...but always a teacher as well.

During my politically active time in our state and national union, I was still considered to be a classroom teacher. They worked it out so that when I was gone I had a substitute of my choice in the classroom. I had a friend, who taught a lot like me, that I would have come in and cover my class. I guess you would consider it kind of like a job share position is now, but it wasn’t really that clean cut, you know what I mean? Like my schedule wasn’t Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and his was a Tuesday and Thursday type thing like they do now. Or I taught mornings and he taught afternoons, it wasn’t that predictable. Ours was more like when I was called to Washington DC to do work with the national caucus, or when there was big legislation on the horizon for the field of education, my role within the local and national union would increase and my friend would substitute for me. It was through my workings with the
national chapter of the union that I began to see that the local union within my district was often out of compliance with our national chapter. This was when I began making a name for myself with our local district as a means to protect our teachers.

**Advocacy Pursuits**

Advocacy, good grief do we ever need to have advocacy in our district. The contract in our district has been written in such a way that seemingly outlandish behaviors from students fall under the job responsibilities of being a teacher. Well, let me back track for a minute here. The current conditions, which are deplorable, in our district have come as an unintentional consequence from pieces of legislation passed under the Obama administration. Let me be the first to tell you, I am very much a supporter of the Obama administration and what they did for the country as a whole, however I am not a fan of what was done unintentionally in the field of education.

In our district, a study was done and it was found that an exponentially higher number of our African American students are disciplined for their behavior in school than our white students. Having a primarily white and older teaching force it began being portrayed as our teachers were racist and practicing white discipline. It was the desire of the district to change this perception, so as a result teacher job responsibilities were written in such a way that little to no teacher interventions could take place as a result of student behaviors in the classroom. For instance, a teacher cannot do anything to a student who throws a book or a desk in the classroom. It is the students right to remain in that classroom and have the opportunity to learn that day. Students can also not be sent home for having drugs or alcohol on them, even if they are underage or if the drugs are illegal. Students have the right to wait for the teacher in the parking lot after school and physically attack the teacher if they choose to do so. Even things like
fighting in the classroom we are not to involve themselves in the fight and they are not to try to
separate the students. We’ve almost had a teacher murdered as a result of a brutal attack by a
student.

This behavior of students and our steps away from practicing white discipline have been
very traumatic for our district. I have become more active again in our union as the rights of
teachers are being severely abused. In fact, one of the legal experts in our area called the
practices of our district an epidemic! When I stand up for teachers currently it is difficult
because like I said, their contracts are written in such a way that this behavior from students is
allowable. However, I have selected to continually make the media and newspapers around our
district aware of all of the unreported events happening within our school.

It began as a simple support group. I had a blog and I was looking for teachers who had
recently left our district as a result of the brutality of students or other unforeseen events that
occurred to them while teaching in our district. The group began as a place for teachers to get
support from one another and then blossomed to something else. I began posting stories on my
blog of reasons why teachers were leaving, the local news and newspapers began to contact me
and interview me as a means to get a sense of why teachers were leaving. I was surprised to see
how much recognition a simple blog had gotten me, but then I began to see the other
ramifications of being an advocate. To me, an advocate lets others know what is going on, what
is happening that is wrong that needs to be addressed.

My involvement with this blog and the local media began to impact me professionally. I
had not changed at all professionally, I was teaching the same, I had the same work ethic, I was
just running a support group for teachers. That is when my professional gag order came. At my
school site and in my district, I began to get targeted. I was simply standing up for people’s
rights. Then all of a sudden, my Superintendent and Principal targeted me. I was put on an improvement plan and on the course to be let go.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how former school-based educators (classroom teachers), who became teacher union representatives, frame their stories of mobility, leadership, advocacy, and barriers and supports affecting educator attrition. I studied three participants: Meghan, Catherine, and Randolph, all of whom were asked a series of interview questions that prompted raw stories of their professional lives. Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit narratives about their professional careers to this point, their beginnings with the local union and their vertical movement within the hierarchy of the union. I then analyzed the narrative data to create an understanding of union leadership as a non-traditional path of leadership studied within the field of education and how they use their current role within the union to advocate for the profession.

Overview of the Findings

The findings in the first portion of this chapter aim to answer the overarching research question of: How do former teachers enter and perform the role of teacher union representative? The narratives shared in response to this question represent the why behind an educator’s decision to step away from the district whether in a full or part time capacity and begin leading within their local union, which at times can work counter to the efforts of the district in which they are still employed. I explore the structure of the narratives including how participants...
sequence events, what keying techniques they use, as well as the themes that emerged from the narratives and how they link to the working conditions study by House (1981).

I first explore the role of the Union Representative as a whole and clarify the responsibility of the Union Representative. The literature base does not have a clearly defined description of the role of a Union Representative. I share the roles and responsibilities narrated by the participants in order to create a working definition of the role and add to the structure of the union compared to the structure I described in Chapter Two. I then explore how the concept of advocacy was defined by each participant.

The findings are: 1) Working conditions push educators to pursue union leadership, 2) Professional responsibilities of a Union Representative vary, 3) Issues for which Union Representatives involved the improvement of working conditions.

**Finding 1: Working Conditions Push Educators to Pursue Union Leadership**

In the interviews with each of the three participants, all individuals were very concise and precise about the moment in their professional lives when they decided to pursue the role of being a Union Representative. Each participant described a defining moment, one that shifted the trajectory of their career in a negative manner. At this professional crossroad, the participants turned to the union as a means of continuing their professional growth and broaden their sphere of influence within their respective districts. These defining moments have been linked back to the work of House (1981) which studied workplace conditions leading to educator attrition. However, before linking the shared narratives to the existing literature base, I examine each narrative for: plot, characters, and sequence of events in an effort to gain insight on participant structure of the narrative. After examining these elements of the participant’s narratives, I then
describe a theme of discrepancy that has convinced the educator’s involved in this study that serving as a Union Representative was the next step for them professionally.

The participants described their vertical growth within the union similar to that of a career ladder. The unions that they have become involved in have an established hierarchy that they became a part of the day they elected to be a member. From their experiences with the union as being a member they became aware of this hierarchy, and consequently opted to move up within this hierarchy as they were provided more leadership opportunities within the local union. As a result of various reasons, the individuals in this study elected to move up within the union and grow professionally in ways never afforded to them as a classroom teacher in their respective districts. While reasons for pursuing growth within the union varied from participant to participant, the actions of vertical growth within the local union was mirrored between participants.

In Table 4 below, each narrative is examined by elements of plot as a means to identify story telling techniques and structure used by each of the participants. The three narratives below aim to answer the research questions that make this study. While I sorted the narratives shared in response to the research questions in this study, it stands to note that this was not a task that could be easily differentiated. Essentially, many of the narratives shared had overlapping pieces of information, or could answer multiple research questions at a time. However, in the disaggregation of research, I found it helpful for tracking elements of plot and story to attempt to sort the narratives to have a beginning in which to identify structure. As a result, the narratives have been divided in an attempt to answer the research question and sub questions.

Table 4 encapsulates each of the three groups of narratives that were used in response to the overarching research question. The table is to be read across each row. When starting from
the left, the participant name is listed, across the top, the three groupings explained above have been used as a means to sort and make sense of the narratives shared as a result of this study. Beneath each of the narrative categories the plot is noted for each of the three major narratives shared in response to the research questions. Reflecting upon the components of plot was essential, as in narrative methodology the story shared becomes the data collected and analyzed. In learning more about the story-telling techniques of the participants, and how they elected to frame their story of transition I began to learn more about the working conditions both present and absent that prompted their story of mobility. Beside the components of plot, a time is noted. This is the time in the transcription that the plot or story element was introduced in the narrative by the participant. For the purposes of this timing, the beginning word of the narrative was counted as 0:00 and then I added up using the timing in the original interview transcription as it played in Dedoose. The times are noted in minute and seconds. Noting the time of each element of plot was influential in looking at the structure of the overall narrative and noting similarities and differences between the narrative storytelling techniques used by each of the participants.

It was through the identification of when elements of story were placed in the various narratives that I could begin to examine the components included within each narrative and determine the story structure and relationships that were used by each of the participants. In looking at the times contained within the table similarities can be seen in how the individuals paced their narratives and when the conflict, character introduction, and climax was shared verbally. These elements will then further be examined by keying techniques and character development.
Who is Involved in the Narrative

The use of characters in a story is critical as the character’s thoughts, actions and words continually push the story along from beginning to end. When listening to the stories shared by the participants, it was important to consider who had been included in the story, as well as who had been excluded. For the purposes of this study I did not directly ask the participants who had been left out of their narratives. I believe that their answers may have been biased in a sense that these narratives are being shared using their perception, which is often considered as reality. I have however noted in the table below, who was included, but very briefly in the story. The character that was presented in the story that little was known about; their thoughts and actions were not as developed as the other characters, this was the character that was essentially left out as little was known about their point of view. All characters are noted in the table below, in no particular order, however the forgotten character is noted below in italics.
I attempted to use conversational phrases during interviews with the participants, as clarifying techniques to find out more about these forgotten characters. Meghan and Catherine would often brush the clarifying questions aside, while Randolph provided me with literature to read prior to our interview as a means to have a working knowledge of what he was talking about in our session together. Randolph would frequently answer my conversational phrases by directing me back to what had been sent previously. While this was helpful and allowed me to learn more about his under developed characters, I did not consider being pointed in the direction of outside sources as counting for the participant giving an account for a forgotten character in the narrative shared. In either instance, the character that little was known about in the narratives remained as such, as none of the participants gave much thought to the conversational questions I posed in hopes of learning more about the characters noted below in italics. In reflecting upon the characters both included and forgotten in the narratives shared by participants, I began to understand how participant tone, working relationships between individuals, and actions of others contributed to the extent to which individuals were painted and portrayed in the overall narratives shared. When participants identified with another character they were much more developed than those characters with whom they did not agree with or see eye to eye with professionally.

Table 6. Characters in Narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Entering Local Union</th>
<th>Journey within Union</th>
<th>Advocacy Pursuits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meghan McGuiness</td>
<td>Self, District, Fellow Teachers at School Site, Former Administration, <em>Retiring Union Member</em></td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Self, <em>Coaches</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine Hughes</td>
<td>Self, Principal, Site Based Building Representative, Academic Coach, <em>Superintendent</em></td>
<td>Self, President, Vice President</td>
<td>Self, Accused Member, News Media, <em>Student</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sequence of Events

The sequences of events used in the narratives shared throughout this interview were all very common. The participants used a cause and effect type sequence when sharing their narratives during the interview session. In listening to the causal relationships between pieces of their narratives I was able to listen for statements where linkages were made from one portion of the narrative to another, and then a brief justification was given. I believe that the quick justifications shared by the participants were small glimpses into their sense making. In listening to the series of cause and effect instances that propelled the narrative forward, the larger structure was really that of a problem and solution format. In looking at Table 4, the critical timing of actions and details that moved the plot along are noted. However when assessing the narrative from the beginning of it being told, to the end of it being told, the series of cause and effect actions that take place between the characters within the narrative lead to an overall solution to the problem that was stated early in the narrative. In all of the narratives that the participants elected to share, the problem was always resolved by the end of the narrative. Overall, the
narratives were storied using problem and solution as the guiding focus in structuring the narratives.

**Keying Techniques**

Keys, are non-literal or make believe events that are not actually occurring in a narrative. In the narratives shared by participants, I listened closely to see if they used any of the five keys found in table 4 in their narratives. When framing the narratives in response to the interview questions posed, the participants used their personal construction of the happenings based on their primary framework of lived experiences. Their social constructions led to the incorporation of many human players in the story such as: union members, union presidents, principals, the President of the United States and the Secretary of Education. The regroundings key was observed often as motivations and reasoning behind character actions were only given from the vantage point of the participant. The participant’s perception of the other character(s) in regards to the specific incident, event, or happening within the narrative was taken as true as the other characters mentioned would not be considered for participants in the study. When participants shared their narratives using their personal construction of the narrative, pseudonyms were not used initially. When the participant was sharing the narrative, they used accurate dates, names, times, legislative bill numbers etc. It was not until I began asking clarifying questions that the participants became aware of member confidentiality and concerns about the research. It was then that I assured them that all identifiable information was removed in order to protect both themselves and the member from identification.

In the guided doings of the narratives, the participants simply shared what they saw, what they felt, and what was done to them. This was an interesting finding in the interviews. When looking at the role of the union representative you put your professionalism essentially on the
line for others. All participants shared instances in which “gag orders” were given for them from the district as a result of the member or educational practice that they were advocating for. The role of union representative requires many different capabilities of the individual. However, in the storied events of representation and serving as a union representative, the stories were all told from a first person point of view in which the participants never hinted at trying to put themselves in the shoes of the member, district, national chapter, etc.

The regroundings, or motivations for acting on behalf of a union member, or on behalf of the field of education were present in every narrative shared by the participants. The motivation was characterized by each union representative as making the educational profession a better place to work. While some described their motivation as creating wins, or fighting for professional rights, or the pursuit to clear ones name of slander, each union representative was determined to positively shape the field of education one educator at a time based on current and circumstantial needs that were being presented.

Themes that Emerged and Linkage to Literature

Henteges (2012) noted the importance of administration at a school site. The administration at a school site is considered to impact the overall culture and climate of a school, and in turn be the single most prominent reason that teachers give for staying at or leaving a specific school site. Meghan and Catherine listed the administration at their school site as a reason behind their professional mobility. Meghan was seemingly stunted in her career ladder and was not receiving professional growth and development under the tutelage of her current administration. Catherine on the other hand, believed her working relationship was fine with her administration until her trust was quickly blindsided leaving her on the defense. Both of these participants identified administration as a factor in their decision to pursue leadership within the
local union. Randolph, while he didn’t explicitly note administration as a factor in his narrative, his use of storytelling techniques implied that administration aided in his decision to continue his work within the union. For example, when he stated that he had received his professional gag orders, this was in response to an order given by his administration. As a result of this action, which he did not agree with, Randolph pursued his leadership within the union at a greater depth and became determined to advocate for his cause in seeming retaliation of his administrator’s actions.

I have created a table to present the data gathered in response to each participant’s narrative shared in response to why they decided to become a local union representative. The table is divided into three rows where each row is representative of a participant. In the first column, the participant’s name is listed. In the second column, the frequently used words by the participant has been tracked. For this particular question, I noted words that participants used several times in their narratives while describing their transition from the classroom and into the union. From their frequently used verbiage I then began to find themes in response to the narratives. The theme that emerged from their narratives was a theme of discrepancy. A working condition be it: emotional, appraisal, instrumental or informational was absent or being left unmet in the eyes of the participant thus prompting their professional mobility. Once the theme of discrepancy in perceived working conditions versus actual working conditions was decided upon, the narratives were then studied to identify the specific working conditions by House (1981) to see which conditions, if any, were present in the participants’ individual educational working environment and how these factors impacted their decision to move into the work of the union and are listed in the third column of the table below.
Meghan’s word choice created a discrepancy in her narrative; she would describe herself with words of advancement. She had advanced education and had recently completed her Doctorate, she was advanced in her career and had held many jobs within the field of education, she was advanced in her age and had a mature family with children who were now young adults. Despite her personal advancement, her professional career had halted as a strict hiring freeze was in effect for her district. When this information was shared in the narrative it linked to the working condition of emotional support. Meghan noted through her narrative a lack of respect and appreciation in her former position as she felt she was over qualified for the role that she was serving, this links to emotional support as described by House (1981). Through her narrative, it became clear that there was a discrepancy or misalignment between Meghan’s personal status and position and her professional title. This discrepancy ultimately led her to pursue other careers within her district. Meghan was experiencing a discrepancy with her appraisal support in her current condition (House, 1981).

Catherine brings a different tone to the participant pool. Her word choice was rather curt at times when describing previous working relationships with her district and administration. In the sharing of narratives, Catherine created a seeming us versus them mentality in her recollection of what prompted her to begin stepping out of the classroom and into the union. This lack of open communication and absence of trust shared in the narrative links to emotional support as described by House (1981). Catherine relied heavily on emotions in her story and began to hint at legalities and protecting the individuals who comprise the teaching force. It was through her perceived lack of knowledge in the beginning of her career that she is now prompted to serve in the union to ensure other educators are equipped with the knowledge of their rights. This links to informational support not being present in Catherine’s working conditions (House,
1981). Catherine had to independently pursue what she knew from prior experiences as what was best and did not have the support of her administration.

Randolph’s word choice was very poised, and direct. He relied heavily upon his knowledge of educational legislation and opportunities that have been presented to him throughout the course of his career to build his narrative of his transitions in and out of the classroom over his educational career. Randolph, unlike the other participants commonly steps in and out of the classroom and works with both the local and national union chapters. His decision to pursue the union more heavily at sometimes more than others shows Randolph’s belief in emotional support (House, 1981). When he begins to feel emotionally threatened he heavily pursues a role within the union. Given Randolph’s history with the union, he is very knowledgeable. As a result, he is able to provide himself with informational support (House, 1981) to continue moving his district forward as he hopes to better the working conditions for teachers in the classroom.

In looking at how the words were used in the overall context of the narrative, the theme of discrepancies was continually supported. As a result of working conditions not being present in the field of education, or not meeting the expectations of the participants, leadership roles within the union were pursued. The themes identified in each of the three narratives as reason given to transition from the classroom into a full or part time position representing teachers at the union level is once again linked to the research conducted by House (1981) that serves in the conceptual framework. This research considers conditions present and absent from the workplace, which define in an individual’s decision to pursue another profession.
Table 7. Reasons for Leaving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Word Choice (5 or more uses in narrative)</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Linkage to House</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meghan</td>
<td>Advanced education, no opportunity, next step professionally, career advancement</td>
<td>Discrepancy → personal and educational achievements and professional title</td>
<td>Emotional &amp; Appraisal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>Stupid, not a part of educational family, protocol, is it typical</td>
<td>Discrepancy → knowledge of rights and protection, knowledge of union procedures</td>
<td>Emotional &amp; Informational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randolph</td>
<td>Active, member, teacher, core network, politically correctness, weaker, support, gag order</td>
<td>Discrepancy → power and representation in the union versus protection of the member</td>
<td>Emotional &amp; Instrumental</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The conceptual framework used for this study focuses upon the current working conditions within the field of education. This system of supports and barriers ultimately serves to impact an educator’s decision to stay within the field or to leave. A study by House (1981) identifies four specific factors, that teachers describe as systems of support and lack thereof at the site based level.

House (1981) conducted a study called work stress and social support. During the study teachers were interviewed and asked about the level of support they received, and the impact this had on their decision to stay or leave their current job. These four categories used by House were again used in this study as a means to determine which components of support, or lack of support resulting in barriers, contributed to the educator’s decision to leave. The four components of support have been defined using the original descriptors used by House.

Emotional Support refers to administrators and colleague’s ability to show teachers that they are respected, trusted professionals and worthy of concern by maintaining open communication, showing appreciation, taking interest in teachers’ work, and considering teacher recommendations (House, 1981). All three of the participants noted an instance in which emotional support played into their decision to pursue leadership in the union. Catherine, in her story for leaving, noted the lack of emotional support from her administration as one of the
leading reasons why she pursued the current position she holds in the union. She noted he unethical actions of the administration being more than she could handle in her narrative for leaving the district in which she was employed. Meghan stated her emotional reactions to feeling stunted in her growth within her district as a hard freeze was on positions that would give her a higher title and salary. Randolph, noted his own personal struggles with working in his district.

Informational Support refers to providing teachers with information that they can use to improve classroom practices. For example, administrators provide opportunities for teachers to attend staff development, offer practical information about effective teaching strategies, and provide suggestions to improve instruction, classroom management skills and strategies to identify signs of stress and burnout and strategies to alleviate the stressors (House, 1981). Catherine noted in her reason for pursuing leadership opportunities in the union came as a result of not being properly informed of the educational practices in their district. She stated that it was because of her working knowledge of the business world and having had prior experience in Human Resources for a large company that she knew the ill-fated meeting with her administration and the Human Resources head in her district that day was not what should have been common practice(s). As a result, Catherine has made it a mission to inform and equip the members within her district of the safeguards the union has in place for educators and how the protection(s) offered by the union can aid in supporting the educator.

Appraisal support, as used in this study, referred to administrator’s responsibility to provide ongoing personnel appraisal. This support includes frequent and constructive feedback about job performance, current information and best practices that provide information about what contributes to effective teaching, and clear guidelines regarding job responsibilities (House, 1981). Meghan noted in her reasons for pursuing full time work at the union level that she was
not receiving the professional growth she felt she needed at her current school site. Given her dissatisfaction with appraisal support, Meghan began working under a new administration and hoped that her professional need of appraisal support would be met. When the new administration failed to meet her needs for growth, she began looking at positions outside of the district to fill the void. This is when a full-time union position became available to her.

Randolph noted Instrumental reasons, the fourth and final working condition noted by House (1981) as reasoning behind his extensive involvement with the union. Instrumental support is where Administrators as well as colleagues directly assist teachers with work-related tasks, such as providing necessary materials, space, and resource, ensuring adequate time for teaching and nonteaching duties, assisting teachers with parental difficulties, helping with managerial-type concerns, developing forum to support the day-to-day frustration of a teacher of students with difficulties and providing flexibility for consultation time (House, 1981). Randolph states over and over again the lack of support in place from his administration and colleagues in his school building as reasons to why he pursued leadership within the union. Randolph notes that the union and his district are very pro students and are against the rights of teachers. In hearing the narratives that Randolph shared of teachers getting beat up by students in the parking lot after school, a teacher being left with permanent brain damage due to an attack by a student, and a student being tried for the murder of their teacher, instrumental supports are not in place within his school or district to support the educator. To further depict the lack of instrumental support that is present in the district, these stories have been kept out of the news by district officials and Randolph and other teachers have had to turn to social media, blogs, and other mediums to begin spreading awareness of the unethical treatment of teachers within the district.
The reasons stated by participants for pursuing their current role within the union echoed those found by House (1981), namely that poor working conditions is associated with increased rates of attrition from the field by educators. Attrition rates continue to plague school districts across the nation, and four contributing factors to an educator’s decision to leave have been backed by literature for twenty-seven years, yet the flight from the classroom remains the same.

**Finding 2: Professional Responsibilities of a Union Representative Varied**

This study set out to gain an understanding of the role of Union Representative. Essentially, I was interested in learning the various roles and responsibilities that are required of these individuals as defined by their local union. I believe that I was really in search of finding a job description for these individuals and then seeing through the sharing of their narratives how this description looks in the flesh on a day to day basis with the growth and demands of each of their individual districts.

In Chapter Two, Figure 4 served as a baseline visual to address the typical organizational structure of local unions across the United States. This figure served to illustrate what had been found in the literature about the structure of American Educational Unions. As the figure shows, much was known about the roles and responsibilities of the Union President, and less was known about the day to day activities and responsibilities of the union representative. It was through the sharing of narratives and asking participants to share how they entered and performed their role as a union representative that more has been learned about the responsibilities of this position.

The participants in this study all mentioned that being a classroom teacher really prepares you for the job of a Union Representative in a sense that the only thing you can really expect is the unexpected. Meghan put it best when she stated that Union Representatives are like the teacher and the members become like the students. You know that the phone in your office is
going to ring with a concern, or you know full well that when you visit this school site in the afternoon a member is going to approach you with a problem or dilemma, it is just to what extent will you need to use your resources provided by the union to meet the needs of the member.

Another way that the role of the Union Representative is similar to that of a classroom teacher is the calendar. Union Representatives are present each and every day of the school year. In the beginning of the year when schools are holding their Back to School gatherings, unions are preparing Welcome Back treats for members as well as scheduling recruitment opportunities for new hires and non-members. The participants in this story noted that they almost look forward to the times in which standardized testing is in its height as it gives them an opportunity to have their members primarily consumed with testing and they can pay attention to the current legislative session and what may be coming out in terms of educational laws and the impact the proposals could have on the local districts. The participant’s all noted that their schedule mirrors that of the classroom teacher. However, when standardized testing begins teachers often file less grievances with the union as the work day is very scripted in an effort to provide required testing environments. The participants also note that over the summer when school is out of session they use their time to focus not as much on immediate needs of the members, but rather to become well versed in what is coming down the legislative pike and seeing how as a union they can prepare to take a stance with or against their district and school board.

While learning about the schedule and demands of a Union Representative was very helpful in gaining a continued understanding of the position, I still needed to know more about the overall hierarchy of the union, and how the role of Union Representative linked to the larger bureaucratic nature of the local union. The participants cooperated with my desire to know more
about their positions and consequently began creating the union hierarchy that exists below the role of the union representative, this has been illustrated and defined in Figure 5.

The hierarchy of positions below was created as a result of listening to participant’s narratives regarding the structure of their local unions. The lowest title within the union is listed to the left, and the titles gain in prominence as you move to the right. The following working definitions of the terms have been created as a result of the participant interviews.

*Union Member* refers to all instructional and support staff that is represented and protected under the contracts within the local teacher union. These individuals are who the local union negotiates on behalf of and represents. The unions in this study ranged from having 3,000 to 12,000 union members.

*Building Representative* refers to the individual who is the point of contact for the union at each individual school site. The Building Representative serves to update school based union members on the local happenings within the union and to keep the local members updated with local and national legislation and movements as provided by the local union. This individual also serves as a point of contact for members who feel their union rights are being violated. It is the building representative who represents members in administrative meetings, and it is also the building representative who reaches out to the Area Representative and Governing Board of the local union should member rights be called into question.

*Area Representative* refers to individuals who are over the site based Building Representatives. The Area Representative is not tied to a single school, but rather represents an area of their local school district. There are fewer Area Representatives than Building Representatives. Area Representatives are the first level within the hierarchy in which the individual has the opportunity to fully leave the classroom.
*Union Governing Board* is the Governing Board of the Union and are the local officers that have been voted in by their members to represent the local union. These Governing Officials are often full time union representatives that attend state and national conferences and conventions as a means to stay informed of the political happenings in the field of education, and ensure that their local chapter is in compliance with state and national regulations.

![Diagram of hierarchy of roles](image)

Figure 5. Participant Created Hierarchy of Roles within Local Union

Placing the participants on the continuum above was very important for me as a researcher to ensure that I fully understood where these individuals are placed and how they contribute to the overall workings of their local union chapter. In speaking to the participants it was essential to understand the full hierarchy of their local union, and see where exactly the union representative fell within the overall organization. In the literature review, the Governing Board, which is above the union representatives, was established. In the findings, the role of the union representative is fully explored. Figure 5 serves to the roles and members below the union representatives who are in contact with the union representatives, and the individuals whom the union representatives stated they take responsibility to representing. Meghan and Randolph serve in the role of Area Representative, though their roles differ slightly based on the composition of their local union chapters. Catherine is currently serving on the Union Governing Board of her local union, as she is the current President.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

Union representative’s duties include both local and national roles and responsibilities. The following job responsibilities have been organized in the table below. While all participants
have noted this list is not exhaustive, but rather what they could recall having done in their current roles, or roles they have held within the union in the past. Each participant described the role as union representative as being very flexible and fluid. For instance, in their job descriptions, a vague clause such as: in addition to assigned duties is included. This allows the union to use these representatives creatively and flexibly as a means to accomplish the agenda of the local union. The lists below have been ranked by the frequency in which the job responsibility has been mentioned by each of the participants in their narrative accounts of their preparation and transition into the role of being a local union representative.

Table 8. Local and National Responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Union Responsibilities</th>
<th>National Union Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Filing grievances</td>
<td>• Attend national conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mediation</td>
<td>• Attend meetings/webinars regarding coming legislation and the impact at the local level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Membership recruitment and retention</td>
<td>• Serve on national committees and organizations within the union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Organizing local member recruitment fairs</td>
<td>• Create partnerships with other unions within the geographic area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Holding meetings</td>
<td>• Work with the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Training new building representatives</td>
<td>• Support neighboring unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Problem solving and creating favorable outcomes for our members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In reflecting upon the way in which the role and demands of a Local Union Representative was defined by each of the participants, they were all very similar. One key difference that was noted in the role by each of the participants is the amount of time they spend working in that roll on a daily basis. Meghan is a full-time member of the union that has stepped away from the classroom completely and now earns her eight hours a day of pay solely by
serving the Union. Catherine, who serves as her Union President is a full-time classroom teacher. Her time spent with the union occurs during school hours in addition to her job as a classroom teacher. This leaves Catherine busy in the afternoon and evening once school has let out ensuring that she is meeting the needs of members and that systems are in place for member support.

In listening to the narratives shared by each of the participants, Figure 4 can now be completed with the addition of the major components that make up the role of Union Representative. Below the figure, each role is further defined in response to the narratives shared.

Figure 6. Roles and Responsibilities of a Local Union Representative.

**Membership**
When asking each participant about the roles and responsibilities of a Union Representative, much of the narratives centered around current efforts that are being done in their respective unions as a means to gain members. The membership work described by the participants included holding recruitment fairs at the beginning of the year as new educators enter the district. The hope of the local union is to serve as a source of support for new educators who are not accustomed to the high levels of demand that come with the teaching profession (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Johnson, 2006). The participants in this study also mentioned holding multiple retention fairs throughout the year to keep current members interested in the union. These retention fairs, as they were often termed, consisted of some sort of social hour or cocktail hour where members could meet with one another in a relaxed setting and discuss current issues. The local union has become well versed in meeting the needs of the multigenerational workforce that currently makes up the population of American educators (Heineke, Streff, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014). Membership in the union is being pushed as unions across the state are being threatened with being decertified as a result of not having more than half of eligible employees included in their membership (Solochek, 2018). In other words, both Meghan and Catherine, the Florida Union Representatives were very aware of their statistical figures within the district pertaining to their total members. These two representatives face the danger of having their unions decertified should House Bill 7055 pass as neither union had close to 51% of the educators employed in their district as part of the union.

**Relationship Building**

Educational Unions, from the very start, have had their influence over the profession stunted. From the passage of the New Deal legislation by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, to the Wagner Act of 1935, union rights and power over the profession has been continually limited
(Scribner, 2015). Educators, one of the last sectors to be provisioned under the protection of a union, did not occur until decades after the establishment of many of the national trade and laborer unions (Scribner, 2015). As a result of educational unions being essentially late in their establishment, it is no wonder that their professional jurisdiction has been severely limited in comparison to the unions that were established in prior decades.

Meghan and Catherine both noted their extensive efforts to join with local Police and other First Responder Unions to build the strength of local hero unions as they called them. Often first responders and educators are given discounts and perks within the community for the work that they do. Meghan and Catherine also stated how they reach out to other neighboring unions around them to build a working relationship. When asked the purpose of building relationships with neighboring unions both within and outside of the field of education the participants replied that there is power in numbers. When unions partner together the numbers of one union can stand behind the other union when they are in need. For instance, with HB 7055 and other controversial legislation that has or will come up for a vote, the unions will side together. This strengthens the power of the union according to the participants as more pull is given at the polls. As a result of having a seemingly smaller political influence, the participants in this study noted their efforts to build relationship with other neighboring unions as a means to grow their strength and influence locally (Johnson et al., 2009).

Creating Win/Win Solutions

All participants in this study noted their desire to create win/win solutions for their members and other parties involved in various mediation pursuits. The union representatives that participated in this study are the self-proclaimed front runners of the mediation process at it pertains to their members. When a member of the union is faced with a professional problem,
they have two options in front of them for next steps. The member may call upon the guidance of their site based representative to take next steps and receive advice; or the member may call upon the aid of the union representative. In either instance one or both individuals will be there to see the member through the mediation process and provide guidance to the member as needed (Torres, 2016).

If the situation should escalate in such a manner that legal support is needed for the member, the union representative would go through the necessary steps to ensure the member is paired with a union provided lawyer for the remainder of their meditation. In all cases, no matter the cause for mediation, the union representatives in this study emphasized the desire to create a win/win solution for their member and the administration, or district entity having fault brought against it. The representatives noted the importance of maintaining a positive relationship between the district and the members as this positive working relationship comes to aid when the Union President and Governing Board must sit at the table for negotiations with the District for whatever the case may be.

Training

Each of the participants in this study noted the amount of time that they spend in training or professional development as they continue to grow into their role in the local union. The trainings that the union representatives attend are often hosted by the national chapters of the NEA and AFT as a means to provide learning that can be applied at the level of the local union. Much of the training that they have received pertains to the mediation process, member rights, and sessions discussing the ins and outs of the current legislation that could or will be coming down the pike for education (Picower, 2013).
In addition to attending training and taking part in professional development activities, the union representatives are also responsible for providing trainings as a part of their job. A very important part of being a union representative, as noted by a majority of the participants, is training the building representatives and stewards who are new to their position and role. Ensuring that the training provided for various levels of the union leadership is essential for the continued success and stability of the union. Representatives noted their constant push to ensure the trainings were hands on for the learners and relevant for their daily tasks (Jensen, 2012). Ensuring that the leaders beneath them have adequate training to perform their site based roles is essential as the site based representatives and stewards were defined by the participants as a front line of defense in providing members rights and guidance.

**Finding 3: Issues for Which Union Representatives Advocated Involved the Improvement of Working Conditions**

Local teacher unions respond to the district working conditions and the impact legislation has on educators, daily through their advocacy pursuits. For the purposes of this study, advocacy has been used to describe the causes and work an advocate participates in. Advocacy is the literal act of the individual advocate interceding on behalf of others. Advocacy can take on a variety of causes, and may be described slightly different from one advocate to the next. This was seen in this study, as Meghan and Catherine had distinctly different definitions for advocacy. Meghan equated advocacy to winning and Catherine described advocacy more as fighting for what is right for students, the educator, and the profession. Randolph defined advocacy similar to Catherine however he focused on advocacy for the educator and profession as he stated that there was a large imbalance between the rights of educators’ and the rights of students.
When speaking with Randolph, his narrative of advocacy was different. He looked at subgroups within student and teacher populations and was compelled to step away from the classroom to advocate for groups of people at a time. Meghan and Catherine both referred more to advocacy for the individual. Randolph’s narrative of advocacy was markedly different from the other two by the way(s) in which he chose(s) to advocate. Meghan and Catherine described an advocacy technique that followed the regulations of their local unions. They relied heavily upon complaints of members to determine which causes to advocate and then began to focus on making changes in those areas. Randolph actively pursues an advocacy topic. He relies upon current educational events and legislation to focus his advocacy pursuits. He then begins by pursuing individuals who have been impacted and learning their story. With the use of small group support style meetings, and blogging he takes a rather organic movement and draws public attention to the cause (Dunsmore, 2015). Randolph’s use of advocacy techniques vary from the traditional path of grievance and representation followed by most unions in the continental United States.

Roberts and Siegle (2012) created the three P’s of advocacy framing: purpose, preparation, and persistence. Through their study, if purpose, preparation, and persistence is taken into account when advocating, then the advocacy work has a greater likelihood of being successful when presented to an audience or forum for the cause/issue being pursued. All of the participants had varied perceptions of the success of their advocacy pursuits. However, each in their own sense worked through each of the P’s. The table below breaks apart the shared narrative into the P’s as suggested by Roberts and Siegle (2012).

In listening to the narratives shared by the participants, only one of the three participants used methods similar to the 3P’s for their advocacy pursuits within their union work. Randolph
was the only participant who strayed from the union supports and guidelines for member support
to pursue and craft advocacy for groups of people that were important to him, and also for
himself.

Table 9. Three P’s of Advocacy in use in Local Unions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Preparation</th>
<th>Persistence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meghan</td>
<td>To have teachers financially compensated for trainings required to maintain professional title being held on the weekend</td>
<td>Review of contract language and district decision to implement required trainings</td>
<td>Continued discussion with District to find funding sources for individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>To represent a teacher falsely accused of inappropriate relations with a student</td>
<td>Face to face meeting with teacher to learn of accusation</td>
<td>Continued meetings with member to support and encourage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establish legal representation of local union on behalf of member</td>
<td>Keep member abreast of progress in legal hearings and next steps</td>
<td>Contend with media and speak on behalf of member as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randolph</td>
<td>Responding to teacher brutality as required by contract in response to combatting white disciplinary practices</td>
<td>Familiarized self with Obama legislation, read contract verbiage, and relied upon professional contacts to establish small support group</td>
<td>Utilized existing blog that already had reader traffic to push the stories of teachers, the popularity grew and local news media gained interest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first P is the purpose for advocating. When stating a purpose it is critical that the
union representative construct a clear goal for how the advocacy work will look. Randolph did
this when he set his purpose to be having a union that was pro member as opposed to pro
administration. He stated that the union currently has their practices backwards in their district
right now. As it stands, the union partners very closely with the administrators within the school
district. While this seems like a rather large feat, turning a union into a pro member organization, Randolph again narrowed his purpose. Randolph stated that his desire was to get the teacher contract renegotiated to read in favor of the educator (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Currently, the physical abuse that the teachers are having to endure in the district as a result of students has been written into the job description of educators in the district. Randolph’s purpose was to rewrite the job descriptions as noted in teacher contracts and used by Human Resources in his district.

Regarding preparation, information and research were key factors in the success of participants’ advocacy work. It is through preparation that the union representative collects data that supports the requests for change to be made (Roberts & Siegle, 2012). Randolph prepared for his advocacy pursuits by creating a small support group for teachers who had been physically abused by students in the district and consequently decided to leave the profession. It was through his meetings with this small support group that he began to learn more about the types of physical abuse that was happening to teachers, and the frequency at which teachers were having to endure this abuse. This small group afforded Randolph to collect data and build relationships with his targeted audience of abused teachers who have left the profession. He then began to prepare for his next step, making his purpose public. It is through relationships that support, and ultimately change occurs (Roberts & Siegle, 2012). In order to begin pushing for change, Randolph turned to social media and the Internet to gather a following. He began a blog that shared the stories of what educators’ in his district had to endure professionally as a means to keep their employment (Dunsmore, 2015). It wasn’t long after his blogs began getting read that Randolph began receiving calls from the local news stations or interviews as the media was beginning to take interest in what he was presenting.
The third and final P is persistence. Advocacy is a continual process that relies heavily upon interpersonal relationships and various forms of communication. In the pursuit of advocacy, it is undoubted that there will be roadblocks to overcome, as a result Roberts and Siegle (2012) suggest that those who are called to advocate take on the warrior mentality. Randolph most certainly took on the warrior mentality when pursuing a change of job descriptions for teachers in his district. His workings with the union, and the growing popularity of his blog made him a target at work. Randolph, a veteran teacher, who had always received high markings on his evaluations was now receiving less than satisfactory markings and was placed on an action plan noting areas for improvement. When speaking to administration and district officials as to why the drastic changes in markings were happening now, he received little feedback other than his teaching practices needed to improve. As an individual reflecting, Randolph stated time and time again that nothing about his teaching practices had changed. He had not regressed or began to take up practices that were not considered best. Rather, he believes the plan for improvement came in response to the attention he was getting by taking teacher’s stories and making them public for the local news media to see. It was during this phase of persistence that Randolph found the Superintendent to be his biggest hurdle to successful advocacy. It was through focused and purposeful consideration that Randolph began to combat actions of the Superintendent that were being made against him personally. The assault on his teaching through unfair evaluations and action plans would no longer be accepted by Randolph. As he demanded more feedback and spoke about his own story on his blog an investigation began on the Superintendent. It was through the sharing of his own story and through his own persistence that the Superintendent was eventually removed from their duties. When this occurred, Randolph felt that he had created a win in his district.
While the abuse of teachers is still occurring, and the job descriptions have not changed to date, new leadership is in the district and Randolph believes that in and of itself is a foundational next step for change. New eyes coming into the district may be more vigilant in seeing the problem with the current position description teachers are having to fulfill.

Purpose, preparation, and persistence are words that should continually spiral through the mind of a local teacher union representative. Applying the three P’s of advocacy is a thoughtful and time consuming pursuit. However, as Randolph has shown and shared through his narrative, successful advocacy for educators is possible. I feel that a fourth P of patience would be appropriate to add to the advocacy work that Roberts and Siegle (2012) present. Randolph seemed to understand the time it takes to make a large change or impact in his district. In speaking to Meghan and Catherine, advocacy was a win, but the wins they mentioned were often very fast paced. Having multiple advocacy pursuits open at once, with some being resolved faster than others should be the goal of a local union representative.

When pursuing advocacy opportunities within the field of education, local union representatives are tasked with presenting and framing their ideas in such a way that the educators within the field, as well as district leaders and school board members understand the change they are hoping to enact. When a union representative begins advocacy work, it is essential that they remember to frame advocacy work around purpose, preparation, and persistence so that one is able to successfully advocate on behalf of educators/education (Roberts & Siegle, 2012).

Meghan, Catherine and Randolph all noted in their narratives that the advocacy work they pursue often takes months and sometimes years to settle (Dunsmore, 2015). However, if they show unwavering persistence in their advocacy pursuits, they can and will be successful.
Catherine noted in one brief narrative that while representing a teacher during a large media scandal, the teacher stepped down. She stated that as a union representative you need to make sure to represent the right members in your pursuit, some individuals do not have the resilience high profile cases require to see it out until the end. This was an example in which the pursuit of advocacy came to a sudden closure as the member whose rights were being advocated for could not take the drawn-out timeline, which is often typical of advocacy pursuits.

Purpose, preparation, and persistence are important words for local teacher union representatives if they want their advocacy efforts to be effective. While remembering the three P’s of advocacy is relatively simple, these words need to become engrained in advocates as a means to continually shape, pursue, and change the elements of curriculum that are not current serving as what is best for students. Having a strong network of support helps those who pursue advocacy work to feel support while they work towards successful advocacy pursuits. All of the participants relied upon their prior knowledge or existing supports within the union as a foundation on which to pursue advocacy.

**Framing Their Story: Leaving for Leading**

The participants in this story framed their narratives overall in a problem and solution format. Each narrative began with a problem in place and then through a series of smaller cause and effect relationships between the characters involved in the narratives, a solution was reached. In all but one of the narratives shared a win/win solution was achieved. In listening to the narratives and coding the responses given by the participants, there was a quest mentality to their storied events.

A quest is defined as a search for something. The participants in this study were continually searching for: balance in their position, meeting the needs of members, and meeting
the demands equitability of their union members and union governing board. While each participant noted different management techniques to meet the demands of the profession, none of the participants reported being completely satisfied with their performance in their current role. This is where the quest mentality of the participants comes into play.

The participants in this study have voluntarily opted to pursue leadership at the union level despite the known risks and professional blackballing that can occur when leading from within a union. The working relationships between the unions in this study and their corresponding school districts were rocky at best. The participants however continually stood up against the resistance of the district and members whom they were representing and continue to seek better working conditions and treatment of educational professionals.

While the participants merely reported their narratives in a problem and solution format, I believe that the single instances of creating wins for union members and educators as a whole translated into a quest mentality in which the union representatives are seemingly chivalrously seeking betterment of the profession and working conditions across their district at times to the determent of self, these union representatives take on almost a heroic stance as they stand to professionally sacrifice their namesake, and time for the continued betterment of their district(s).

The quest mentality can also be linked backed to the continued desire to create a zero-sum relationship between teaching conditions and student learning (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011). To simply state that there is a zero-sum balance between teaching conditions and student learning in the field of education insinuates that each side of the equation, teaching conditions and student learning, are given equal protection and chances for advancement. However, in response to listening to the narratives shared by the participants, and by following current legislation at the state and federal level, teaching conditions are continually compromised and
overlooked for the continued learning of students. I believe that these participants, through their work within their respective unions are on a quest to right size or balance the teaching conditions and student learning into a true zero-sum relationship that has yet to be created in their districts and states.

As long as the imbalance between teaching conditions and student learning exists, highly qualified teachers will continue to leave the profession at alarming rates. When teacher success in the field is directly linked to levels of student achievement, and decisions of whether to renominate a teacher’s contract are carried heavily by evaluations that bear significant weight on student standardized test scores, the field of education in and of itself is essentially pushing the most highly qualified teaching candidate out the door of the profession, and encouraging professional mobility of our most dedicated educators.

Teachers are continually forced to perform at high levels in the classroom despite being plagued by constant budget cuts and changes to levels of support. Educators are forced to produce the same levels of student learning with less resources, less instructional support personnel, and less administrative and mentor support as on-boarding programs become targets of re-deployment efforts to offer coast saving opportunities. The literature presents the idea of a symbiotic relationship between teaching and working conditions that is necessary for the continued success of the educational field. However, the same working conditions that have been known for over one hundred years continually plague teachers with the demands for student learning and measures of student success continue to grow (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011). Until this relationship between working conditions and student achievement is put in a true zero-sum relationship, educators will continue to mobilize within and out of the field of education.
Balancing this equation is the quest placed before the American Union Representatives as they continually strive to positively impact the field of education.

**Summary of Findings**

The driving why behind the educator’s decision based on the data collected was that a discrepancy in perceived working conditions versus actual working conditions existed in their professional life. The working conditions in their current assignment were less than satisfactory. As a result, the educators pursued union work to not only fill a personal professional void they were experiencing, but also to aid in the satisfaction of the working environment and climate of their members that they represent.

The second finding addressed the job description and responsibilities that are fulfilled by local union representatives. In listening to the shared narratives and identifying themes, local union representatives serve to: build the membership capacity of the union, build relationship with neighboring unions and districts, create win/win situations in mediations, and provide training to leaders new to the union at the site based level as well as attend trainings offered by the National union chapters to continually grow themselves within their position and gain continued familiarity with the overarching expectations of the union.

The third and final finding addressed who unions advocate for. Unions advocate for their members, for the profession, and for the betterment of education as a whole. While the methods of advocacy used, and the cause may vary greatly from one union to the next, all of the representatives expressed that their hope for their advocacy work is to leave a situation or a scenario better than it had been previously. The pursuit of advocacy can often be long and labor intensive, but all representatives expressed pride in their work in their districts and shared their accomplishments in response to the individualized advocacy pursuits.
Limitations of the Study

The study had two overarching limitations, which were the timeline set for the study, and the number of participants that took part in the study. The timeline set for this study was one calendar year, lengthening future studies would be beneficial. The recruitment process began in March 2017 with the intent to begin interviews by April or May at the latest. Unexpectedly, the recruitment process took a total of three to four months to recruit the three participants. With a longer recruitment period, and a small number of participants, this becomes a limitation of the study. Fifty potential participants were contacted via email, however only three agreed to participate. In addition to the timeline of the study, the initial design of the study was a limitation as well. The three participants noted an interest in participating in the study but the series of three bi-weekly interviews was too time consuming for their schedules. As a result, the three interviews were condensed into a single interview, which included three distinct phases that mirrored the original design of the study. In addressing this limitation of the study, it would be beneficial in future studies to begin the recruitment in the fall or winter. Many of the union representatives that were included in the potential sample noted that they were going on vacation during the summer and consequently were not interested in participating in the study. I believe if the study followed the academic calendar of the districts involved, greater participation would be seen.

The second limitation of the study addresses the number of participants that took part in the study. A total of three participants agreed to participate in this study. The participants noted that their schedules were very busy and elected to hold a single interview that lasted between one and a half to two hours. The scheduling of the interviews became a limitation as I believe that having multiple interviews over a series of months would have allowed the relationship between
the researcher and the participants to grow and mature. Furthermore, I believe that the scheduling of interviews over time would strengthen the data as narratives shared over time may become stronger with the use of more explicit details, imagery, comparison etc. However, due to the demands of the participants the single interview format was implemented.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how former school-based educators (classroom teachers), who became teacher union representatives, frame their stories of mobility, leadership, advocacy, and barriers and supports affecting educator attrition. The overarching research question was: How do former teachers enter and perform the role of teacher union representative? The overarching research question was crafted in hopes that the three participants would share narratives of their transition from the classroom into the role of the local union representative. The two sub questions that supported the overarching question were: How do they story their transition from teaching students to representing teachers? How do they frame the responsibility of teacher unions and teacher union representatives to advocate? Through the sub questions I had hoped to gain insight on how union representatives were prepared to meet the demands of their job and how does the union, as well as the individual representative, define and go about constructing advocacy pursuits.

While the three participants in this study, at one time or another, contributed to the attrition statistics in their district and state, none have left the field of education. In having learned more about the role of local educational unions and the role of the union representative I have also gained an increased awareness of opportunities for teacher leadership, mobility within and out of the field of education, and advocacy that was seen through a series of narratives told by the participants.
There were three major findings in response to this study: 1) Working conditions push educators to pursue union leadership, 2) Professional responsibilities of a Union Representative vary, and 3) Issues for which Union Representatives advocate involved the improvement of working conditions. First, each of the participants noted discrepancies existed in their professional that pushed them to pursue union leadership roles. They reached a point to where they could no longer work happily within their current working conditions, and consequently reached out to the union for continued professional growth. Second, the job description and responsibilities fulfilled by local union representatives varied. The participants worked to build the membership capacity of the union, build relationships with neighboring unions and districts, create win/win situations in mediations, and provide training both for themselves and for new leaders. Third, the participants advocated for their members, for the profession, and for the betterment of education as a whole. While the exact method and means of advocacy are unique to each union, the desire of the participants to make working conditions better within the field was a shared vision of all the union representatives and unions that were included in this study.

Implications of the Findings

Ingersoll (2001) states that schools across America are not plagued teacher retention problems based on a shortage of qualified teaching candidates. Rather, American schools are plagued with staffing and retention problems because qualified teachers are leaving the teaching sector in pursuit of other careers. Having completed a study that addresses the structure of American teacher unions, and the job responsibilities of the union representatives, the question remains, to what extent does unionism curb educator attrition from the field of education for both veteran and novice teachers. Han (2016) states that teachers in districts with higher union densities are more likely to remain in the teaching profession. Research shows that union
collective bargaining practices have the potential to reduce teacher attrition by 3% (Han, 2016). While union practices have been shown to have a minimal impact on an educator’s decision to stay within the field of education, unions do address the ailments found within the educational system that often results in the most qualified teachers leaving the profession.

**Pursuit of Leadership with the Local Union**

Union leadership, as expressed by the participants in this study is often seen as very controversial or highly contingent. The union representatives in this study went so far as to say that gag orders were placed on them professionally when they begin to take up causes that were of concern to members. Local union representatives are called to take up educational advocacy in their day to day working. Educational advocacy can be described as a lonely road that educational leaders travel while risking professional persecution and legal ramifications if they do not conduct themselves accordingly. While there are many cases that exhibit successful advocacy practices, there are just as many or more cases that display actions taken against union representatives and educational leaders in seeming retaliation for advocacy practices.

*Reinhardt v. Albuquerque Public Schools Board of Education* (Alexander & Alexander, 2012) is an exemplar case of successful teacher advocacy. Here, a speech and language pathologist advocated for students by taking on the role of a concerned citizen. When Ms. Reinhardt made multiple complaints to school administrators about receiving inaccurate caseloads of students, she was shocked when no response was given. Feeling that her students were suffering as a result of not being serviced to meet their individualized educational needs, Ms. Reinhardt took it upon herself to pursue legal action to benefit her students. In the end, the courts ruled in favor of Ms. Reinhardt stating that she was protected under the First Amendment and was not speaking ill of her job. Her job description entailed providing speech services to her
students and she was advocating for her students as a result of being denied services protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). As a result, the caseloads were corrected, Ms. Reinhardt was allowed to keep her job as a speech and language pathologist, and her students began receiving the necessary services they needed for educational success. Cases like this that work in favor of the educational rights of students and uphold the rights of teachers is ultimately what unions and union representatives long to be a part of as a means to push professional best practices for students and staff within the field of education.

Unfortunately, the Reinhardt v. Albuquerque Public Schools Board of Education case is one of few that rule in favor of educators who are pursuing advocacy for their students and education as a profession. Not all cases support advocacy or speaking out in the workplace, especially when one is a public employee. One of the most famous whistleblowing cases is Garcetti v. Ceballos. This landmark case decided that a public official or employee may exercise freedom of speech only when speaking as a private citizen, not while they are on official duties. This case impacts educational advocacy greatly. Teachers are viewed as public employees and officials. If a teacher pursues advocacy issues using their formal role of teacher as opposed to that of a concerned citizen, their job can be placed in danger and they can ultimately be terminated.

Personnel Today conducted a study between five hundred and eighty-three Human Resource Employees and five hundred and twenty-four Union Representatives as a means to check the pulse of the relationship between union representatives and employers. Of those who participated in the survey, 92% of the union representatives reported that they think their career prospects have been damaged by their title and involvement with the union. While this number was astounding, almost 40% of the Human Resource employees interviewed agreed that the
careers of the Union Representatives have been stunted as a result of their union affiliation and title.

In reflecting upon judicial decisions, as well as studies conducted polling union leaders on their perception of working relationships, the data collected in this study yields findings. Each of the participants stated multiple times in their narratives that they had been pressured or targeted in their career with the union as a result of their advocacy work. Randolph stated he received his “gag order”, Meghan stated that she felt professionally stunted in the district and consequently went to the union for more leadership and growth opportunities, and Catherine stated that she continually feels targeted as a result of her leadership in the union.

The statistics in this study are startling, and the information shared by participants in this study agrees. Holding the job of a union representative can at times be a professional sacrifice of your career while you take a noble stance to represent your colleagues in the field and continually push practice. The call to be a Union Representative is a noble one that comes with its fair share of conflicts and risks. After completing this study, I feel it is important to know your union representatives and to appreciate the professional and personal sacrifices they are willing to make for the profession as a whole.

All of the participants in this study were considered to be veteran teachers as they had all been teaching for six or more years. According to Borman & Dowling (2008), veteran teachers who are female, white, and married are more likely to leave the classroom. This was not seen in this particular study. However, Borman & Dowling (2008) also state that veteran teachers who work within special education, teach math or science, or work at urban schools with large numbers of poor, minority students are more likely to exit the profession. This was seen in Meghan during the study. Her background in her district was with special education and working
with students who were going to be aged out of the public school system. Meghan was the only participant within the study that truly contributed to the overall attrition statistics for her district. The other two participants held a hybrid role within their district.

Catherine and Randolph are both still tied to the classroom in addition to their work with the local union. Teacher leadership is gaining credibility in the field of education as the impact of moving educational practices forward with teacher leadership is being seen time and time again (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998; Smylie, 1995; Wasley, 1991). Catherine and Randolph would be considered formal teacher leaders that contribute to the overall improvement of the working conditions within their schools and districts (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2010; Muijs, Chapman, & Armstrong, 2013; Nolan & Palazzolo, 2011). Both participants have the opportunity to impact student achievement levels in the classroom, as well as create better working conditions within their districts as a result of their formal leadership roles within their union.

Traditional definitions of teacher leadership rely heavily upon the work of Leithwood and Mascall (2008). The role has been defined as a teacher who spends half of the instructional day in the classroom, and the other half of the day performing and working in a specific leadership role in the school. I believe that Randolph and Catherine are teacher leaders though they do not fit under the traditional definition. They were teaching a full day in the classroom and then spending their personal time attending to union matters. This arrangement still gave the participants a 50/50 split of classroom time and leadership opportunities to impact the overall working conditions; which are not confined to the typical hours of a school day.

**Professional Responsibilities of a Union Representative**

The National Education Association boasts that teachers are members of the largest professional union in the United States, far out-weighing the membership in local trade and other
established unions (Kopkowsk, 2008). Given the adage that there is power in numbers, it stands to note that the national chapters of the educational unions in the United States see the potential to continually impact practices within the field at both the local and national level. In reviewing the professional responsibilities of an educational union, and the promise made to educators by the two national educational unions, the responsibilities mirror that of the experiences of the participants in this narrative.

The National Education Association promises their members a strong professional network that is created at the national level and trickles down to the level of the local unions. The professional network is described to members and non-members alike as a network of educators who have had similar experiences and can guide you through the roughest professional paths. In reflecting upon the participants in this study, each of their narratives were very unique and brought a myriad of educational experiences and hardships with them. One could consider the participants in this study worldly in an educational sense as they have been in the profession for quite some time and have had the opportunity to see and experience many situations first hand, either professionally or through their role in the local union.

Furthermore, these participants offered members the protection that is mentioned by the National Education Association (Kopkowsk, 2008). UniServ directors, a term interchangeable with union representative, serve across the nation to advise and represent members on employment related matters. Educators who are members of professional unions and organizations like the ones who participated in this study are protected under their local union’s liability insurance and legal protection for professional ease. When educators are made aware of their legal protection provided by the union, classroom teachers gain the courage with the mentorship of their local union representative to step up and combat unfair employment practices.
and unethical practices of administration. It is through the support of the union, and the relationships built between members and union representatives to push practice and continually better the profession. While not all teachers want to take formal action(s) against their school site or district, there are a handful who feel comfortable engaging in self advocacy with legal protection provided by the union.

The study found that union representatives have four professional responsibilities that link to their role within the union. Membership was of utmost importance to each of the participants in this study. Each participant noted the efforts of the union to continually attract more members. During this study membership was particularly important as union busting legislation was proposed in Florida, and in Minnesota the participant reported that he, as well as other educators had been dismayed by the lack of strength of the unions since an earlier merger and consequent separation of the NEA and AFT.

Relationship building, the second responsibility of union representatives, was crucial to each of the participants in this study. The participants stated that relationship building helps in building membership, but more importantly relationships aid in the support of union pursuits. Meghan noted that her union partners with local First Responder, and trade unions as a means to gain support. In these union based relationships they aid each other with legislative matters. For instance, Meghan stated that her union was working in response to HB 7069, a controversial educational Bill that would provide public tax dollars to the funding of charter education. Meghan stated that her union was stanchly against this practice and consequently the union was taking action. From picketing, to informing district personnel and residents within their county of the proposed legislation they were trying to raise awareness. The union based relationships enter this scenario as a result of union to union support. Meghan stated that their First Responder and
trade based union allies would stand behind them and push for their cause as well. She explained the relationship as a reciprocal relationship where the other unions backed the opinions of their partners.

The third responsibility of union representatives is creating win/win solutions for all parties involved. Meghan and Catherine both stated in their narratives that they had created a win/win scenario for their members. Meghan had created a win for the teacher not receiving pay as a result of mandatory weekend training, and Catherine had created a win essentially as the teacher she was representing was able to resign and move on with her life as she saw fit. Randolph, while he was able to share win/win situations for the members he represented, more came from his narratives. Randolph noted student use of excessive force and violence on teachers within his district. In the instances of violence that he shared win/win situations were not created. One teacher was left with permanent brain damage, and other teachers were unable to fulfill their duties as an educator after their attack. However, his focus remained not on issues of violence or teacher’s rights versus student rights. He instead focus his attention to create a win/win situation for teachers who had been, or could be, subjected to student violence by focusing upon the contract and the current job description of teachers within the district. He believed that the wording of the contract and current job description was written loosely as to allow these violent attacks to happen on and to teachers. Through focused revisions of the contract and job descriptions Randolph believed he could begin to curb the violence that was plaguing the teachers in his district.

Professional development, the fourth responsibility of union advocated was discussed briefly by each of the participants. In their current role within the union each of the participants have elected to focus on self-professional development as a means to continually better their
practice and hone their skills of being a union representatives. Each of the participants noted taking part in national conferences and trainings to become more in tuned with their national union’s mission and vision.

**For Whom and What to Advocate**

The participants in this study shared multiple instances of advocacy through their storied and crafted narratives. There was undoubtedly a continual desire to better the field of education as a whole, and to protect the teaching force against poor working conditions. At times, however, larger issues came into play and the day in, day out typical advocacy pursuits of local unions were put on hold. Essentially, unexpected and unforeseen events and legislation come up and force local unions to reprioritize their advocacy calendar and place certain issues above others.

Currently, Florida Unions are being threatened with the passage of House Bill 7055 and the demand of heightened school security in response to the school violence experienced in Parkland Florida. However, unions as a whole maybe divided on which avenue of advocacy to pursue first.

House Bill 7055 is a nearly two-hundred-page document that is threatening Florida unions as a whole. The size and complexity of the proposed bill allows for varying components to be placed within the legislation in hopes for passing a final vote in the House and Senate. One element of the bill which is receiving praise is the proposed tax credit scholarship that will be provided to students in public schools who have been victims of bullying to go toward paying tuition at a private school so that they may continue their education in a threat free environment. However, also contained within this piece of legislation is an attempt to utterly destroy local educational unions as a whole. House Bill 7055 will require that all local educational unions maintain a 51% membership from all eligible employees as a means to maintain their union
certification. Unions dropping below the 51% membership mark would be decertified and cease to exist. In speaking to the union representatives in this study, this is a real concern that they are facing at the local union level. Membership recruitment fairs have increased and awareness of the looming legislation to their members has been continually provided. The participants in this study expressed concerns about having their union decertified. Catherine went so far as to comment, that if the field of education is in this much turmoil with the presence of unions in place, one cannot comprehend how the field may change for the worse for teachers if unions are to become decertified.

The local unions are coming under attack in Florida and may cease to exist without a large educational shift in knowledge of the legislation and professional willingness to join the union. The representatives in this study shared through their narratives and personal advocacy pursuits as a means to show how often the union representatives are called upon to represent various members. Florida is known as a union busting state. The desire to disrupt and decertify unions in various professions is largely being seen through current proposed legislation. While Florida has always been deemed a union busting state, it appears the state is closer than it has been in the past to successfully disbanding the unions. However, at times when Florida Unions would love to focus their full attention of school safety and security they must divide their attention between a horrific event that has sparked the need for increased safety with almost a selfish need to recruit and gain members to ensure that they continue to exist as an entity.

The school shooting that occurred in Parkland, Florida on February 14, 2018 was the largest incident of school violence the state of Florida had ever seen. In response to the loss of seventeen lives of both students and staff members, the state of Florida has taken a very proactive stance against school violence and the protection of students and staff members while
at school. Making schools safer from gunmen and other attackers is taking center stage in the Florida Capital right now as school districts, school boards, and local unions team up to protect the safety of students while at school. The Florida House and Senate is being flooded with demands to provide School Resource Officers at all school sites, to increase and closely scrutinize the background check process that is in place in the state prior to buying a firearm, and also to ban the use of assault weapons for private individuals. While all levels of educational personnel are banding together in response to this recent tragedy, one particular member may no longer have a voice at the table if continued legislation is passed (Solochek, 2018).

Randolph mentioned school violence and acts of aggression against teacher’s multiple times in his narratives. Violent acts against teachers and students are becoming more prevalent in the news media, and has called nation-wide attention to the need to make schools safer for both students and faculty. While Randolph had not been a victim of school violence personally, he had many instances in which coworkers had been physically abused.

**Implications for the Theoretical Framework**

The following two implications consider changes that could be made to the existing frameworks of Roberts and Siegle (2012), and House (1981). Fluidity between the P’s of advocacy is suggested as an implication for Roberts and Siegle (2012) with the consideration of another potential P that fits the advocacy process as a result of listening to the narratives shared by the participants in this study. House (1981) takes into consideration the working conditions faced within the field of education that has resulted in educator attrition. I would suggest broadening the view of working conditions within the field to include organizations like the local union that ultimately try to curb attrition from the field. Local unions have made strides towards
curbing teacher attrition rates, but current legislation has the potential to disband the main source of current educational advocacy, the union.

**Fluidity**

The frameworks used for this study come from House (1981) and Roberts and Siegle (2012). In each of these frameworks ideas are presented in a seemingly linear manner. For instance, House (1981) give four factors of overall working conditions that cause educators to leave the field of education. Roberts and Siegle (2012) give a structure in which to use to advocate. The participants in this study gave life to these frameworks, in listening to their narratives, it was seen that educators who leave the field do so for a variety of the reasons suggested by House (1981), and advocacy pursuits are not clean cut and often flow between one or more of the suggested P’s at the same time.

A “P” that I feel is missing in Roberts and Siegle’s (2012) model is perseverance. The literature talks about advocacy pursuits and the varying components that go into successful advocacy. While the literature may note that it takes a various amount of time to advocate, the literature fails to mention all of the hurdles and pitfalls that union representatives will be faced with when pursuing advocacy work. The participants in this study were very quick to share their narratives in terms of advocacy. The participants continually fought for their member’s rights, but little did they talk about themselves. The pursuit of advocacy weighs heavily on the advocate and the cause being advocated for. In all of the narratives shared, union representatives continually placed ember needs above their own and maintained a brave face in the pursuit of advocacy.

The role of union representative is best imagined as the center-piece of an hour-glass, the portion that is the narrowest on the object, but through which all the sand passes. An hourglass
has an undefined top and bottom of the object as the object is continually flipped to allow for the passage of sand. This is similar to the ever-changing balance felt by union representatives. At times, there are top down pursuits of advocacy that are imposed upon them by the union’s governing board. When the union board is at the top of the hour-glass, the sand trickles down to the union representatives, and then falls to the bottom of the hour glass to impact the members and district as a whole. At other times, the union members demand the attention of union representative, in this instance the hour glass is flipped and the member demands trickle down to the union representatives, and if widespread raise past the union representative to the union governing board and become inadequacies that are presented to the district.

It stands to note that the union representatives, represented in this case by the center of the hour glass is the smallest, yet strongest, portion of the entire object. Physically, the center of an hour-glass is the narrowest part of the object, this I true in terms of union representatives in comparison to the larger organization of the union, the board and members greatly outnumber the individuals who hold the role of union representative. However, while the smallest in overall number; this is also the strongest portion of glass in the hour-glass. The glass in this narrow middle section is reinforced with extra strength to ensure that the glass can hold up to the continual passage of all the sand through it time and time again. The union representatives in this study were all very sound individuals who continually pushed themselves to grow professionally and strengthen or sharpen their skills so that they may successfully fulfill their role within their union and their district.

**Sustainability**

An overall fear of union sustainability resonated in this study. Throughout the course of collecting data and interviewing participant’s union busting legislation was going before the
house and senate. Furthermore, comments made in interviews with participants noted that union representatives are holders of great amounts of knowledge that are not always known until a vacancy is created as a result of them leaving the profession or retiring.

I question the overall sustainability of American teacher unions as a result of current union busting legislation that is plaguing the nation. Supreme Court decisions have been made in favor of employees not having to pay union dues or fees if they opt not to join. However, these educators who opt not to join are still provided with the protection and provisions of the union. Union membership across the nation continues to decline and may very well drop below the fifty-one percent needed to keep unions certified in multiple states.

Thus, unions need to better clarify the roles and responsibilities within their union so members and districts are clear on services offered and who to contact should they have a need. Having identified and defined roles within the union will aid in structuring the organizations in a clear manner that will aid to the overall functionality of the union. If roles are understood, mentorships can be put in place for new union representatives, and positions are clarified unions can ensure that a retirement or change of position of one of their leaders will not result in the overall demise of their strength and knowledge.

The unions in this study, like most unions, practice external advocacy. This means that union advocacy work tends to focus on the issues that directly impact the majority of their members (Rottmann, 2008). In reflecting upon this attention to the masses mentality that the unions have adopted, I cannot help but think this seemingly sound practice may ultimately impact the overall sustainability of the union. Could it be that membership in unions is low as a result of the predictable nature and advocacy pursuits of the local union? Could it be that educational professionals who are not part of the masses, and who are not having their cause
advocated for have become tired of paying dues to an association that is not taking their concerns to the forefront? Both Meghan and Catherine used very traditional advocacy methodologies when working with their local union, Randolph on the other hand took steps that were more non-traditional to advocate. In looking at the decline in the union membership across the United States and questioning the sustainability of unions, I have come to believe that the voice of the majority has changed, but union leadership has not heard the cry.

The American family has long since changed from the early days of education where teachers were unmarried white females who had to resign or were terminated when ideas of marriage and childbearing came into question for the teachers. Family units today are diverse, ever-changing, and wonderfully unique to meet the growing society in the United States. Consequently, I believe the union, and the masses for which they speak have become frozen in time while their members continually become more diverse and have varying mindsets and priorities on which they would like to see the union focus. Essentially, I believe that unions in a sense have stayed frozen in time allowing the members that they serve to outgrow them. Now individuals pursue their own paths of advocacy without the need for union protection, which in turn makes the sustainability of the union come into question.

**Trustworthiness**

Shenton (2004) discusses nineteen different practices that a researcher can include as a part of designing credible studies. The credibility of this study relies upon an integration of many of these practices and methods used in the context of conducting qualitative research. Shenton (2004) states that the researcher holds the responsibility to ensure that sufficient measures have been put into place to enable the research being conducted to make connections and transfer to a variety of situations. This ability of the research to speak to other groups is in a sense the
transferability of the work. As a means to add to the transferability of a work, Shenton (2004) asks researchers to be transparent and definite in the boundaries for participants so that others in the field will have a solid understanding of the how and the behind the study as a means to determine transferability to other groups.

Dependability of a study speaks of the ability of future researchers to re-create the study at a later point in time. One of the essential elements in a study’s dependability is having the methods clearly described in such a manner that the methodology becomes a prototype for other hoping to recreate the study with a similar pool of participants (Shenton, 2004). In order to meet the dependability criteria in framing, I described the methodology in detailed in chapter three. Additionally, I sought transparency through sharing a reflexivity statement. Sharing who I am as the researcher, where I stand in accordance with the practices and views, and how I responded to participants, provides the reader some basis upon which to judge the level of subjectivity that gets communicated.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The research conducted for this study has just begun to highlight the professional transition that occurs in an educator’s career when they have one foot rooted in the school house and the other foot rooted in their local teacher union. The three participants in this study shared their narratives of transition, and how their current job looks within their local union. Conducting more interviews with various unions to fully grasp what entices an educator to move into a leadership position within the local union would be beneficial as these participants were a small sampling of the national union representative population. Having representation from small, medium and large districts would strengthen this study as one could see how varying sized unions are structured and how the role of the representative changes. I would also like to see how
this study would be impacted by including states who have historically strong teachers’ unions, such as those found in the northeastern United States. The two states included in this study are not known for their strength in unions. This study could be built upon by including unions of varying sizes and strength, and by including these elements in future studies, the themes that have begun to emerge in this study can be strengthened and added to in terms of generalizability.

Meghan noted that in her district the union is very focused on the passage of HB7055 coming down the pike and how that will impact their district. She stated that the union works very closely with district officials to create a plan in place for the implementation of new educational mandates. I then asked how the union begins working on conditions that are causing teachers stress within the workplace, or how some of the contributing workplace factors as found by House (1981) are addressed. She noted that when they are working with legislation that the union tracks the phone calls and complaints made by the members. When they see that enough teachers have complained about the same issue(s) they then begin to reach out to the members to gain more information and address the perceived problem that is causing strife. Catherine and Randolph noted similar practices within their unions as well.

Teacher unions in these districts could impact the attrition rates of teachers if a plan was put in place to balance the amount of time the union spends with national legislation and local concerns. The participants noted strong working relationships between their union and the local school district. It appears as though these relationships are underutilized. Breaking down how the union representatives’ time is spent would be beneficial to the members and the overall district. Having a 60/40 or even 70/30 balance of time that allows the union representative to pursue local member concerns and address the four workplace conditions that contribute to educators leaving the field could be a powerful step towards curbing the attrition rates in these three districts.
The second component of the conceptual framework for this study addresses the framing of advocacy pursuits of the union. As noted above, I am suggesting a formal split of time that the local union representative would spend on national vs local concerns. The next logical step would be to address the advocacy techniques that are research based for providing successful advocacy pursuits. Roberts and Siegle (2012) use the three P’s of advocacy framing: purpose, preparation, and persistence. When using this foundational technique for framing an advocacy pursuit, the results are often more favorable as the advocacy work is focused and purposeful as opposed to random or hit or miss in the delivery of information to the targeted audience.

**Reflexivity Statement**

The concept of teacher versus the former teacher became growingly apparent to me throughout the course of this research. In the beginning of this study I was serving in a hybrid position in which I taught children for half of the school day, and then was released from my teaching responsibilities in the afternoon to coach and grow pedagogical practices within our school site. When the data collection began, I was professionally transitioning from the role of a teacher/coach to that of an Assistant Principal. In serving in my current position for the past seven months I have begun to see how the concept of being a former teacher doesn’t exist in the mind of an educator. When meeting people in public for the first time, or when speaking to students I find myself giving the title of teacher though I know my professional title has changed. Like the educators in this study, I hold many titles and roles within the field of education, but when asked my title I still proudly respond I am a teacher. Teaching, as felt by myself and as shared by these individuals, is not just something, or a title that can be stepped away from while still being within the field of education. Rather, you are always a teacher it is merely the lesson being taught and the audience who serves as your student base varies.
The use of the word former in the research question assumes that the individuals have stepped away from the role of being a teacher. Originally, the study was crafted to only include participants who had stepped away from the classroom in order to pursue full time union work. However, through participant searches it became apparent that many of the smaller unions typical to the smaller school districts used in this study, do not afford union workers the opportunity to serve in that capacity full time. Meghan who was serving as the President of her local union was required by her union’s bylaws to maintain the title of classroom teacher as a pre-requisite to serve on the union’s Governing Board. Furthermore, it was through the interviews and conversations with participants in the course of the study that I continually heard them refer to themselves as a teacher. When listening to how the narratives were framed, and how the participants described themselves, they still greatly identified as teachers within the field of education, even if they were not currently in the classroom (Meghan). Randolph stated, “I think teaching is the best thing!” It was through participant comments that I learned the participants themselves do not view themselves as a former teacher. Rather they described themselves more as a teacher who is also serving in other capacities.

The participants in this study did not simply step away from the classroom and into their union roles. Rather, each individual began as a classroom teacher who then became a member of the union. They then matured within the profession as their interest in the union grew, by being personally represented by the union, and through taking increased interest in union negotiations. These individuals committed to becoming more involved with their local unions.

Another point that I would like to address as part of my reflexivity and reflecting on the study would be my use of narrative methodology. Being a novice researcher and having used narrative methodology for the first time, I believe that I need to grow in my use and technique.
When interviewing the participants, I used a combination of narrative and conversational phrases. Narrative phrases were placed throughout the interview as a means to gather narrative data from the participants. Conversational phrases were interjected at the end of narratives, and between narratives as a means to gain further clarification. Throughout this study, I was hesitant to use conversational phrases during the narratives as I did not want to change the shape of how the participant was painting their narrative as they shared. I did become more comfortable throughout the interviewing process and began to ask more conversational phrased questions between narratives. However, there was always a concern for me as the researcher in asking too many questions. I feared excessive questioning could reshape the narrative, or make the participants less likely to share their stories of mobility freely for fear of being questioned and having their actions scrutinized.

**Concluding Remarks**

Working conditions, educational legislation, the current political climate and teacher rights are all large contributing factors in an educator’s deciding factor on if they should stay within the field of education or leave. Union representatives and the pursuit of advocacy for their union members have the potential to curb the flight of educators from the profession but it has not been perfected. The representation of the union is a lengthy process that members at times do not see through to fruition. However, ensuring that local teacher unions have knowledgeable individuals working within them, who are equipped with the 3P’s of advocacy, successful next steps can be taken for members to change the working conditions within the district and ultimately curb teacher attrition. My hope is that the lived narratives of the participants will be continually fleshed out to see how the union representative is part of a larger educational network that contributes to the overall feeling of success or failure within the field of education.
These participants are not speaking in isolation, but rather as small pockets from around the United States, that with further research could prove to be standard practices of local unions. Additionally, vignettes offer distinct opportunities for educators to share their individualized story of leaving their teaching roles have not been included by and large.

It is through the telling of stories and the reasoning given for leaving by educators that local teachers unions can address reasons for departure from the profession. Consequently, advocacy work, and changes to teacher contracts and job descriptions can be made in such a way that high quality educators remain within the field, and better yet they remain in front of a classroom full of students that they continually push to attain high levels of achievement.
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APPENDIX A

LOCAL UNION REPRESENTATIVE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The interviews completed with the local union representatives will be semi-structured and responsive to the information being given by the participants. The following are interview protocols that will be used during the interviews. Additional questions may arise during the interview process.

Interview Phase 1

1. Participant Job Related Background
   a. How would you describe your background within the field of education (Narrative Phase)
      i. How long have you been in the field of education? (Conversation Phase)
      ii. What institution did you graduate from? (Conversation Phase)
      iii. What was your field of study when completing your collegiate studies? (Conversation Phase)
      iv. What degree(s) do you hold? (Conversation Phase)
      v. In what area(s) are your degrees? (Conversation Phase)
   b. I would like to know more about the role of the local teacher union representative. Please complete this sentence with as many descriptors as you see fit: The role of local teacher union leader involves… (Conversation Phase)
c. Tell me about how the teacher union representative position arose for you?  
(Narrative Phase)
  i. What, if any, other opportunities were you considering during this time as a next professional step? How did these impact your decision?  
(Conversation Phase)
  ii. What, if any, issues were of concern to you before you took the role of union representative? Do those issues matter now, why or why not?  
(Conversation Phase)
  iii. Tell me about an experience you have had since accepting this position that has made you think that this would be a good position for you?  
(Conversation Phase)
  iv. Tell me about an experience you have had since accepting this position that has made you want to continue to serve in this capacity?  
(Conversation Phase)
  v. How long have you served in your role as union representative?  
(Conversation Phase)
  vi. What was your career path to this position? (Conversation Phase)

**Interview Phase II**

2. Role of Union Representative
   a. Describe what interested you in pursuing work with the local teachers union?  
(Narrative Phase)
      i. How would you describe the context and demands of your job requirements? (Conversation Phase)
ii. How does your year look, month by month in terms of responsibilities and obligations? (Conversation Phase)

iii. What does a typical week look like for you? (Conversation Phase)

b. Would you tell me about how the responsibilities and requirements pertaining to your position were presented to you? (Narrative Phase)
   i. What was the on-boarding process like with the union? (Conversation Phase)

c. Tell me about an opportunity that arose allowing representatives and union leaders to take on various advocacy pursuits.
   i. What was your role in this pursuit? (Conversation Phase)
   ii. What were the steps you yourself and the union take/ have taken to advocate? (Conversation Phase)
   iii. What sorts of preparation had to be done for this? (Conversation Phase)

d. Tell me about a time you have worked in conjunction with other representatives, or in areas that are not assigned? (Narrative Phase)
   i. Why was/wasn’t this partnership successful? (Conversation Phase)
   ii. What was learned as a result of this work together? (Conversation Phase)
   iii. How does your relationship with administrators in schools or the district affect you work if at all? (Conversation Phase)
   iv. How are areas assigned, and is there ever rotation of representation? (Conversation Phase)
e. Tell me about a time, while working with a teacher, or a group of teachers, when you felt your contribution as a union representative was significantly influential?
   (Narrative Phase)
   i. What emotions were involved (Conversation Phase)
   ii. How would you describe the role of advocacy and its relevance to the practice of teacher union representatives? (Conversation Phase)
   iii. Did the conditions of the facilities matter? (Conversation Phase)
   iv. What working conditions were influential in this instance? (Conversation Phase)

3. Educational Transition
   a. Tell me about a time when your reason for leaving the classroom crystallized?
      (Narrative Phase)
   b. What is your recollection of the context and working conditions when you decided to make a career switch from teacher to union rep? (Narrative Phase)
      i. How did the school administrator respond?

Interview Phase III

4. Advocacy Framing
   a. Tell me about a time where you had to advocate? (Narrative Phase)
      i. What are your thoughts about being an advocate? (Conversation Phase)
      ii. What compels you to remain in the field of education? (Conversation Phase)
iii. What makes you dedicate your profession to the field and the betterment of it? (Conversation Phase)

iv. What do you think is key to successful advocacy? (Conversation Phase)

b. Would you share a time when you have been hindered when trying to advocate? (Narrative Phase)

i. For whom? By whom? (Conversation Phase)

ii. What, if any, are there struggles you face routinely when advocating? (Conversation Phase)

iii. How do you prepare to face such struggles? (Conversation Phase)

iv. How does the inability to strike and the perceived strength of the union matter to your success as an advocate? (Conversation Phase)
APPENDIX B

EMAIL TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

Good Morning,

I invite you to participate in a research study on Leadership, Education, and Union impact on the field of Education.
You may participate if you are:
(1) A current union representative in Florida, and
(2) a former classroom teacher
Your participation will last approximately 45 minutes.

A potential benefit of this study is to gain an increased understanding of what is being done in the field of education to retain teachers. Another benefit would be having the ability to share the work you have done to better the educational profession.
There is no risk involved in this study. Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw your participation at any time during the study should you choose to do so.
If you do choose to participate in the study, please know that there will be high levels of security in place so that your information is kept confidential and anonymous. Furthermore, the interviews will be coordinated to work in accordance with your schedule.
If you have any questions, please contact me Holly Magaditsch, University of South Florida Doctoral Candidate, at hmtabak@mail.usf.edu.

University of South Florida
Internal Review Board
2017
Number Pro00029824

Respectfully,
Holly Magaditsch M.Ed.
Lead Researcher
Doctoral Candidate
University of South Florida
Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk

Pro # _00029824__________________

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called: **Union Representatives’ Stories of Leading**
The person who is in charge of this research study is Holly Ma. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Vonzell Agosto.

The research will be conducted at mutually agreeable locations selected by yourself and the researcher.

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**Purpose of the study**
The purpose of this study is to learn why educators transition out of the classroom and take on full time roles within their local teachers union.
If you agree to be in this study, we will conduct a series of three interviews with you. The interview will include questions about your job, the path that brought you to your position, your role within the union, your advocacy practices, and your leadership on the district in which you serve. With your permission, we would also like to tape-record the interview.
Why are you being asked to take part?
We are asking you to take part in this research study because this is a research study that follows an educator’s path from the classroom into the role of union representative. We are requesting that you to take part in the study due to your current role as a local union representative.

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:
Participate in a series of three interviews. The interviews will be weekly or bi-weekly, depending on your preference, will include questions about your job, the path that brought you to your position, your role within the union, your advocacy practices, and your leadership on the district in which you serve. With your permission, we would also like to record the interview. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only I will have access to the records. The recorded interview feed will be destroyed once it has been transcribed.

The interviews will be held at a mutually agreeable location and will last approximately an hour. The interviews completed with the local union representatives will be semi-structured and responsive to the information being given by the participants. The following are interview protocols that will be used during the interviews. Additional questions may arise during the interview process.

Interview Phase 1
5. Participant Job Related Background
   a. How would you describe you background within the field of education (Narrative Phase)
      i. How long have you been in the field of education? (Conversation Phase)
      ii. What institution did you graduate from? (Conversation Phase)
      iii. What was your field of study when completing your collegiate studies? (Conversation Phase)
      iv. What degree(s) do you hold? (Conversation Phase)
      v. In what area(s) are your degrees? (Conversation Phase)
   b. I would like to know more about the role of the local teacher union representative. Please complete this sentence with as many descriptors as you see fit: The role of local teacher union leader involves… (Conversation Phase)
   c. Tell me about how the teacher union representative position arose for you? (Narrative Phase)
      i. What, if any, other opportunities were you considering during this time as a next professional step? How did these impact your decision? (Conversation Phase)
      ii. What, if any, issues were of concern to you before you took the role of union representative? Do those issues matter now, why or why not? (Conversation Phase)
      iii. Tell me about an experience you have had since accepting this position that has made you think that this would be a good position for you? (Conversation Phase)
      iv. Tell me about an experience you have had since accepting this position that has made you want to continue to serve in this capacity? (Conversation Phase)
      v. How long have you served in your role as union representative? (Conversation Phase)
vi. What was your career path to this position? (Conversation Phase)

Interview Phase 2

6. Role of Union Representative
   a. Describe what interested you in pursuing work with the local teachers union? (Narrative Phase)
      i. How would you describe the context and demands of your job requirements? (Conversation Phase)
      ii. How does your year look, month by month in terms of responsibilities and obligations? (Conversation Phase)
      iii. What does a typical week look like for you? (Conversation Phase)
   b. Would you tell me about how the responsibilities and requirements pertaining to your position were presented to you? (Narrative Phase)
      i. What was the on-boarding process like with the union? (Conversation Phase)
   c. Tell me about an opportunity that arose allowing representatives and union leaders to take on various advocacy pursuits.
      i. What was your role in this pursuit? (Conversation Phase)
      ii. What were the steps you yourself and the union take/ have taken to advocate? (Conversation Phase)
      iii. What sorts of preparation had to be done for this? (Conversation Phase)
   d. Tell me about a time you have worked in conjunction with other representatives, or in areas that are not assigned? (Narrative Phase)
      i. Why was/wasn’t this partnership successful? (Conversation Phase)
      ii. What was learned as a result of this work together? (Conversation Phase)
      iii. How does your relationship with administrators in schools or the district affect you work if at all? (Conversation Phase)
      iv. How are areas assigned, and is there ever rotation of representation? (Conversation Phase)
   e. Tell me about a time, while working with a teacher, or a group of teachers, when you felt your contribution as a union representative was significantly influential? (Narrative Phase)
      i. What emotions were involved (Conversation Phase)
      ii. How would you describe the role of advocacy and its relevance to the practice of teacher union representatives? (Conversation Phase)
      iii. Did the conditions of the facilities matter? (Conversation Phase)
      iv. What working conditions were influential in this instance? (Conversation Phase)

7. Educational Transition
   a. Tell me about a time when your reason for leaving the classroom crystallized? (Narrative Phase)
   b. What is your recollection of the context and working conditions when you decided to make a career switch from teacher to union rep? (Narrative Phase)
      i. How did the school administrator respond?
Interview Phase 3
8. Advocacy Framing
   a. Tell me about a time where you had to advocate? (Narrative Phase)
      i. What are your thoughts about being an advocate? (Conversation Phase)
      ii. What compels you to remain in the field of education? (Conversation Phase)
      iii. What makes you dedicate your profession to the field and the betterment of it? (Conversation Phase)
      iv. What do you think is key to successful advocacy? (Conversation Phase)
   b. Would you share a time when you have been hindered when trying to advocate? (Narrative Phase)
      i. For whom? By whom? (Conversation Phase)
      ii. What, if any, are there struggles you face routinely when advocating? (Conversation Phase)
      iii. How do you prepare to face such struggles? (Conversation Phase)
      iv. How does the inability to strike and the perceived strength of the union matter to your success as an advocate? (Conversation Phase)

Total Number of Participants
About seven individuals will take part in this study. A total of seven individuals will participate in the study at all sites selected by the individual participant.

Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal
You do not have to participate in this research study. You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

Benefits
You will receive no benefit(s) by participating in this research study.

Risks or Discomfort
This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation
You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

Costs
There will be no additional costs to you as a result of being in this study.

Privacy and Confidentiality
We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your
study records. Anyone who looks at your records must keep them confidential. These individuals include:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator and study coordinator.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call Holly Magaditsch at (813) 629-3093.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

I freely give my consent to take part in this. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

_____________________________________________  ________________________________
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study                  Date

_____________________________________________
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

_____________________________________________
Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent                  Date

_____________________________________________
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent