A Phenomenological Study of the Self-Efficacy of Program Completers of the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy

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Abstract

Colleges and universities are trusted with the responsibility of preparing the professionals of tomorrow. However, the number of individuals seeking a profession in education has been on a steady decline over the past 4 decades (King, 2018). This deterioration of education graduates has exacerbated the issue of poor teacher retention, leading to nationwide teacher shortages. (United States Department of Education [ED], 2017). In Georgia, 26.3% of those hired in 2013 were no longer employed in the Georgia public school system by 2018, leaving thousands of teaching vacancies unfilled statewide (Georgia Professional Standards Commission [GaPSC], 2019). High rates of new teacher attrition have a significant negative financial impact on America's school districts as 40% of new teachers leave their jobs during their first 5 years of teaching, at an estimated national cost of over $8 billion annually (King, 2018; Phillips, 2015; Sutcher et al., 2019). The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of successful veteran completers of the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP), a non-traditional teacher development program. As more school districts fill vacancies with candidates who have obtained certification through alternative means, the importance of better understanding the experiences of the study participants may increase. This study may benefit organizations involved in the education, certification, and employment of educators. The information gained from this study may also be beneficial to individuals interested in obtaining a teaching certificate through an alternative certification program.

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Dedication

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Chapter I

My introduction to the phenomenon of teacher shortages and the difficulty district leaders experience in filling vacancies occurred when I was one of the first recipients of the Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally (HOPE) Grant. Different from the HOPE Scholarship, which is available to all students graduating from an eligible Georgia high school with a grade point average of 3.0 or higher, the HOPE grant was only awarded to those going into an area of study identified as a "critical field." For me, that area was speech-language pathology. In exchange for my graduate school tuition, I agreed to work in Georgia schools for 2 years, at which point the grant was forgiven.

Over the past 22 years working in the field of education, my career trajectory has evolved. As the current Director of Administrative Services in a rural school district in southwest Georgia, I work directly with each aspect of personnel, including recruitment, hiring, and certification. Each year, numerous districts across Georgia face the dilemma of filling vacancies left as a result of retirements, resignations, and terminations (Phillips, 2015). While the statewide teacher shortage trend has continued for decades, the remedy has changed (U.S. Department of Education [ED], 2017). Georgia, for example, responded with the implementation of the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in 2009, which provided districts with some relief from the shortage by allowing individuals with a bachelor's degree outside of the teaching profession to be hired prior to obtaining teacher certification (GaPSC, 2017). As an additional hiring

incentive, some districts pay the GaTAPP fee, at approximately $6,000 each, for every teacher matriculated in the program.

In the 4 years I have worked in my current position, I have noticed several trends regarding alternative certification candidates. Some individuals intentionally obtain bachelor's degrees outside of education with the intent of going through GaTAPP at a district's expense. Some enter GaTAPP but never finish, leaving the district without a teacher after paying the program tuition, while others complete the program at a district's expense only to move to another district upon completion. The last type of candidate completes the GaTAPP program, obtains certification, and remains a teacher within the sponsoring district. These are the candidates who present the desired outcome and pique my professional interest as their career decisions has potential implications for the manner in which I conduct recruitment and support of GaTAPP candidates. These individuals were also the focus of this study.

Overview

Colleges and universities are trusted with the responsibility of preparing the professionals of tomorrow. However, those seeking a profession in education have been on a steady decline over the past 4 decades (King, 2018). The number of annual education degrees awarded peaked at around 200,000 in the 1970s (King, 2018). Today, fewer than 100,000 undergraduate education degrees are obtained annually nationwide (King, 2018). According to Partelow (2019), colleges and universities have seen a 28% decline in the number of students completing teacher preparation programs between 2009 and 2017. This decline is most obvious in the number of women pursuing degrees in education, dropping from 36% in 1971 to a mere 7% in 2015 (King, 2018). The

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) reported a 15% decrease in conferred bachelor's degrees in education between the 2005-2006 and 2014-2015 school years, while every other major field reported an increase in awarded degrees (Will, 2018).

Employment retention is a concern for any industry. However, in the field of education, the issue of poor retention, leading to teacher shortages, continues to grow nationwide (ED, 2017). In Georgia, 26.3% of those hired in 2013 were no longer employed in the Georgia public school system by 2018, leaving thousands of teaching vacancies unfilled statewide (GaPSC, 2019). The GaPSC (2018b) investigated root causes and determined one primary issue was a reduction in the number of people completing teacher preparation programs in traditional certification programs. Over a 5-year period, from 2014 to 2018, completion rates dropped from 4,912 to 3,300, resulting in a 33% reduction in students completing teacher preparation programs (GaPSC, 2019). With fewer individuals completing teacher preparation programs and becoming certified to teach, the pool of candidates to fill vacancies has decreased annually.

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and the GaPSC responded by implementing an alternate certification program in 2001, which became known as the GaTAPP in 2009 (GaPSC, 2009). This program provided districts with relief from the teacher shortage by allowing individuals with a bachelor's degree to be hired before obtaining certification (GaPSC, 2018b). The GaPSC compared retention rates of Georgia teachers who completed traditional certification programs with those completing the GaTAPP program between 2008 and 2015 (GaPSC, 2018b). After the second year of employment, 95% of GaTAPP candidates were still teaching versus only 88% of the

traditionally certified teaching population who began in the same years. However, after the second year of employment, retention rates for GaTAPP teachers consistently dropped below that of the traditionally trained teaching population (GaPSC, 2016a; GaPSC, 2017).

Problem Statement

High rates of new teacher attrition have a significant negative financial impact on America's school districts as 40% of new teachers leave their jobs during their first 5 years of teaching, at an estimated national cost of over $8 billion annually (King, 2018; Phillips, 2015; Sutcher et al., 2019). Georgia school districts lost between $120 and $130 million annually to replace teachers who retired, resigned, or were terminated in the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years (Nweke et al., 2006). Using the U.S. Inflation Calculator, this translates to between $160 and $180 million today. Young (2018) researched factors contributing to the reduction of teacher turnover and found state certification assessments provide an accurate prediction of teacher success. To encourage alternate certification candidates to complete state-sponsored programs, the AACTE offered a 21-state teacher preparation program completion promotion during the 2019 school year (King, 2018). The program included moving away from standardized certification exams in favor of more performance-based assessments. While the GaTAPP program incorporates performance-based requirements, candidates must also pass the Georgia Assessment for Certification of Educators (GACE) exam in the specific field for which they are seeking certification. Although the GaTAPP program provides districts some level of relief when trying to fill vacancies, each year school districts lose millions

of dollars in efforts to replace teachers lost through resignations, terminations, and training programs to help teachers persist in their school positions (Phillips, 2015).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of successful veteran completers of the GaTAPP, a non-traditional teacher development program. This researcher aimed to identify which common practices used among school districts in southwest Georgia were most effective in encouraging identified GaTAPP completers to remain in the teaching profession in the district where they were originally hired.

Research Questions

The following research questions provided the basis for this qualitative study. As Maxwell (2013) stated, "More than any other aspect of your design, your research questions will have an influence on, and should be responsive to, every other part of your study" (p. 73). Therefore, these questions were designed with careful consideration of the research goals, conceptual framework, methods, and validity concerns (Maxwell, 2013).

Research Question 1: What are the life and career experiences of successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in southwest Georgia?

Research Question 2: What were the perceived barriers of successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in southwest Georgia?

Research Question 3: What strategies were used by successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in southwest Georgia to mitigate completion barriers?

Significance of the Problem

High rates of new teacher attrition have a significant negative financial impact on America's school districts, as 44% of new teachers leave their jobs during their first 5 years of teaching at an estimated cost of $2 billion annually (King, 2018; Phillips, 2015). The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of successful veteran teachers who completed GaTAPP, a non-traditional teacher development program, in southwest Georgia. This study may benefit organizations involved in the education, certification, and employment of educators. On a local level, school boards, superintendents, human resource specialists, and principals may consider the results of this study when making hiring decisions to gain a better understanding of the level of support necessary to ensure that GaTAPP candidates complete the program and become long-term employees. This study may be particularly beneficial to Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESA). This same information may provide direction to the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC), those involved in educational legislation, such as lobbyists for the Professional Association of Georgia Educators (PAGE), and colleges and universities with teacher training and education programs. The information gained from this study may also be valuable to individuals interested in obtaining a teaching certificate through an alternative certification program.

As more school districts fill vacancies with candidates who have obtained certification through alternative means, the importance of better understanding the experiences of the study participants may increase. Acquiring first-hand accounts of the experiences that GaTAPP candidates had as they balanced the demands of obtaining certification while working in a field for which they had no formal training, may provide

increased awareness of common practices that led to the retention of these teachers. Replication of these practices and retention strategies may prove cost-effective for districts and beneficial for student achievement.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework changes an area of interest into a focus of study. It "both shapes the design and direction of your study and guides its development" (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017, p. 4). Because each researcher has their distinctive interests and goals, no two conceptual frameworks are the same. It is from their unique conceptual framework that researchers process critical methodological decisions (Maxwell, 2013; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). My personal experience in obtaining certification, as well as my professional familiarity working with teacher candidates who are obtaining certification through the GaTAPP program, has influenced my beliefs about the theory at the foundation of the conceptual framework utilized in this study and the influence it has on these candidates.

In qualitative research, theories are used "as a broad explanation for behavior and attitudes" (Creswell, 2014, p. 64). This qualitative research study was founded on a common theory surrounding those who have obtained a bachelor's degree in one field then chose to obtain teacher certification through the GaTAPP program. As Maxwell (2013) explained, "Theory is a statement about what is going on with the phenomena that you want to understand" (p.49). The phenomenon of alleviating teacher shortages in Georgia by hiring individuals who will obtain certification through the GaTAPP program was viewed through the lens of the self-efficacy theory. According to Bandura et al. (1980), "Perceived efficacy enhances psychosocial functioning through its effects on

choice behavior, effort expenditure, persistence, and self-guiding thought" (p. 40). These behavioral changes may be more evident through the commitment of individuals who have completed the GaTAPP program and remained in the teaching profession than those who obtained certification through a traditional route.

Figure 1

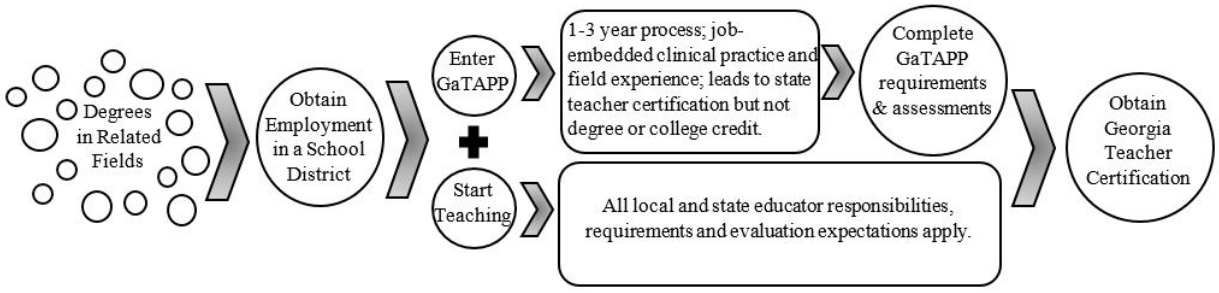
Traditional Route to Teacher Certification

Individuals who acquired teacher certification through a traditional route follow a linear path to certification which can be simplified to "enroll in a college or university program now, then seek employment later" (GaPSC, 2021a). Upon acceptance to a college or university's GaPSC approved educator preparation program (EPP), aspiring teachers are provided a prescriptive path to earn an undergraduate degree in the educational grade band and/or subject area of interest. Once all coursework is completed, candidates are eligible to graduate and begin working as a teacher. As shown in Figure 1, most students take the GACE prior to graduation. Although obtaining a passing score on the state-required assessment is not a prerequisite for graduation from most EPPs, the purpose of the assessment is to ensure hopeful teachers have the knowledge and skill level necessary to fulfill the expectations of a Georgia educator. Therefore, it is mandated prior to certification.

The scripted nature of this route to certification provides structure and guidance to candidates. Courses are typically scheduled on weekdays and during normal business hours because the "job" of the individual is considered to be that of a student. While education is one of the oldest major areas of study in most colleges and universities, enrollment in EPPs has consistently declined over several decades, and many who enroll do not complete the program (Will, 2018). In 2018, 12,055 students enrolled in initial teacher preparation programs in Georgia colleges and universities, but only 3,300 graduated with a degree in education (GaPSC, 2019) – a loss of 73% of initial enrollees. This prolonged pattern of decline in the graduation of future educators has created a teacher shortage crisis and provides evidence which may be attributed to a lack of self-efficacy from these individuals (Betz and Hackett, 1986; Podolsky et al., 2016; Will, 2018).

Figure 2

Georgia's Alternate Route to Teaching Certification



In sharp contrast, those who seek certification through an alternate certification program do not hold a bachelor's degree in education. As displayed in Figure 2, these individuals enter employment in a school system holding degrees from a variety of fields

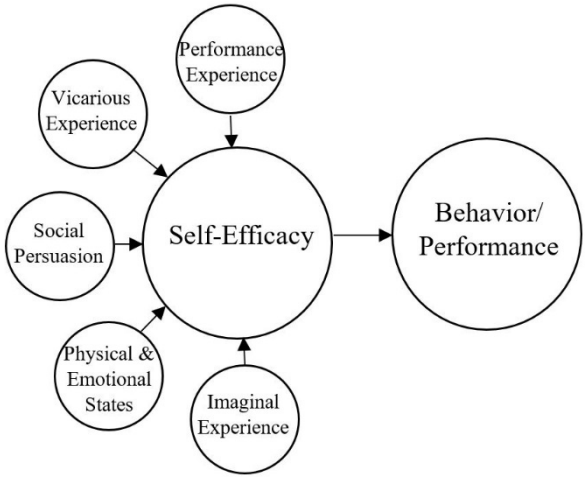
outside of education. While each candidate must hold a degree in a field related to that which they are being hired to teach, many have taken few or no courses through a GaPSC approved EPP, placing them at a disadvantage to traditionally trained new teachers. Once employed in a Georgia school district, they must uphold all expectations and responsibilities associated with the role for which they were hired while simultaneously fulfilling all requirements for the GaTAPP program. The accountabilities related to GaTAPP are designed to provide opportunities for candidates to develop the competencies needed for their professional role. To assist with the compounded expectations, each GaTAPP candidate is provided a Candidate Support Team, which includes school-level support and a regional supervisor to help monitor the candidate's teaching skills and success in meeting the program requirements. Once all obligations are met, typically taking between 18 months and 2 years, the candidate is eligible to obtain Georgia teaching certification.

Key in reaching this goal is the candidate's determination and perseverance within these first 2 years. In 2018, 702 teacher candidates enrolled in the GaTAPP program (GaPSC, 2019). A total of 565 candidates completed the program and became Georgia certified teachers (GaPSC, 2019), representing 80% of the original enrollees. In this same year, only 27% of those originally enrolled in college/university EPPs completed the traditional route to teacher certification. It may seem counterintuitive that those faced with additional challenges and stressors complete the program at a higher rate. This level of fortitude and endurance in alternate certification candidates is an example of the type of self-efficacy Bandura first identified in 1977.

In his explanation of the self-efficacy theory, Bandura (1994) defined four sources of an individual's self-efficacy: experience in overcoming obstacles through perseverant efforts (performance experiences), vicarious experiences provided by social models, social persuasion, and a healthy emotional and physical state. A fifth factor, imaginal experiences, has been suggested by researcher James Maddux (Ackerman, 2020). Many philosophers subscribe to the exercise of imagining future success to guide one's belief in possible success, which is associated with the self-efficacy theory. Ackerman (2020) suggested those with high self-efficacy, specifically teachers, suffer from less stress and occupational burnout. This strengthens the relationship between this theory and my study. Many individuals who obtain teacher certification by completing the GaTAPP program while teaching, and remain in the profession, possess the self-efficacy characteristics upon which Bandura based his theory.

Figure 3

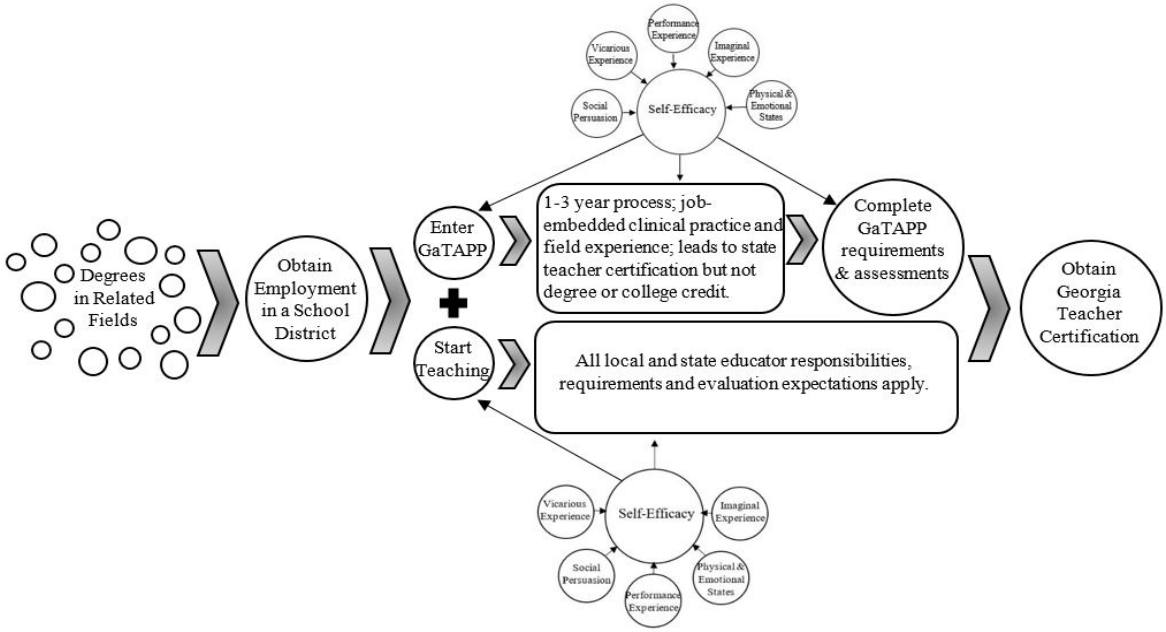
Five Sources of Self-Efficacy Affecting Performance



In their extensive work on the topic, Betz and Hackett (1986) applied the self-efficacy theory specifically to the impact self-determination and self-efficacy have on career choices. The authors further asserted that even more than one's abilities, occupational self-efficacy, gender, and career interests are considerably prognostic of occupational alternatives. One's perceived weaknesses, whether valid or imagined, can impose limits to the career choices or professional success one experiences (Betz & Hackett, 2006). Therefore, "perceived self-efficacy affects people's choice of activities and behavioral settings, how much effort they expend, and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences" (Bandura & Adams, 1977, p. 287-288). According to Lopez-Garrido (2020), a person's self-efficacy results from the level of confidence they have regarding their potential success in a given situation. This idea provides the underpinning of this study. It is my intent to learn more about the level of importance successful veteran completers of the GaTAPP program place on their personal self-efficacy while balancing the responsibilities of teaching and earning their Georgia teacher certification through this alternative route.

Figure 4

Influence of Self-Efficacy and Completion of Alternate Certification



As Bandura (1994) explained, individuals with confidence in their abilities approach demanding encounters "as challenges to be mastered rather than threats to be avoided" (p. 71). Individuals completing an alternative certification program find themselves holding a job for which they have no formal training or education while simultaneously completing the tasks required to become certified for the position, often encounter trials when self-efficacy is essential. Thus, various sources utilized to strengthen self-efficacy are critical throughout the alternate certification process, as success experienced along the course strengthens the effectiveness and value of efficacy to the individual (Anthony et al., 2011). "The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goal challenges people set for themselves and the firmer is their commitment to them" (Bandura, 1994, p. 73). According to Bandura, self-efficacy can be developed

through continued exposure to mastery experiences in which learners receive guidance and support on tasks, observe demonstrations of competence in situations similar to their own, and receive feedback on practice (Tugsbaatar, 2020). The alternate certification candidate must maintain belief in their capabilities and draw from the five sources of self-efficacy throughout the process and throughout their career (Ackerman, 2020; Bandura, 1994). Forsbach-Rothman et al. (2007) studied the self-efficacy of student teachers from traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs and found that reported levels of personal efficacy among novice teachers in an alternative certification program are comparable to that of student teachers from a traditional university EPP.

"Self-efficacy is a person's particular set of beliefs that determine how well one can execute a plan of action in prospective situations" (Lopez-Garrido, 2020, p. 1). Figure 4 provides a visual representation of the periods of the alternate certification process during which candidates may require sources of self-efficacy. The influence of self-efficacy while an individual is maintaining an optimum balance between the demands placed on a new teacher along with the expectations of the GaTAPP program is essential throughout the alternate certification process and beyond (Anthony et al., 2011). The five factors within the self-efficacy theory are critical from the point the individual is hired and the GaTAPP program is implemented, during the completion of all GaTAPP requirements, and through the acquisition of teacher certification (Anthony et al., 2011; Betz & Hackett, 1986). According to Betz and Hackett (1986), task performance influences an individual's level of interest and self-assessment of ability. Thus, task success promotes self-efficacy expectancies while task failure diminishes self-efficacy (Betz & Hackett, 1986). The specific self-efficacy traits necessary for the alternate

certification candidate are unique to the individual and were a focus of this study with each participant.

Summary of Methodology

Research experts describe five approaches to basic qualitative research: case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, and phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Researchers applying the phenomenological approach seek to make meaning of the experiences of those directly involved in the event or phenomenon (Seidman, 2013). As Patton (2015) described, "Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (p. 115). A phenomenological approach is most appropriate for this study because it allowed the collection of first-hand accounts of the program from the individuals who experienced and completed it. Merriam (2002) highlighted three main sources of information in qualitative research– interviews, observations, and documents. The instrumentation selected in qualitative research can provide both breadth and depth of selected topics (Patton, 2015). For this study, data were collected through a series of one-on-one interviews with each participant as well as a compilation of artifacts and documents relevant to the GaTAPP program, certification assessment, and professional development supports.

Purposeful sampling allows researchers to select participants who are representative of the population being studied and requires a researcher to intentionally focus on the purpose, questions, and data of the study (Ary et al., 2019; Patton, 2015). The focus of this study was to explore the lived experiences of successful veteran completers of the GaTAPP program. Based on the need for historical and personal knowledge, I utilized "key informants, key knowledgeables, and reputational sampling,"

also known as Group Characteristics Sampling (Patton, 2015, p. 284). Participants for this research were teachers who work for school districts within the identified RESA of southwest Georgia. Because GaTAPP participants have different experiences depending on the district in which they work, I interviewed six individuals, two from three different school districts, who obtained their teacher certification through completion of the GaTAPP program and have remained teachers for a minimum of 3 school years after completion of the program. To fully understand the role this alternate certification program played in the retention of teachers, it is important to study the experiences of each candidate through their own unique lens (Ary et al., 2019). Each participant has rich knowledge about the GaTAPP program, including the requirements and obstacles candidates face as they work to complete program requirements while simultaneously working in a field in which they are not fully trained.

The criterion for selecting interview participants was established based on the following specifications:

1. Participants must have obtained teacher certification through the completion of the GaTAPP program.
2. Participants must work for a school district within an identified RESA located in southwest Georgia.
3. Participants must have remained a teacher for a minimum of 3 years following completion of the GaTAPP program and all certification requirements.

The rationale for these criteria was based on the participants' ability to provide insight into the three identified research questions. Each participant offered rich information

about the experiences and lessons learned through their journeys and what led them to remain in the profession following GaTAPP completion.

Through purposive sampling, I identified individuals who met the criteria listed above. I contacted school district leaders (See Appendix A), including human resource departments and building leaders, via email and phone calls, for referrals. To further narrow the scope of participants, criteria were ranked to ensure the most information-rich candidates were selected from each district. Those who obtained certification through participation in identified RESA in southwest Georgia were ranked first, followed by the greatest number of teaching years post-GaTAPP. And finally, candidates who remained in the same southwest Georgia school system were ranked higher than teachers who changed school systems over their teaching career. Most importantly, participants were selected because they held the information necessary to answer the core research questions (Maxwell, 2013).

Limitations

The interpretive nature of this qualitative study may limit the breadth of the research. Researcher bias influenced by personal background, attitudes, and professional experience may affect the interpretation of data collected (Ary et al., 2019). The practice of reflexivity helps control the potential effect researcher bias may have on shaping the direction of a study (Creswell, 2014). Factors such as the time of day an interview was conducted may have impacted the participant's response length and energy level while completing the interview. The time of year data is collected, and the teacher's morale at that time, may also limit the richness of the information. Because my research focused on a limited number of individuals who completed the GaTAPP program and their

interpretation of their experiences, findings cannot be generalized beyond the scope of this study. While multiple alternative EPPs exist, this study focused on one identified alternate certification program in one specific region of Georgia. The design of the study was not bound by specific grade levels or subject areas taught by participants. Therefore, findings may or may not be applicable to all grade levels or subject areas.

The world dramatically changed with the advent of a global pandemic. As a result, work and the protocols required to conduct work changed. The very nature of daily life presented limitations and barriers that were once unimagined. In this study, safety precautions mandated by current national, state, and local laws and guidelines challenged the ability to conduct lengthy face-to-face interviews. Yet, the integrity of data collection was not compromised by required remote collection methods. The researcher and participants met in person for each interview. When a six-foot distance between the researcher and participant was not possible, both individuals wore masks for the entirety of the interview.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms were defined:

Alternate, Alternative, or Non-traditional Certification Program – Each of these terms describes a post-baccalaureate program designed for individuals who did not prepare as educators during their undergraduate studies (GaPSC, 2021b).

Attrition – The reduction in the number of teachers due to employee resignations or retirements (Kan, 2014).

Barrier – An obstacle that hinders an individual who is enrolled in and attempting to obtain teaching certification through the completion of the GTAPP.

Beginning or New Teacher – An educator with fewer than 4 years of teaching experience after obtaining teaching certification is considered a beginning teacher. This definition also corresponds with the guidelines set forth by the Georgia Department of Education Teacher Keys Evaluation System, which maintains stricter evaluation requirements for the first 3 years an individual holds a teaching position in Georgia (GaDOE, 2021).

Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) – The state agency responsible for setting and applying guidelines for the preparation, certification, and continued licensing of Georgia's public school educators.

Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) – A classroom-based, non-traditional teacher preparation program for individuals who hold a bachelor's degree or higher in a related field from an accredited institution but have not completed an undergraduate teacher preparation program (GaPSC, 2021b).

Long-term Employee – An individual who has remained within the same school district for 5 or more consecutive years is considered a long-term employee of that district.

Program Completer or Completer – An individual who has completed all requirements for a state-approved teacher preparation program.

Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) – The state agency responsible for the implementation of the GaTAPP alternate certification program, including monitoring and supervising teacher candidates through program completion. The agency works closely with the GaPSC and Georgia school districts to ensure candidates meet state

requirements to obtain teaching certification. There are 16 RESAs in Georgia (GaDOE, 2021a).

Self-Efficacy – An individual's belief in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1977).

Successful Veteran Teacher – An educator who has completed an alternative certification program and remained employed in public education for 3 or more years, within the same school district or in combination of multiple school districts.

Teacher Candidate – An individual who is in the process of obtaining teaching certification through an alternative certification program (GaPSC, 2021c).

Teacher Demand – The number of teachers needed to fill vacancies created through attrition or the creation of new positions within a school district (Sutcher et al., 2019).

Teacher Preparation Programs – The formal coursework offered at a state-accredited college or university designed to prepare undergraduate and graduate students to become licensed.

Teacher Retention – The number of teachers returning to the profession at the conclusion of a school year.

Teacher Shortage – The inability to staff vacancies with individuals qualified to teach in the fields needed (Sutcher et al., 2019).

Teacher Supply – The number of teachers available for hire within a given period of time (Sutcher et al., 2019).

Teacher Turnover – The rate at which teachers separate from a school district or leave the teaching profession each year. This is calculated by comparing the number of

classroom teachers within a school district in the current year versus the number of classroom teachers within the same district the previous year (Garcia & Weiss, 2019a).

Teaching Certification – The state licensure required to ensure that classroom teachers meet minimum requirements and satisfy state teacher effectiveness requirements.

Traditional Certification – The acquisition of teaching certification obtained by completing all requirements of a college or university's state-approved teacher preparation program.

Summary

The field of education has experienced a continuous evolution in teaching requirements, certifications, and teaching needs. A myriad of research has documented this progression for decades. As the landscape of students and student needs has changed, so has the training and education of prospective teachers culminating in a teacher shortage crisis, unlike anything that has been experienced in the field before. Within the next decade, student enrollment is expected to grow by three million (Berry & Shields, 2017; Daniels, 2018). This growth in enrollment is met with a decrease in individuals entering the profession and high rates of teacher attrition. Enrollment in teacher preparation programs dropped 35% between 2009-2014 (Berry & Shields, 2017) and has remained on this track. "Beginners—the largest group within one of the largest occupations in the nation—have been leaving at relatively high rates, and these rates have held steady in recent decades" (Ingersoll et al., 2018). While colleges of education have made provisions to attract more teacher candidates, a discrepancy remains between the majors students choose and the personnel needs of K-12 schools (King, 2018).

The impact made through alternative certification programs has been dramatic, yet relatively little research has been conducted to explain the effect these programs have made on mitigating teacher shortages. Much can be learned from those who have completed these programs and remained in the profession on a long-term basis. In this study, the researcher focused on ascertaining candidates' use of self-efficacy sources in their own experience of obtaining teacher certification through Georgia's alternate certification program, GaTAPP. A deeper understanding of their experiences, including factors contributing to their sustained commitment to continue to teach, may afford administrators a perspective of their role in closing the teacher shortage gap.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Each year, myriad school districts are faced with the added financial burden incurred when filling teaching vacancies created through teacher attrition. “Teacher loss or ‘attrition’ can cost a district 30% of the departing teacher’s salary. Using this estimate, along with Georgia’s average salary of $57,000 in 2019, the average cost of a teacher leaving a district is approximately $17,000” (McKillip & Farrie, 2019). The national average for filling teaching positions is closer to $21,000 per vacancy (Garcia & Weiss, 2019b). Multiplied by the number of teachers lost through resignations, retirements, and terminations, the cost to districts to train new teachers presents an annual expense of millions of dollars (King, 2018; Phillips, 2015). As a nation, school districts spend an estimated total of almost $8 billion annually for teacher recruitment and new teacher training (Garcia & Weiss, 2019b; Sutcher et al., 2019). The existing disproportionality in Georgia’s teacher supply and demand exacerbates the difficulty of filling vacancies, particularly in rural school districts (GaPSC, 2019).

This researcher examined the strategy of relieving teacher shortages through the practice of hiring individuals who do not hold Georgia teacher certification but are eligible to obtain certification through the GaTAPP. I focused my research in southwest Georgia, specifically in the geographic region served by an identified RESA in this

region. Through qualitative research methods, I acquired data to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What are the life and career experiences of successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in southwest Georgia?

Research Question 2: What were the perceived barriers of successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in southwest Georgia?

Research Question 3: What strategies were used by successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in southwest Georgia to mitigate completion barriers?

Findings from this study may hold particular value for those directly involved with school district personnel, including building and district-level administrators and school board members. Outcomes will be especially beneficial to entities responsible for the administration of Georgia's alternate certification program and Georgia teacher certification rules. Specifically, GaTAPP administrators and facilitators from RESAs across Georgia and the GaPSC. Results from this study will provide increased awareness of an identified gap in the literature.

The literature review serves several purposes. Through an exhaustive review of the literature, the researcher identified results from closely connected studies, related the topic of study to similar work in the field, and helped identify gaps in the current exchange of ideas in the literature (Creswell, 2014). "The essential characteristic of a good literature review is *relevance*…" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 145). Establishing the

importance and value of the study is achieved through the effective use of relevant literature. In the literature review, the researcher attempted to provide a comprehensive review of the topic being studied using the most current resources available which serves as "the basic rationale for conducting research…" (Galvan & Galvan, 2017, p. 12). The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of successful veteran completers of GaTAPP, a non-traditional teacher development program which leads to teacher certification.

The literature in this chapter assisted the researcher in framing the problem being addressed in the study (Creswell, 2014, p. 29) to provide some level of explanation of the teacher shortage crisis the US faces which provided the catalyst for alternate routes to teacher certification to be developed. Data gathered from the subjects may prove beneficial to school districts seeking diverse recruitment methods or strategies to better support active teacher candidates.

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory as it relates to alternate certification candidates. "People's perceived self-efficacy partly determines how well they develop the basic cognitive, self-management, and interpersonal skills on which occupational careers are founded" (Bandura, 1994, p. 79). Maxwell's (2013) four modules for construction of a conceptual framework are: experiential knowledge, existing theory and research, exploratory research, and thought experiments, all of which were used to provide the literature base for this framework.

Experiential Knowledge

Maxwell (2013) contended, "Separating your research from other aspects of your life cuts you off from a major source of insights, hypotheses, and validity checks" (p. 45).

My experiences provide a perspective which shapes my beliefs and assumptions about teacher preparation, certification, and teacher retention. Because I did not reach my current position through a traditional route, I believe there is value and legitimacy to alternate certification paths if the individual is seeking the position with the right intention. Although I did not obtain a degree specifically in education, I did have education courses and completed a semester-long field experience with a speech-language pathologist in an elementary school. It is my belief the courses and fieldwork I did as part of my degree provided invaluable experience which prepared me for working in the education setting. Those who have a degree in an unrelated field likely do not have this opportunity, which lead me to assume they may be less prepared for the idiosyncrasies of a school as well as the classroom management and teaching strategies necessary for early success.

From my professional experience in the school district in which I work, I believe a school system paying for the certification program is both a hiring incentive and an advantage for the district to be able to fill positions which, if left unfilled, could be eliminated entirely. Another assumption is that some people may view alternate certification programs as easier than traditional college coursework, and they may, therefore, intentionally seek a degree in an unrelated field with a plan to obtain a teaching certificate through a program such as GaTAPP. I believe individuals who seek alternate methods to obtain teacher certification fall into two categories. The first group of individuals received a degree, didn't find professional satisfaction in their chosen field, and are now trying education because it piques their interest, or someone advised them to pursue it. I believe individuals in this category are more likely to leave the profession

after a short period of time, possibly before completing the requirements of the GaTAPP program and gaining Georgia teacher certification. The second group of GaTAPP candidates worked in an unrelated field, presumably the area their degree is in, and then determined education was their true calling. This population most often enters the field with the intent to remain an educator until they reach retirement. This is the group of alternate certification candidates school districts want to hire and the population I was most interested in researching for this study.

Historical Background of Teacher Training and Certification

The art of teaching is well documented as ancient philosophers and men of religion "taught" hundreds of followers. The first teacher is a highly debated topic. Many feel it was Confucius, while others argue it was Socrates (History.com Editors, 2019). While the practice of passing knowledge takes on many forms, the contemporary concept of teachers originated in the American colonial era. In 1755, future President John Adams, like many before him, "untried and untrained," assumed the role of teacher without public objection or concern (Ducharme et al., 2021). The practice of an inexperienced individual taking on the role of a teacher was neither uncommon nor considered detrimental to students' education.

Education at that time followed a didactic model in which the teacher's sole purpose was to pass on basic skill knowledge, primarily reading and writing, which could be memorized and assessed through rote recall. (Ducharme et al., 2021). Trade skills were learned by observing elders, not in schools (Ducharme et al., 2021). In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, teachers were predominantly male and most had another profession, such as farmer or shopkeeper (Public Broadcasting Service

[PBS], n.d.). They typically only taught school during the offseason of their "primary" profession (PBS, n.d.). Requirements for becoming a teacher consisted of little more than having a school board approve one's moral character (Ravitch, 2003).

Foundation of Certification

As organized public education in America became more common in the states, the profession began to formalize pedagogy in specific content areas (New York University Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, [NYU], 2018). "Teacher certification in the 19th century was irregular and diverse" (Ravitch, 2003). In some states, a general knowledge test may have been required, but in 1834, Pennsylvania became the first state to enforce a law requiring aspiring teachers to pass a formal assessment of reading, writing, and math (Ravitch, 2003). Following this philosophy, other states recognized the need for accountability and consistency for teacher preparation. By 1867, most states required an assessment of the basic skills Pennsylvania first recognized (Ravitch, 2003). Some states added content testing the candidate's knowledge of United States history, geography, spelling, and grammar (Ravitch, 2003).

In 1867, President Andrew Johnson signed legislation to create a national Department of Education, whose primary function was to oversee the collection of information regarding the states' schools (ED, 2010). However, one year later, in 1868, the Department was renamed "Office of Education" and was stripped of some of its influence after state legislators expressed their constituent's fear the agency would gain too much control over their schools (ED, 2010). Today, each state maintains primary control of all training and certification requirements for its educators (Daniels, 2018).

Normal Schools

As formal certification of educators became a requirement across the nation in the early 1800s, normal schools were established to "normalize" and regulate the training educators received. (PBS, n.d.) By the late nineteenth century, almost every state had at least one normal school, many in churches and community organizations, to offer training to aspiring teachers (Ducharme et al., 2021). The state-developed training courses varied somewhat in duration and required curriculum (Ravitch, 2003). "In rural areas, local school boards ran teacher institutes, where their teachers could brush up on academic and pedagogical subjects" (Ravitch, 2003). Prior to the development of normal schools, few teachers had any type of formal teacher training (Ducharme et al., 2021).

The concept of teacher training programs continued to gain value and prominence throughout the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. By the 1940s, normal schools had converted into 4-year colleges, which evolved into state universities by the 1960s and 1970s (Ducharme et al., 2021). Obtaining teacher certification became heavily dependent on training in pedagogy and passing standardized tests of pedagogy theory (Ravitch, 2003). State education departments agreed that mastery of pedagogical subject matter culminated by being granted state teacher certification (Ravitch, 2003). Obtaining state teacher certification now universally indicates completion of teacher training and preparation requirements (Ravitch, 2003).

Original Teacher Shortages

Along with the increased emphasis on teacher training, the turn of the nineteenth century was a time of vast growth in student enrollment (Lucas, 1999). The number of students in American schools grew from around 14.1 million in 1890 to over 23.5 million

in 1930 (Lucas, 1999). This growth rate was disproportionately greater than the increase in the number of teachers in the same 4 decades (Lucas, 1999). "Accompanying dramatic increases in the numbers of students attending school at the turn of the 19th century and beyond was an enduring, always troublesome, teacher shortage" (Lucas, 1999, p. 49). In the first 30 years of the nineteenth century, many American schools, particularly in the Northeastern states, utilized a "monitorial system" to keep schools open (Blakemore, 2018). "At the time, there were not enough educators to go around in America's burgeoning school system, so the few teachers outsourced many of their duties to the students themselves" (Blakemore, 2018). Exemplary students would learn a lesson from the teacher; then these "monitors" would relay the lesson to other students at the same mastery level, but not necessarily the same age (Blakemore, 2018). This permitted fewer teachers to oversee the education of larger numbers of students. According to Lucas (1999), some 364,000 teachers were employed in American schools in 1890. By 1930, the total had only grown to around 640,000 educators (Lucas, 1999).

Establishment of Teacher Training and Certification in Georgia

In Georgia, evidence of provisions requiring teachers to obtain a "certificate of qualification" date as far back as 1858 (GaPSC, 2013). To provide guidance in all facets of public education in the state, the GaDOE was created in 1870, and the agency continues to deliver leadership and regulation to Georgia educators today (Huff, 2006). It is the ultimate responsibility of the department to ensure education funding from the federal government is allocated appropriately, and all federal and state laws related to education are upheld (Huff, 2006). According to a 2013 GaPSC report on the history of

teacher certification in Georgia, the State School Commissioner began to issue permanent state licenses in 1887.

The State Division of Certification was established in 1924, but it wasn't until 1991, the Georgia General Assembly created what is today known as the Professional Standards Commission in accordance with Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated (OCGA) (GaPSC, 2013). The commission was charged with the responsibility of the oversight and administration of preparation, certification, and professional and ethical conduct of Georgia's public school personnel. Through a partnership with colleges, universities, the GaPSC's Division of Certification, and the educators themselves, the agency has worked to remain abreast of current trends in education and has supported the evolution of teacher certification. The agency's continued commitment is evident with the addition of new fields, changes in new teacher assessments, awareness of trends in state and national traditional certification, and the development of an alternate certification program (GaPSC, 2013).

Aspiring teachers in Georgia may obtain certification through one of two options, traditional educator preparation or a non-traditional or alternate route (GaPSC, 2021a). Those seeking traditional educator preparation must complete a GaPSC approved EPP. Although EPPs in Georgia's colleges and universities may exhibit some degree of variance, each must maintain the Accreditation Standards initially adopted by the GaPSC in 2013 (GaPSC, 2018a). The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) developed five Accreditation Standards by which all college and university EPPs in the country must uphold to sustain accreditation for their teacher preparation program.

The Accreditation Standards adopted by the GaPSC include a sixth standard, specific to the expectations and requirements of the GaPSC (GaPSC, 2018a).

In 2015, the GaPSC revamped the existing structure and implemented a tiered certification system (Daniels, 2018). Georgia's tiered certification system includes the following levels of certification (Daniels, 2018; GaPSC, 2021a):

- **Pre-Service Certificate** – Holders must be admitted to an EPP. This certificate allows holders to participate in field experience, clinical practice, student teaching, or residency work while under the supervision of a certified educator.
- **Provisional Certificate** – Valid for up to 3 years while holders complete requirements for a professional certificate.
- **Induction Certificate** – For early career educators or educators new to Georgia. May be issued for a 1-, 3-, or 5-year validity period depending on the requirements the educator must meet before conversion eligibility.
- **Professional Certificate** – Issued to educators who have met all minimum requirements, including a satisfactory evaluation rating. The two types of renewable Professional Certificates are Standard and Performance-Based.
- **Advanced Professional Certificate** – Holders must meet requirements, including obtaining an advanced degree beyond an initial preparation program, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification, or professional certificate in Curriculum and Instruction or Instructional Technology.

- **Lead Professional Certificate** – Holders must meet minimum requirements, including having Teacher Leadership Certification.

Teacher Shortages

In 2003, teachers comprised 4% of the total workforce in America. At that time, there were twice as many teachers as registered nurses and five times as many teachers as lawyers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Today, teachers make up only 2% of the U.S. workforce (Christensen, 2021). In their extensive study on this subject, Ingersoll et al. (2018) reflected on warnings dating back to the 1980s of a forthcoming crisis in education triggered by extreme teacher shortages. These predictions included an increase in unfilled teaching positions because of a disproportionate number of retirements. Through analysis of the 2015-2016 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), the authors identified seven transformational trends influencing the contemporary teacher workforce:

1. Larger – more teachers in the field
2. Greyer – aging teacher workforce
3. Greener – more "beginner" teachers
4. More Female
5. More Diverse, by Race-Ethnicity
6. Consistent in Academic Ability – teachers have lower academic achievement test scores than other professions
7. Unstable – teachers leaving the profession

Four of the seven identified trends – larger, greyer, greener, and unstable – relate directly to the purpose of this study. The first trend indicated the teaching population is larger today than ever before. While fluctuations in birth rates account for some spikes, a

nation-wide decrease in student-teacher ratio provided one of the key explanations for identified shortages. Evidence of an increase in hiring special education and teachers of English Learners, was also revealed through analysis of the SASS (Ingersoll et al., 2018). This may appear to be a solution to teacher shortages rather than a problem; however, the need for these specialized instructors continues to grow at a greater rate than districts are able to meet (Ingersoll et al., 2018). To combat teacher attrition and increased enrollment in the subjects of math and science, a substantial growth in the number of mathematics and science teachers also contributed to this first trend (Ingersoll et al., 2018).

The second trend, "graying," addressed the aging of the teaching workforce (Ingersoll et al., 2018). As teachers approach retirement and school districts struggle to replace them, this trend "would force many school systems to resort to lowering standards to fill teaching openings, inevitably resulting in high numbers of underqualified teachers" (Ingersoll et al., 2018, p.9). This led to the authors' third trend: a "greener" teaching workforce. This term, implying a lack of experience, applied in this study to both recent college graduates as well as older beginning teachers. In the 2015-2016 school year, 62% of new hires were age 29 or older, with almost 20% being over age 40 and included mid-career switchers (Ingersoll et al., 2018). The authors emphasized, "Early attrition has remained high among this growing number of beginners" (Ingersoll et al., 2018, p. 12).

Finally, a fourth trend concerned the turnover rate in the field of education through what the authors described as an "unstable" workforce. "More than 44% of new teachers in public and private schools leave teaching within 5 years of entry" (Ingersoll et al., 2018, p. 20). The researchers found this trend has been present in the field of

education for decades, which has left the field woefully absent of the experience and longevity other industries attribute to their success (Ingersoll et al., 2018). This trend was reinforced by Garcia and Weiss (2019b), who determined 20% of teachers, at any given time, have less than 5 years of teaching experience. Kan (2014) confirmed teachers leave the profession at approximately the same rate as police officers and almost double the rate of professionals such as engineers or pharmacists.

Factors of Teacher Attrition and Retention

Ingersoll and Smith (2003) asserted, "Total teacher turnover is fairly evenly split between two components: attrition (those who leave teaching altogether) and migration (those who move to teaching jobs in other schools)" (p. 31). As this trend continued in 2017, approximately 8% of teachers were leaving the profession, and another 8% changed schools annually (Strauss, 2017). In 2016, the attrition rate in the United States was almost two times that of high-performing countries such as Finland and Singapore (Sutcher et al., 2016). By 2019, an estimated 8% of the nation's teachers were leaving the profession annually (Abitabile, 2020). Fifty percent of those leaving were pre-retirement resignations (Abitabile, 2020).

Researchers continuously attempt to identify root causes for teachers leaving the profession within a short period in the field. One study indicated attrition rates of those entering the field prior to full certification are two to three times higher than those of teachers who have completed an EPP at a 4-year college (Podolsky et al., 2016). In 2018, Young (2018) studied research conducted between 2000 and 2016 to deduce methods for general teacher recruitment and retention across the United States. To gather successful retention influences, the author studied core reasons for educator resignations. Teachers

provided many explanations for why they left the profession. Many of the reasons cited, such as lack of administrative support or influence over school policies, increased teacher retention once they were rectified by school districts (Young, 2018).

Salgado et al. (2018) asserted that those reporting greater self-efficacy experience higher student achievement. Young (2018) referenced research-based correlations between specific teacher traits and teacher effectiveness, as defined by student success on state assessments and state teacher effectiveness measures. She found fully certified teachers who teach within their certified subjects and grade bands experience success and remain in the educational field considerably longer than teachers working outside of fields for which they are certified. State certification assessments offer another strong predictor of teacher success (Young, 2018). Providing meaningful professional development, advancement opportunities, a positive work environment, and a mentoring program to support new teachers, all increase retention (Swanson & Wagner, 2016; Young, 2018).

Salgado et al. (2018) studied the certification routes of middle school science teachers in south Texas. Some teachers acquired certification using a traditional route, while others completed alternate certification programs. The researchers explained the differences in coursework hours, program requirements, and program completion time. Evidence provided by the researchers supported the idea that an individual's feelings of teaching competence and confidence influenced teacher retention as well as student achievement (Salgado et al., 2018). The researchers utilized the Science Teaching Efficacy Belief Instrument to assess how teachers during the 2015-2016 school year self-reported beliefs of efficacy. Findings did not support a correlation between student

achievement and certification route, content hours, or class sizes. They found student engagement, classroom management, and instructional strategies had a strong connection to a teacher's confidence and self-efficacy and thus, student achievement.

Not all attrition is bad. A certain amount of attrition is expected and necessary. "Effective organizations usually benefit from a limited degree of turnover, which eliminates low-caliber performers and brings in new blood to facilitate innovation" (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Approximately one-third of the annual teacher departures are a result of anticipated retirements (Sutcher et al., 2019). Pre-retirement attrition, on the other hand, is responsible for the majority of teacher vacancies each year (Sutcher et al., 2019). In the 2015-2016 school year, an estimated 66% of the new teacher demand was a direct result of these pre-retirement resignations (Sutcher et al., 2019). In a 2019 report from King (2018), the author explained while 60% of college graduates obtained a teaching job in 2012 following completion of an EPP at a 4-year college, a shocking 24% of those new teachers had left the professional after just one year. Consistent attrition such as this presents an almost insurmountable shortage in the field (Sutcher et al., 2019).

Financial Influence

One of the greatest factors in a person's decision to remain in a position is the financial impact on their lives (Garcia & Weiss, 2019b). Teachers have long voiced frustration about the disproportionality of their salaries compared to other professions (Podolsky et al., 2016). A teacher's salary is determined through a complex funding formula by school districts and is not subject to the same pressures of the labor market, which influences other professional salaries (Garcia & Weiss, 2019b). In 2018, the inconsistency was 21.4%, and the margin was on track to continue to widen (Garcia &

Weiss, 2019d). A discrepancy existed even within the profession as teachers working in high-poverty schools were paid an average of $53,300 in the 2015-2016 school year compared to the almost $60,000 their counterparts in low-poverty districts received (Garcia & Weiss, 2019c). Garcia and Weiss (2019c) examined the factors contributing to the inequality in teachers' salaries and found one fundamental difference between teacher salaries and those of other professionals is the lack of influence by a truly competitive market (Podolsky et al., 2016). This, along with an outdated and insufficient system of funding, results in educators being a holistically underpaid profession (Podolsky et al., 2016).

A teacher's annual salary is just one factor in the financial deliberation individuals contemplate when considering resignation. Feng and Sass (2018) assessed the impacts loan forgiveness, tuition reimbursement, and targeted bonuses have on the reduction of teacher attrition, teacher efficacy, and retention of teachers. The study focused on Florida's Critical Teacher Shortage Program (FCTSP), which began in the 1986-1987 school year and continued until the 2009-2010 school term. The FCTSP had two main components: a tuition reimbursement program and a loan forgiveness program. Each component required candidates to be employees of a Florida public school and work in a pre-determined critical field. The study's third element assessed the effectiveness of one-time signing and relocation bonuses as a recruitment and retention tool. The authors determined both loan forgiveness and initial signing bonuses influenced the reduction in attrition. They warned, however, while there is some initial relief in attrition, signing bonuses only offer a short-term solution, and loan forgiveness only yields long-term

benefits if the awarded teachers meet the standards of highly qualified teachers (Feng & Sass, 2018).

Rural, High-Poverty, and High-Minority Schools

"Teacher quality is a significant concern in the United States, but even more so in rural and urban areas that are difficult to staff, and compounded further in schools that serve low-income and minority students" (Miller et al., 2019). Geographic isolation and higher poverty rates make rural areas less enticing to fully certified teachers. The sparse population in these communities greatly limits the availability of teacher candidates (Miller et al., 2019). Although researchers have established the impact teacher quality bears on student achievement, many rural school districts have no other option than to fill vacancies with individuals who have not met their state's minimum requirements for teacher certification (Miller et al., 2019).

While rural districts struggle, nowhere is the teacher shortage felt stronger than school districts in high-poverty and high-minority communities (Garcia & Weiss, 2019c; Sutcher et al., 2019). "These shortages exacerbate the inequitable distribution of qualified teachers to schools serving concentrations of low-income students and students of color" (Sutcher et al., 2019). Statistically, the teacher turnover rate in high-poverty and high-minority areas is greater than that of low-poverty districts (Sutcher et al., 2019). This leaves students to be taught by a high percentage of inexperienced, out-of-field teachers who, in many cases, are paid less than their equally underqualified counterparts in low-poverty districts (Podolsky et al., 2016; Sutcher et al., 2019). The unbalanced funding of these schools often results in fewer resources and poorer working conditions, which places them at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to attracting new recruits and

retaining teachers each year (Sutcher et al., 2019). In 2018, the Learning Policy Institute estimated an almost 50% increase in the number of teachers in high-minority schools who were uncertified for the subjects they were hired to teach between the 2014 to 2016 school years (Sutcher et al., 2019). In the 2017-2018 school year, it was estimated that around 25% of classroom teachers in Georgia's rural, high-minority schools were not just inexperienced in the subjects they were hired to teach but had no classroom experience at all (Thompson, 2019).

School Climate

"The environment in which an employee works has a major impact on not just job satisfaction but also on the ability to do the job well and the desire to continue to remain in the job and the profession" (Garcia & Weiss, 2019e). The school environment is influenced by teaching and learning expectations, safety, interpersonal relationships, and administrative influence, which creates a school's culture and climate (National School Climate Center, [NSCC], 2007). Sutcher et al. (2019) examined the catalysts for pre-retirement resignations among teachers. They discovered an astounding 55% of teachers who left the education profession in 2013 identified "dissatisfaction" as the core motive for their decision. Specific reasons included discontent with teaching conditions such as class sizes, frustration with administrative support and practices such as limited classroom autonomy or involvement in school decisions, and larger concerns with policy development and implementation (Sutcher et al., 2019). Ingersoll et al. (2014) found the majority of resignees identified discontent with school administration as the primary factor in their decision to leave. Cottrell (2016) stated, "People leave because their manager is not meeting their needs. People quit people before they quit companies" (p.

25). Teachers report a variety of challenges that impede a positive working environment (Garcia & Weiss, 2019e).

Garcia and Weiss (2019e) addressed the areas of school climate defined by the NSCC. In regard to teaching and learning expectations, 27.3% of teachers felt students are unprepared for the grade they enter, and 21.5% identified a lack of parent involvement and support as a detriment to their school climate. Safety concerns included being threatened by students (21.8%) and being physically assaulted by a student in their current school (12.4%) (Garcia & Weiss, 2019e). The greatest indicator of dissatisfaction in school climate for the teachers in this study was the lack of influence they felt they have regarding the subject and curriculum they teach (71.3%) and the materials they are required to use (74.5%). Perhaps the most alarming statistic Garcia and Weiss (2019e) revealed was the 57.5% of teachers who acknowledged uncertainty regarding whether they would still choose to become a teacher if given the opportunity to go back to college. In a 2015 study by the GaDOE, 66.9% of teachers admitted they were either unlikely or very unlikely to recommend teaching as a career choice to high school graduates (Owens, 2015). Unfortunately, this cry for reform has yet to yield policy change resulting in significant improvement in working conditions for teachers.

Teacher Attrition and Retention in Georgia

In Georgia, while the 2018-2019 school year started with more certified teachers than the year before, 16,000 teachers had left the profession between the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years (McKillip & Farrie, 2019). Analysts anticipate a 3 million student surge in Georgia's school enrollment by 2028 (Daniels, 2018). This, accompanied by a growing teacher shortage crisis, leaves districts in Georgia with a predicted 100,000

teacher shortfall by 2025 (Daniels, 2018). In 2016, Georgia hired 18,299 teachers (GaPSC, 2021b). After 6 years, only 67% remained in Georgia schools (GaPSC, 2021b). One contributing factor, according to McKillip and Farrie (2019), is Georgia has the sixth largest gap in the nation between teachers' salaries and other professions. Thus, it is not surprising that high-poverty and high-minority school districts in the state struggle annually to attract and retain certified teachers in their classrooms (McKillip & Farrie, 2019).

Of the 181 school districts in Georgia, 95 are considered rural, high-poverty, and/or high-minority (GaDOE, 2021; McKillip & Farrie, 2019). Out of the 14 school districts served by southwest Georgia and addressed in this study, 12 are defined as rural by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) (GOSA, 2015). While the state currently employs 114,800 educators, who serve approximately 1.6 million students, the number of certified teachers fails to meet the vacancy needs within the state's school districts (Daniels, 2018; GaDOE, 2021).

Teacher Shortages in Critical Fields

In 2017, the ED identified the fields of special education, math and science, and foreign language as "high-need" across America's schools (ED, 2017). "Middle and high schools, in particular, face challenges in filling positions in special education, math, science, foreign language, applied technology, and ESL" (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2019). Cowan et al. (2016) argued that the widely publicized "national teacher shortage" only exists in specifically identified subjects. These authors contended policies designed to address a broad sweeping teacher shortage crisis should be redesigned to target these particular subject areas (Cowan et al., 2016).

Like the majority of the United States, Georgia also faces critical needs in the fields of special education, math, science, and foreign and bilingual language (Daniels, 2018).

Special Education

As school districts across the nation struggle to fill vacancies, perhaps the greatest void felt by districts is when a special education teacher leaves. Forty-eight states and the District of Columbia report teacher shortages in special education (Berry & Shields, 2017). A national shortage in this domain has been reported since the 1960s (Sutcher et al., 2019). According to the ED Teacher Shortage Areas report, in the 2019-2020 school year, Georgia reported a pervasive shortage of special education teachers across all domains and every grade level, kindergarten through grade 12 (ED, 2021a). Mason-Williams (2015) investigated qualifications and preparations of special education teachers in high-poverty areas to determine equality in the distribution of teachers in North Carolina. Data utilized from the 2004 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) helped determine teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Mason-Williams, 2015). Special education teachers were categorized into three levels of preparation (extensive, some, and none). Each level was then further defined by grouping the teachers into six areas (degree major, degree level, special education certification, education certification, preparation program, and teaching experience).

Mason-Williams (2015) found a statistically significant correlation between special education teachers in high-poverty schools and less qualified, less prepared teachers. These outcomes were attributed to the higher turnover rate in this field as well as a reduced number of available special education teachers available for hire each year (Mason-Williams, 2015; Samuels, 2018). Samuels (2018) found primary factors

contributing to the attrition of special education teachers include a lack of understanding of the professional responsibilities of teachers in this field, difficulties balancing expectations of various supervisors, and the volume of paperwork required of special education teachers.

Math and Science

Reported closely behind special education are the teacher shortages in the subjects of mathematics and science (Sutcher et al., 2019). These domains have consistently experienced shortages since the 1950s (Sutcher et al., 2019). In the 2017–2018 school year, 47 states and the District of Columbia reported teacher shortages in mathematics (Berry & Shields, 2017). Shortages in science were reported by 43 states in the same school year (ED Office of Postsecondary Education, 2017). In 2019-2020, Georgia identified a significant shortage in "Basic and Advanced Mathematics" in grades 6-12 and all areas of science in the same grade bands (ED, 2021a). "With greater job opportunities offering stronger compensation in the broader labor market for individuals who have trained in mathematics and science fields, these subjects are up against a particularly difficult recruitment challenge" (Sutcher et al., 2019). Ingersoll and Perda (2009) correlated the shortage of mathematics and science teachers to "the quality of educational performance and, in turn, to the future well-being of the economy and security of the nation" (p. 2). The authors contended that the shortage in these subjects was not due to a lack of teacher training in mathematics and science. Rather, it was attributed almost entirely to pre-retirement attrition and the competitive hiring market for individuals trained in these disciplines. (Ingersoll & Perda, 2009).

Foreign Language

Swanson and Wagner (2016) considered the teacher preparation, certification routes, recruitment, and specific content teacher retention of foreign language teachers, discovering many leave prior to retirement. According to their research, the output from colleges and universities does not meet the resulting void, leaving unfilled positions in schools and students without alternative opportunities to learn languages. The authors believed foreign language students become foreign language teachers. They also stressed that the possibility of students not having teachers to teach foreign languages breaks this cycle and exacerbates the shortage. They researched questions regarding certification pathways through teacher preparation programs and teacher retention. The researchers found foreign language teachers experience disadvantages at the collegiate level. Further, they discovered students who desire an education certificate face unique challenges when universities inconsistently classify foreign language programs, leaving foreign language majors under a multitude of schools.

According to Swanson and Wagner (2016), identifying the best preparation method for future teachers remains a challenge. The researchers believed mentorship is fundamental to teacher success. They asserted those who choose alternate certification routes are particularly vulnerable to pitfalls experienced by new teachers. Georgia State University and the Language Teacher Retention Institute, created by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language, collaborated to cultivate and support novice teachers (Swanson & Wagner, 2016). The hope is for effective foreign language teachers to inspire the next generation of teachers in this critical field and close the foreign language teacher voids (Swanson & Wagner, 2016).

Teacher Workforce Supply and Demand

"Knowing how many teachers are needed is crucial to understanding labor market needs and thus ensuring that every community has access to a sufficient supply of well-qualified teachers" (Sutcher et al., 2019). Teacher shortages occur when there is an insufficient number of qualified (certified) individuals available to work in the areas where vacancies exist (Sutcher et al., 2019). This imbalance of trained teachers (supply) and school district needs (demand) has created a vast disparity in the field (Sutcher et al., 2019). Will (2018) asserted college education programs experienced a noticeable enrollment decline. Program completion declined 23% over a nine-year period from the 2007-2008 school year to the 2015-2016 school term. Even more remarkable is the 32% decline for those completing alternate certification programs (Will, 2018).

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities surveyed students and found most perceived a career in education to be unappealing (Will, 2018). As such, colleges must realign their program focus to meet school district needs (Wan et al., 2019; Will, 2018). The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education highlighted a 21-state teacher-prep program completion promotion during the 2019 school year, which included reducing standardized certification exams in favor of performance-based assessments (Will, 2018). Policymakers, colleges, and state Departments of Education are collaboratively seeking ways to explain the decline in interest and completion of teacher programs (Will, 2018).

Similarly, Wan et al. (2019) conducted a predictive study of Michigan's teacher supply. Taking historical data into account, the team found an annual decline in the number of individuals attending who obtained teacher certification between 2012 and

2016 (Wan et al., 2019). In this time span, the number of certified teachers dropped by almost 2,000 (Wan et al., 2019). If the current trajectory continues, the nation will experience a 20% increase in the demand for teachers over the next decade (Daniels, 2018). “The United States could need 316,000 teachers per year by 2025” (Daniels, 2018). These statistics are indicative of an impending widening of the divide between teacher supply and demand. To rectify the inadequate supply of teachers, Wan et al. (2019) recommended teacher preparation programs partner with school districts to understand the workforce needs and implement campaigns to attract future teachers to meet those needs.

The GaPSC assessed teacher supply and demand between the 2015 and 2018 school years (GaPSC, 2018b). In that 4-year period, every education field, except for Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE), saw a decline in the number of graduates from EPPs (GaPSC, 2018b). Changes ranged from a 15% decline in special education completers to a 35% drop in mathematics (GaPSC, 2018b). Almost as severe were middle grades and foreign language teaching programs which each had a 34% decrease in program completers (GaPSC, 2018b). In the 2019 academic year, almost 3,500 special education teachers and nearly 1,000 middle grades math and science positions were filled by uncertified individuals (GaPSC, 2019). These statistics are not surprising as special education, mathematics, and foreign languages have been identified as critical needs areas in Georgia for decades (Daniels, 2019). Georgia currently has 817 traditional EPPs (ED, 2021b). In the 2018-2019 academic year, these programs had a total of 16,138 enrollees and 4,054 program completers (ED, 2021b). Although Georgia

continues to struggle to fill all teacher vacancies, the number of EPP completers in the state is consistently higher than the national average (ED, 2021b).

The *2018 K-12 Teacher and Leader Workforce Executive Summary* from Georgia's GOSA revealed a total of 90.8% of teachers and leaders returned to their positions, and 5% remained in the profession but changed school districts following the 2016-2017 school year (Aleshina, 2019). While the percentage of teachers and leaders is seemingly sufficient, like many other states, Georgia has a noticeable discrepancy in teacher retention rates between high-poverty and low-poverty schools across the state. Low-poverty schools retained 86% of their teachers, while high-poverty schools were only successful in retaining 78% of their teachers from the 2016-2017 school year (Aleshina, 2019).

Alternate Certification

The most substantial impact of teacher shortages befalls students (Swanson & Wagner, 2016). As the inability to fill vacancies continues to grow, states are seeking solutions beyond traditional college educator preparation programs. In the mid-1980s, Texas and New Jersey implemented alternative certification programs to develop teachers to meet their specific needs (Mikulecky et al., 2004). Alternative routes to certification allow individuals with a bachelor's degree in a qualifying field to teach while completing coursework and program requirements leading to full teacher certification (Clark et al., 2013). Support for alternative routes to certification increased with the 2001 execution of the No Child Left Behind Act. The *Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High-Quality Teachers and Principals* section of the 2001 Title II Elementary and Secondary Education Act recognized the effectiveness of alternative certification programs

(Mikulecky et al., 2004). The federal government began to encourage other states to utilize similar methods to recruit professionals from backgrounds outside of education to lessen shortages within their schools (Mikulecky et al., 2004).

Early alternative certification programs such as Troops to Teachers and Transitioning to Teaching were designed to recruit mid-career switchers, including former military personnel. They provide the opportunity for the individuals to begin working in the capacity of a classroom teacher while completing state certification requirements (Mikulecky et at., 2004). State Departments of Education not only received significant interest in these programs, but also, they recognized an emerging trend in interest from men and people of color, both historically underrepresented populations in the field of education (Mikulecky et al., 2004).

By utilizing alternate certification options, school districts can maintain high-quality education and provide the college and career readiness required for students' post-secondary success (Baines, 2010). As a result, districts may fill vacancies by hiring non-professionally qualified or out-of-field teachers (Young, 2018). Some districts increased class sizes to reduce the number of teachers needed (Swanson & Wagner, 2016). Others eliminated courses or programs, such as fine arts or CTAE programs (Swanson & Wagner, 2016).

According to a 2013 evaluation brief by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, as many as 40% of the nation's new teachers entered the field through alternate routes to certification (Clark et al., 2013). Aleshina (2019) revealed only 75% of teachers who completed traditional educator preparation programs in 2017 were employed as teachers at the start of the 2017-2018 school year,

while 90% of those who completed an alternative preparation program retained employment in the same time frame.

Baines (2010) emphasized, “Today, alternative certification is no longer alternative—it is mainstream, and the number of alternatively certified teachers is soaring” (p. 10). At that time, for some districts, alternate certification was considered a life preserver for rural districts unable to fill positions (Baines, 2010). Sutcher et al. (2019) identified vacancies across 36 states filled by at least 87,000 non-certified individuals in the 2017 school year. Baines (2010) determined when colleges and universities redesigned program requirements for education majors to include more stringent admission requirements and more course hours, state legislatures began to open opportunities for alternate education certification applicants. He found while some of these programs were quite reputable, many felt this was a “quick and easy” way to become a teacher. And the array of alternative certification programs does not offer consistency in duration or fieldwork requirements leading to a disparity in program quality (Baines, 2010). In 2010, 47 states, even those with an abundance of teachers, accepted some type of alternate certification program (Baines, 2010). Forty-eight states now offer alternative options to obtain teacher certification (Long, 2020).

Some states have made a distinction between whether a candidate is completing a Bachelor’s Alternative Degree or a Bachelor’s Alternative Program (Baines, 2010). The most distinct difference was those who completed an alternate certification program may not have had any classroom experience before being hired, while those who obtained a traditional teaching degree had some level of field experience (Baines, 2010). Additionally, program completers can work an entire year without being required to take

the state's competency assessment, while students with a degree have taken a state-mandated exam prior to being awarded teacher certification.

"Despite their growing prevalence, alternative routes to teacher certification remain controversial" (Clark et al., 2013). Bruno et al. (2018) surveyed teachers who obtained certification through traditional EPPs and alternative routes to certification. In their research, they found alternative route programs not only met the demands of districts, but also, they produced a more diverse workforce (Bruno et al., 2018). Additionally, no significant difference was found between the teacher's perception of readiness between traditional and alternative training programs (Bruno et al., 2018). "ARP [Alternative Route Program] teachers perceive that their programs are providing adequate preparation to meet the needs of students and that overall ARP teachers have a positive rating of the training received in their preparation programs" (Bruno et al., 2018, p. 310).

Two similar studies were sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences and conducted by Clark et al. (2013). This team focused on the teacher effectiveness of alternatively and traditionally certified teachers in disadvantaged schools and the same dyad in a selected group of elementary schools (Clark et al., 2013). In both studies, teachers who obtained certification through alternative routes were at least as effective as their traditionally trained counterparts (Clark et al., 2013). In some cases, student achievement exceeded that of students taught by EPP completers (Clark et al., 2013).

Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy

The GaDOE and the GaPSC recognized the growing statewide problem with teacher retention and recruitment (GaPSC, 2009). In response, they collaborated to

develop an alternate certification option to help alleviate the gap in teacher supply and demand resulting from teachers not returning to work due to teacher attrition and teacher turnover (GaPSC, 2009). In 2001, the Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program became the state's first alternative certification opportunity (GaPSC, 2009). On May 15, 2009, the GaPSC adopted GaPSC Rule 505-3-.05, which fundamentally transformed the non-traditional preparation of teachers in the state and solidified the program now known as the GaTAPP (GaPSC, 2009). All rules and guidelines concerning non-traditional pathways to certification are now preserved under one umbrella (GaPSC, 2009). The development of GaTAPP enabled districts to fill vacancies with individuals working to obtain teacher certification.

Georgia has 23 non-traditional educator program providers of GaTAPP (GaPSC, 2021a). Program providers are located across the state at 14 RESAs, seven local school systems, one technical college, and one Georgia-based non-profit organization. Any administrative unit interested in becoming a GaTAPP program provider must complete an application process and be approved by the GaPSC through the same review practice as all other EPPs in Georgia (GaPSC, 2021a). Just as in college and university EPPs, GaTAPP providers must meet all six Georgia Standards for the Approval of Educator Preparation Providers and EPPs (GaPSC, 2018a). The program is designed to meet the demands in the individual areas in which the providers are located. For this reason, not all program providers offer the same certification areas. southwest Georgia RESA, for example, offers elementary education, all middle and secondary grades content areas, all CTAE programs, and all special education grade bands. Griffin RESA offers all of these as well as three foreign language certifications. These options are designed to serve the

districts within the regions served by the providers and support the individuals seeking to fill the vacancies.

Individuals seeking admission into a GaTAPP program must meet several prerequisites, including a bachelor's degree or higher, passing scores on all required assessments, verification of content knowledge, and secured employment in a regionally accredited school system (GaPSC, 2021a). In addition to holding a degree in a related field, GaTAPP providers require a minimum grade point average of 2.5 (GaPSC, 2021a). Prior to acceptance, each potential candidate must pass the Georgia Educator Ethics Assessment and all three tests within the GACE Program Admission Assessment (PAA) (GaPSC, 2021a). It is possible for an applicant to be exempt from taking the PAA by submitting a qualifying score on an approved college entrance exam (GaPSC, 2021a). Additionally, candidates must obtain a passing score on the GACE assessment in the content area for which they have been hired (GaPSC, 2021a). Because the program is designed as a job-embedded experience, all applicants must be employed in an accredited school system and be recommended for admission by the local unit of administration (LUA) (GaPSC, 2021a).

As the only state-recognized non-traditional route to teacher certification, the GaPSC works closely with GaTAPP program providers to deliver "opportunities for candidates to develop and demonstrate competence in the professional roles for which they are preparing while supported by their own Candidate Support Team" (GaPSC, 2021a). This team is comprised of three or four members and monitors, assesses, and coaches candidates throughout the program (GaPSC, 2021a). Team members consist of a school-based administrator, school-based mentor, program provider supervisor, and a

content specialist, who may be the same as the school-based mentor or an additional team member (GaPSC, 2021a). Team members are vetted and trained on the Coaching Standards and GaTAPP assessments so they may offer superior support and guidance to candidates as they progress through the 1- to 3-year process (GaPSC, 2021a). While the idea of a support system for alternative certification candidates is not novel, Georgia was one of the first states to develop Coaching Standards and have minimum requirements for team members (GaPSC, 2009).

"GaTAPP really is non-traditional because it is designed to get content-rich applicants who lack pedagogical knowledge and skills into classrooms as quickly as possible, but with a strong support system to assure their success" (GaPSC, 2009). To ensure all candidates obtain a level of pedagogical training equivalent to a traditionally trained teacher, each candidate must demonstrate proficiency in 12 professional dispositions and 24 competencies (GaPSC, 2021a). Identified dispositions are evaluated to confirm a candidate's professionalism in demeanor and actions. Competencies reflect educator expectations and responsibilities and are divided into four categories: Planning and Preparation, The Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities (GaPSC, 2021a). These competencies are similar to Teacher Keys Evaluation System (TKES) standards and performance indicators.

The success of GaTAPP has proven the need for an alternate route to certification (GaPSC, 2016a). According to the 2016 Supply and Demand report by the GaPSC, 18%, or approximately 1,500, of the state's newly employed teachers were hired under an Induction Pathway 4 certification, now identified as Provisional certification (GaPSC, 2016b). By the 2018-2019 school year, over 6,000 teachers were working in positions for

which they were not fully certified, with over half of these individuals working in special education positions (GaPSC, 2019). A 2018 addendum to the 2016 report showed southwest Georgia, the region at the crux of this study, had a total of 249 candidates complete the GaTAPP program (GaPSC, 2018b). Of those individuals, 207 remained in the region for the 2019-2020 school year (GaPSC, 2018b). These statistics solidify the supposition at the foundation of the conceptual framework underpinning this study: those who obtain teacher certification through an alternative certification program, such as GaTAPP, employ the five sources of the self-efficacy theory.

Self-Efficacy

Natural instinct guides us to avoid situations we feel are beyond our capabilities in favor of circumstances which we feel are within our competencies (Bandura & Adams, 1977). The confidence we have in our perceived abilities has significant influence over our potential future successes (Ackerman, 2020). "Self-efficacy is the belief we have in our own abilities, specifically our ability to meet the challenges ahead of us and complete a task successfully" (Ackerman, 2020, p. 2). Sutcher et al. (2016) expounded on this by describing the influence self-efficacy has on teacher retention. "The more teachers know about how to do their jobs well, the more they experience a sense of self-efficacy and derive satisfaction from teaching" (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 63). Although self-efficacy is related to other intrinsic characteristics such as self-esteem, self-regulation, confidence, and resilience, these traits are focused on feelings of "being," while self-efficacy is focused on a sense of "doing" (Ackerman, 2020). Successful experiences, particularly in the face of adversity, foster self-efficacy just as failures reinforce expectations of future disappointments when faced with similar circumstances (Bandura & Adams, 1977).

One of the most powerful self-efficacy builders is sustained perseverance under challenging conditions (Ackerman, 2020, Bandura & Adams, 1977, Bandura et al., 1980, Bandura, 1994). "The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goal challenges people set for themselves and the firmer the commitment to them" (Bandura, 1994, p. 3). Enhancing self-efficacy is achieved through opportunities for attainment (Ackerman, 2020). Bandura and Adams (1977) explained how these opportunities provide individuals a method analysis through social learning based on four sources of self-efficacy: performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Over time, performance accomplishments have become commonly referred to in the literature as performance experiences, and emotional arousal is contemporarily referred to as physical and emotional states. A fifth source, Maddux's (1995) imaginal experiences, was added to the conceptual framework for this study.

Performance Experience

Of the five sources of self-efficacy, an individual's own performance experiences are the most influential in shaping and developing self-efficacy (Bandura & Adams, 1977; Maddux, 1995). Practice allows individuals to attempt to master a skill while simultaneously providing feedback on one's performance (Ackerman, 2020). This self-guided interpretation of achievement strengthens or diminishes self-efficacy (Ackerman, 2020; Betz & Hackett, 1986). Efficacy information acquired through personal experience has the power to raise or lower one's expectations (Bandura & Adams, 1977). Repeated success, for example, demonstrates an individual's skill mastery and increases the expectation of accomplishment (Bandura & Adams, 1977). Repeated failures, in turn, have the opposite effect (Bandura & Adams, 1977).

Bandura & Adams (1977) maintained the timing of experiences of failure may have more influence on the strength of self-efficacy than the failure itself. Long-term positive performance establishes the efficacy to the degree that occasional failed ventures have minimal impact on overall self-efficacy (Bandura & Adams, 1977). “Occasional failures that are later overcome by determined effort can strengthen self-motivated persistence if one finds through experience that even the most difficult obstacles can be mastered by sustained efforts” (Bandura & Adams, 1977, p. 195). Bandura (1994) cautioned those who have quick, easy accomplishments are easily discouraged when their attempts are unsuccessful, resulting in a diminished sense of self-efficacy.

One of the greatest benefits of performance experience is the degree to which these experiences can be generalized to other situations and conditions (Bandura & Adams, 1977). Once a skill is mastered, the efficacy may be used as a coping strategy when faced with a novel situation (Bandura & Adams, 1977). Through modeling and guided performances, individuals learn coping strategies which can be generalized when faced with stressful conditions (Bandura & Adams, 1977). “The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the more active the coping efforts” (Bandura & Adams, 1977). Thus, it offers a wider range of successes and a greater sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994).

Vicarious Experience

Performance experiences are only effective if the individual has had the opportunity for the experiences. The second source of efficacy information is possible even without a personal experience. Vicarious experiences are those which occur through observation of role models and are sometimes referred to as “social modeling” (Bandura, 1977, Tugsbaatar, 2020). Witnessing other’s success in an adverse situation allows the

observer the opportunity to recognize their own possibility for success (Bandura, 1977). Through internal comparisons, the individual determines the probability of their own triumph when faced with similar circumstances (Bandura, 1977). “Vicarious experience, relying as it does on inferences from social comparison, is a less dependable source of information about one’s capabilities than is direct evidence of personal accomplishments” (Bandura, 1977, p. 197). Essentially, if the observer judges their own abilities greater than or equal to the person modeling the behavior, they develop a stronger sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994).

“The impact of modeling on perceived self-efficacy is strongly influenced by perceived similarity to the models” (Bandura, 1994, p. 72).Vicarious experiences also have the power to diminish self-efficacy. If the model experiences repeated defeat, the observer’s self-efficacy might be lowered if they determine the goal is unattainable (Bandura, 1994). This is reinforced when the behavior being observed yields an obvious outcome (Bandura, 1977). Researchers found observers seek strong social models who demonstrate the capabilities which they desire to achieve (Bandura, 1994). “Through their behavior and expressed ways of thinking, competent models transmit knowledge and teach observers effective skills and strategies for managing environmental demands” (Bandura, 1994, p. 72). Vicarious experiences with a positive outcome may provide an observer with courage to emulate a situation. However, if the observed situation results in an undesirable result, the observer may fail to even attempt a similar experience (Bandura, 1977).

Social Persuasion

The power of suggestion can induce motivation or doom (Bandura, 1977). The third influence in self-efficacy is social persuasion and describes the way words can influence the behavior of others (Ackerman, 2020; Bandura, 1977). Words of influence and persuasion are frequently used because of their "ease and ready availability" (Bandura, 1977, p. 198). Positive persuasion encourages positive motivation and efficacy (Ackerman, 2020; Bandura, 1994). Similarly, when individuals are given unrealistic expectations and experience repeated failures or receive messages of doubt from outside sources, motivation wains and abandonment of attempts comes quickly and easily (Bandura, 1977; Bandura 1994). "People who have been persuaded that they lack capabilities tend to avoid challenging activities that cultivate potentialities and give up quickly in the face of difficulties" (Bandura, 1994, p. 72). When assessing the extent of social persuasion on one's personal self-efficacy, Bandura (1994) explained the influence negative messages is disproportionate to that of words of encouragement. People are quicker to believe they are unable to achieve success with words alone (Bandura, 1994).

Social persuasion is most powerful when accompanied by personal experiences of accomplishment in similar situations (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1994). However, even without previous experience to draw from, when people are verbally persuaded, they frequently show greater effort and endurance (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1994). Additionally, the level of familiarity with and respect for the person providing the persuasion influences the degree of efficacy attained. For example, when words of affirmation are given by a mentor or admired figure, the individual is more likely to trust and believe in the expectations (Bandura, 1977). Likewise, attempted persuasion from a

source with low credibility provides little change in the individual's level of perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Some researchers suggested the possibility of motivational self-talk, in some situations, to boost self-efficacy in a similar manner as that of social persuasion (Tugsbaatar, 2020).

Physical and Emotional States

The fourth factor of self-efficacy is a judgment of anxiety levels and vulnerability to stress when faced with challenging situations, which leads to perceived self-efficacy (Bandura & Adams, 1977; Bandura, 1994). "Perceived efficacy enhances psychosocial functioning through its effects on choice behavior, effort expenditure, persistence, and self-guiding thought" (Bandura et al., 1980, p. 40). Conditionals leading to an assessment of physical state may include stamina, fatigue, physical pain, or energy level (Bandura, 1994). One's emotional state includes origins such as mood, stress level, tension, or level of agitation (Bandura, 1994). As expected, affirmative physical and emotional states heighten self-efficacy, and depressed physical and emotional attributes weaken it (Bandura, 1994). Those who exhibit a strong sense of efficacy tend to judge their physical and emotional states positively (Bandura, 1994). When an individual experiences low self-efficacy in a situation, they are inclined to judge their physical and emotional states as weakened or troubled (Bandura, 1994).

Overall physical and emotional health is important to the development and growth of self-efficacy (Ackerman, 2020). "Because high arousal usually debilitates performance, individuals are more likely to expect success when they are not beset by aversive arousal than if they are tense and viscerally agitated" (Bandura, 1977, p. 198).

According to Tugsbaatar (2020), one's judgment of their emotional and physical states is indicative of their ability to achieve the established goals.

Imaginal Experience

Imaginal experiences (Maddux, 1995) offer an additional fifth route to Bandura's original four sources of self-efficacy. According to Maddux (1995), imaginal experiences occur when an individual visualizes themselves experiencing success or achievement. "People are capable of the anticipatory visualization of possible situations and events, their own behavioral and emotional reactions to these situations and events, and the possible consequences of their behavior" (Maddux, 1995, p. 9). By imagining success in hypothetical situations, individuals can invoke feelings of success, which in turn give a sense of accomplishment similar to the sensation of actually experiencing success (Maddux & Gosselin, 2012). Imaginal experiences may occur subconsciously, or they may be intentionally stimulated as a psychosocial method of self-efficacy reinforcement (Maddux & Gosselin, 2012). Imaginal experiences are unique because they may be derived through other self-efficacy sources such as performance experiences, vicarious experiences, or social persuasion (Maddux & Gosselin, 2012). Maddux qualified this source by clarifying, "Simply imaging oneself doing something well, however, is unlikely to influence self-efficacy as much as actual success experiences" (Maddux & Gosselin, 2012, p. 203). Through imaginal experiences, people can determine their own self-efficacy by imagining themselves in potential future situations (Maddux, 1995).

Summary

A review of the current literature was conducted to explore the facets of teacher shortages, the use of alternative certification to alleviate these shortages, and the potential

use of sources of the self-efficacy theory to complete alternative certification programs. A historical analysis of the teaching profession in America established the importance of formal teacher education programs, the origin of teacher shortages, and the birth of alternative certification. While a shortfall of teachers is not just a contemporary issue, the reasons for teacher shortages have changed over time and will likely continue to evolve as the world of education progresses. One of the greatest threats to filling teaching vacancies, revealed through this literature review, is the reduction in the number of graduates from traditional EPPs. Thus, states have responded with the creation of alternative certification options. Alternative certification is growing out of a need in the field of education greater than what the traditional programs can meet (Berry & Shields, 2017).

The practice of mitigating teacher shortages by hiring non-certified individuals and supporting their completion of the GaTAPP program was viewed through the lens of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory. When reviewing current literature related to alternative certification and the self-efficacy theory, it was clear this has not been a widely studied perspective, not even by Bandura. Alternate certification completers have the potential to draw upon each of the five factors identified as methods to strengthen self-efficacy; however, a pervasive void in the literature exists in this area.

An abundance of research and literature exists related to traditional colleges of education, certification programs, and teachers who attended them. However, after a review of the literature, an apparent void in the existing research related to alternative certification completers and their professional outcomes became evident. As the completion rates of non-traditional certification candidates consistently outnumber those

of traditional college EPPs, analysis of this population gains value and importance. Further review of existing literature was conducted to assess the development of alternative certification and its growth in Georgia. Understanding the experiences of veteran GaTAPP program completers may allow school districts valuable insight into what these candidates need to complete the program and remain in the profession successfully. In this study, I explored the lived experiences of veteran teachers who obtained teacher certification through the GaTAPP program.

Chapter III

Methodology

High rates of new teacher attrition have a significant negative financial impact on America's school districts as 40% of new teachers leave their jobs during their first 5 years of teaching at an estimated national cost of over $8 billion annually (King, 2018; Phillips, 2015; Sutcher et al., 2019). Without the implementation of alternative certification options, many school systems may be unable to meet the district's needs, and vacancies may remain unfilled. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of successful veteran completers of the GaTAPP, a non-traditional teacher development program. This researcher sought to identify which standard practices used among school districts in southwest Georgia were most effective in encouraging identified GaTAPP completers to remain in the teaching profession in the district where they were initially hired.

According to Creswell (2014), "In qualitative research, the intent is to explore the general, complex set of factors surrounding the central phenomenon and present the broad, varied perspectives or meanings that participants hold" (p. 140). To investigate the central phenomenon being investigated in this study, the following research questions were framed with careful consideration of the research goals, conceptual framework, methods, and validity concerns of the study (Maxwell, 2013).

Research Question 1: What are the life and career experiences of successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in southwest Georgia?

Research Question 2: What were the perceived barriers of successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in southwest Georgia?

Research Question 3: What strategies were used by successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in southwest Georgia to mitigate completion barriers?

Each of the following sections of this chapter contains a thorough description of the specific research aspects and overall methodology of this study. In the design and rationale section, I identify the foundation for the methods used in this study. In the next section, a comprehensive depiction of the setting at the focus of this research is provided. Following the setting section, I describe my role as the researcher, including personal biases and potential relationships to participants and how these were managed. The criteria used to select participants for this study and the sampling procedures are found in the next section, proposed sampling technique. In the succeeding section, data collection procedures, I identify how various sources of information were collected and why their contents were valuable to this study. Next, in the data analysis section, I highlight the strategies implemented to systematically deduce and organize the information collected. In the final two sections, I focus on the critical issues of trustworthiness and ethical measures to ensure the study's validity and reliability and the safety of all participants.

Research Design and Rationale

A qualitative research approach was chosen for this study to gain "a deeper understanding of a phenomenon by focusing on the total picture…" (Ary et al., 2019, p.12). According to Patton (2015), the purpose of qualitative research and evaluation is to understand how things work, not why. When one considers conducting qualitative research, there must be an understanding that meaning is deduced from an individual's experiences and interactions within their world (Merriam, 2002). "The key issue is the compatibility of your reasons for 'going qualitative' with your other goals, your research questions and the actual activities involved in doing a qualitative study" (Maxwell, 2013 p. 26). In this study, I focused on exploring the lived experiences of successful veteran completers of the GaTAPP program. A phenomenological approach was applied to accomplish this mission. The use of first-hand accounts from individuals who experienced the completion of the GaTAPP program provided awareness otherwise unattainable (Seidman, 2013). I used this study to highlight the voices of six veteran teachers who helped mitigate teacher vacancies within their respective districts by completing the GaTAPP program to obtain teacher certification. GaPSC maintains copious records, including the number of teachers who enroll and complete GaTAPP, however, the agency does not research these candidates' experiences. Through analysis of data collected from a series of individual interviews, documents, and artifacts provided by the participants, findings from this study may contribute to the limited existing literature in this specific area of teacher certification.

According to Ary et al. (2019), all qualitative approaches share the assumption a person's reality is based upon their unique interpretation of their experiences. What

makes phenomenology unique "is that the subjective experience is at the center of the inquiry" (Ary et al., 2019, p. 409). The phenomenological approach requires the researcher to "identify a problem for which…an examination of shared experience is necessary" (Ary et al., 2019, p. 410). Based on Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, the phenomenon at the nucleus of this study was the use of self-efficacy strategies by GaTAPP candidates throughout the process of completing the program and becoming fully certified teachers. My goal as a qualitative researcher was to acquire a better understanding about how GaTAPP candidates utilize self-efficacy sources throughout the process of obtaining certification and the impact these strategies had on the participants' decision to remain in the teaching profession. Procurement of information directly from the individuals with first-hand experiences allowed me to glean each participant's perspective on the GaTAPP program, critical support systems for candidates, and common professional attributes participants possess, contributing to their longevity in the profession.

Setting

The setting for this research, located in southwest Georgia, covers over 5,000 square miles (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The school districts in this area are served by a RESA. All of these school systems, except one, are considered rural by the GaDOE according to guidelines of the Federal Rural Education Initiative (Title V, Part B). Sixty-seven percent of these school districts are considered high-need rural school districts by The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA, 2015). Additionally, 87% of the schools within this region are classified as Title I schools, according to the GaDOE. The regional ethnic/racial composition is 53.4% Caucasian, 42% Black, 3% Hispanic, 1%

Multiracial, .9% Asian, .5% American Indian, and .1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The districts' unemployment rates range from 4.6% to 7.5%, with an overall unemployment average for the region of 6.2% (Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 2017).

This was an optimal setting for this study for several reasons. First, the number of school districts within this region which fall within the GOSA definition of "high-need" may be indicative of a high teacher turnover rate and therefore face a high number of annual vacancies. This may equate to a significant number of GaTAPP candidates in these districts. Because the RESAs are responsible for the implementation and completion process of the GaTAPP programs in the state, all counties served by the identified RESA will be considered part of this study, regardless of rural/urban classification. Furthermore, this RESA has recently increased the number of programs available to school districts. The addition of the Elementary Education GaTAPP program at the RESA in southwest Georgia provides a more comprehensive array of certification options for candidates and school districts. This addition also provides additional statistics for elementary, middle-grades, and secondary GaTAPP enrollment, completion, and retention.

Role of the Researcher

When one considers their role as a researcher, the first determination is the level of involvement the research requires. Because the participants in this study were not from my school district and were previously unknown to me, my role is best identified as an observer. Interactions with participants were limited to interviews and conversational

exchange. Interviews adhered to historical events and provided no opportunity for participation in the events being studied.

As the Director for Administrative Services in my school district, many of my responsibilities relate to certification and other human resources accountabilities. I have held this position since October 2017, meaning it was possible for current teachers to have completed GaTAPP at or around that time and meet the participant criteria. Although in my position, I do not directly make hiring or termination decisions, it may have been the perception of some employees that I do. While I am the district "superuser" and monitor for the TKES, I do not observe any certified staff. However, this responsibility may have led some staff members to believe I influence their annual evaluation. Therefore, the decision to eliminate the option of using individuals from my home school system was made with consideration of teachers' potential level of discomfort and to secure the trustworthiness of the research results.

For this study, my experiences with teacher certification and the GaTAPP were utilized to better understand the relationship between selected participants and the implications of the self-efficacy theory and successful completion of this alternate certification program. As Patton (2015) suggested, the process of *epoche* required me to "look inside to become aware of personal bias, eliminate personal involvement with the subject material—that is, eliminate, or at least gain clarity about preconceptions" (p. 575). This was accomplished by identifying and removing what Peshkin (1991) described as subjective I's. "These qualities have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what happens from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement" (Peshkin, 1991, p. 286). In this way, I moved

from a focus on my knowledge and familiarity with the topic to a shared understanding of the participants' experiences (Patton, 2015).

Proposed Sampling Technique

Patton (2015) explained, "Qualitative inquiry typically focuses on relatively small samples…selected purposefully to permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon in-depth" (p. 52). For this study, a purposeful sampling technique was utilized to select participants who were "information rich and illuminative" about the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2015, p. 46). Participants for this study met defined criteria in order to provide the in-depth information required to answer the research questions designed for this study. The criteria for selecting interview participants was established based on the following specifications:

1. Participants must have obtained teacher certification through the completion of the GaTAPP program.
2. Participants must work for a school district within an identified RESA located in southwest Georgia.
3. Participants must have remained a teacher for a minimum of 3 years following completion of the GaTAPP program and all certification requirements.

When determining the number of participants required for this study, I considered guidance from Seidman (2013), who suggested following two guidelines. First, the researcher must ensure there are a sufficient number of participants to adequately represent the population being studied. Second, the ability to reach saturation must be considered. From the individuals who met the specified conditions, I selected two contributors from three different school districts for a total of six participants. Choosing

two individuals within the same district allowed the exploration of the varied experiences these individuals may have undergone despite having some commonalities. Furthermore, participants were informed of their right to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Including two individuals from each district allowed continued evaluation of the district if one participant ended their involvement in the study. Each participant possessed a deep knowledge of the GaTAPP program, specifically through the specified RESA, and the obstacles incurred as candidates complete program requirements while holding a full-time teaching position without pedagogical expertise of that position.

I began the process of identifying subjects by contacting regional school district leaders, including district- and building-level administrators, via email and phone calls, to inquire about current employees who obtained certification through GaTAPP. The criteria for this research helped narrow the scope of potential participants and assisted these leaders in identifying viable options for subjects and school districts. All potential candidates were ranked based on the specified criteria. Those who obtained certification through participation in GaTAPP at the identified RESA received a priority ranking, followed by the greatest number of years of teaching experience post-GaTAPP. Finally, candidates who remained in the same southwest Georgia school system were ranked higher than teachers who had changed school systems over their teaching careers.

Once qualifying teachers were identified and ranked, district approval was obtained prior to communicating with the potential participants (See Appendix B). As permission was granted, I contacted subjects by phone to introduce the purpose and procedures of the study and discuss their willingness to participate. I followed this with an email summarizing our conversation (See Appendix C). Additionally, the electronic

correspondence provided a written account of the study and the potential contribution to the research. An informed consent form (See Appendix D) was included in the email and transmitted as an attachment.

Data Collection Procedures

"The data collection strategy used is determined by the question of the study and by determining which source(s) of data will yield the best information with which to answer the question" (Merriam, 2002, p. 12). Collecting data from multiple sources is common in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). This strategy reduces the risk of validity threats and ensures triangulation (Maxwell, 2013). In this study, I conducted a series of individual interviews and collected documents and artifacts relevant to the completion process of the GaTAPP program. Additionally, a Source of Data Chart was developed to track and organize data sources according to the research question to which they applied.

Interviews

"A phenomenological approach to interviewing emphasizes the importance of making meaning of experience" (Seidman, 2013, p. 18). Interviews give researchers inner perspectives, that cannot be gained from other forms of data collection (Patton, 2015). "An interview, when done well, takes us inside another person's life and worldview" (Patton, 2015, p. 426). For this study, interviews were formatted to allow a semi-structured model based on predetermined questions and periods of unstructured correspondence, during which the flow was conversational and enabled several topics to be discussed (Merriam, 2002). I utilized the three-interview series described by Seidman (2013), including in-depth, open-ended questions, to maximize the scope of participants'

experiences. This allowed me to gain insight into their backgrounds, their interpretation of the phenomenological focus, and their reflective perspectives (Seidman, 2013).

In an effort to increase the participants' comfort level and as an offer of convenience, interviewees selected the location of each interview. Following Seidman's (2013) recommendation, interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes each and were spaced three days to 2 weeks apart to allow participants and the interviewer time to reflect on each interview. Each interview was electronically recorded and followed a semi-structured format that included predetermined focus questions but also allowed for questions of elaboration and inquiry that developed naturally during the course of the interview. This format provided a natural exchange of question/answer conversation and active listening and helped me maintain the purpose and focus for each interview. Another component of the three-interview method of data collection is the transcription of each interview. Prior to interviews two and three, participants had an opportunity to review the transcript from the previous interview to check for accuracy and validity of the content.

An interview guide (See Appendix E) was used to "ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed" (Patton, 2015, p. 439). The interview guide confirmed the interviewer best utilized the interview time to obtain the most pertinent information and added a measure of reliability to the process (Patton, 2015). To thoroughly explore the experiences of the participants in this study, I utilized a combination of life-history interviews and interviews focused on lessening teacher shortages in Georgia through hiring individuals who obtain certification through the GaTAPP program and the phenomenon of using self-efficacy techniques to complete the

program. As recommended by Seidman (2013), the first guide was utilized to acquire information about the participant's life history. The second guide contained questions focused on obtaining information about the participant's contemporary experience, and the final guide contained guiding questions to provide participants an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of their experience. Interview protocols were developed in Microsoft Word for each of the three interviews. Protocols included demographic information, such as date, time, location, and participant, and were divided into three main sections to reflect an introduction, body, and conclusion (Ary et al., 2019). I used a protocol modeled after the example provided by Ary et al. (2019), including a detailed introduction to clarify the purpose of the study, informed consent, and permission to record. Additionally, the body of the protocol consisted of questions, potential probes, and a designated time for ending and included a review of contact information and confirmation of confidentiality.

Documents

Although not all documents and artifacts are created by the interviewer (Ary et al., 2019), I developed a document protocol in Microsoft Word to analyze each document. The protocol included sections for researcher reflections, participant reflections, and questions for analysis of documents and artifacts (Ary et al., 2019). Documents may be written, oral, visual, or artifacts (Merriam, 2002). For this study, I obtained a chronological collection of information documenting the participant's certification process, from admission to candidacy through final GaTAPP submissions to become fully certified. Documents from participants related to the alternative certification program included correspondence between participants and GaTAPP

mentors and evaluators, proof of assessment registration and passing scores, personal notes or journals from participants, artifacts from portfolio submissions, and letters from the GaPSC documenting participants' applications for and obtaining of Georgia teaching certification. Other potential documentation included artifacts related to mentoring support provided at the school level.

Additionally, I provided written transcriptions of each interview, which were added to the file of artifacts to be analyzed. To present the interview as accurately and completely as possible, the transcription included non-verbal actions, "such as coughs, laughs, sighs, pauses" (p. 118) and any other extraneous noises that may be detected on the audio recording (Seidman, 2013). Additionally, I scanned all written notes and primary or secondary source artifacts provided by participants to create both electronic and hard copy documentation of all data. I protected all data by having original recordings, hard copies of transcripts, memos, and documents, as well as backup jump drives containing electronic data stored in a fireproof box. The thorough review of these documents provided insights into the level of difficulty completing the GaTAPP program posed for each candidate, the participant's judgment of their use of self-efficacy strategies, as well as the amount of support and training provided from the program and school-level mentors and administrators.

Researcher Memos

Researcher memos refer to any written documentation created by the researcher related to the research being conducted (Maxwell, 2013). "A memo can range from a brief marginal comment on an interview transcript or a theoretical idea recorded in a field journal to a full-fledged analytic essay" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 20). At the conclusion of each

interview, I developed a memo about any immediate reactions or conclusions established during the interview. Reflections associated with perceived relationships between participants were noted and tracked for confirmation and detection of saturation. Throughout the process, I used memos to identify concerns of validity, researcher bias, and notes for future research.

Data Analysis Procedures

Analyzing data occurred simultaneously as the data were collected (Ary et al., 2019). Following Maxwell's (2013) guidance, I began analyzing data as soon as the first interview ended and continued to do so throughout the evolution of this research. This process was incorporated into the research design and followed a systematic plan (Maxwell, 2013). Qualitative data analysis is a "time-consuming and difficult process" (Ary et al., 2019, p. 456). This process requires researchers to be immersed in the data through constant reading, considering, categorizing, and interpreting the information so a meaningful representation can be created for others (Patton, 2015). During this process, I provided a rich description to transport the reader to the setting being described (Patton, 2015).

I utilized what Ary et al. (2019) described as three basic phases to analyze the data. First, I used open coding to become familiar with the data and organize the raw data. Although I anticipated using MAXQDA software to manage and code all data, the registration and enrollment process with this international platform proved to be time-consuming, frustrating, and ultimately unsuccessful. I, instead, manually coded all data, which allowed a deepened and richer evaluation of each data source. "The goal of coding is not primarily to count things but to 'fracture' the data and rearrange them into

categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107). I incorporated Maxwell's (2013) guidance to read each interview transcript, all research memos, and related documents as part of the data collected, then, review, and write memos about details, which were initially undocumented. This process promoted the development of "tentative ideas about categories and relationships" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 105). Next, I grouped data into categories and themes (Ary et al., 2019). Finally, interpretation and representation transpired to ensure an accurate description of findings of the study (Ary et al., 2019).

Data analysis strategies are based on the type of qualitative research being conducted (Merriam, 2002). I used phenomenological interviews, related documents, and observational notes as methods of data collection. Analysis of this information included phenomenological reduction (retaining focus on the phenomenon), horizontalization (treating all data as equal), and imaginative variance (utilizing a variety of perspectives to analyze data) (Merriam, 2002). I applied personal reflection and epoche to identify and remove any potential influencing prejudices or assumptions based on personal experiences before initiating data analysis to protect the process (Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2015). As Seidman (2013) stated, the examination of data requires one to have "an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest" (p. 119). I identified pertinent content and scrutinized information as soon as the data collection commenced (Patton, 2015). Next, phenomenological reduction, or bracketing, allowed the data to be analyzed in a way that illuminated the participant's personal experience as it relates directly to the phenomenon. Transcript text was categorized for ease and precise future

reference (Maxwell, 2013). This process involved combining categories into common themes to be interpreted to identify descriptive patterns. From this information, I deduced explanations for the phenomenon at the crux of this study (Ary et al., 2019).

Issues of Trustworthiness

According to Patton (2015), the validity of qualitative research is dependent on having a purposeful research design which yields rich data, a systematic approach to data analysis, high researcher credibility, and readers' value on the study. Maxwell (2013) stated not only is validity a part of the research design, but also, the researcher's perspective of potential threats to validity and strategies to diminish such threats are discovered as research is conducted. When threats appear, they should be dealt with appropriately. Seidman (2013) contended that "…qualitative researchers must inform what they do by concepts of 'credibility,' transferability,' dependability,' and 'confirmability'" (p. 27). The researcher employed a variety of methods to diminish and alleviate threats to validity in this study.

Credibility

The issue of credibility is more commonly known as internal validity (Merriam, 2002). In qualitative research, triangulation means information is analyzed from different perspectives, with a variety of frameworks, and using a variety of data sources (Patton, 2015). The practice of triangulation was applied by collecting data from documents and artifacts and multiple interviews with multiple subjects (Merriam, 2002).

The interview structure used incorporated "features that enhance the accomplishment of validity" (Seidman, 2013, p. 27). The three-interview series described by Seidman (2013) required me to meet repeatedly with participants over an extended

period. This provided the opportunity for relationships to be established between each participant and myself. I collected data until new information no longer surfaced, at which point I began "…to see or hear the same things over and over again…" and saturation was met (Merriam, 2002, p. 26).

Another way I eliminated threats to internal validity was through member checking (Merriam, 2002). Participants reviewed copies of their interview transcripts to check for accuracy and as an opportunity for them to reflect. As Seidman (2013) contended, member checking is an essential step as it "contributes to the trustworthiness and credibility of the report" (p. 100). The use of robust data analysis protocols protected validity and reliability between participants as well as between each interview of the same participant.

Transferability

Maxwell (2013) indicated, "Generalization, in research, refers to extending research results, conclusions, or other accounts that are based on a study of particular individuals, settings, times, or institutions to other individuals, settings, times, or institutions that those directly studied" (p. 136). When considering external validity, or the extent to which the findings of this study may be generalized to other phenomena, "readers themselves determine the extent to which findings from a study can be applied to their context" (Merriam, 2002, p. 28-29). One measure taken to help with transferability was the selection of a representative sample of participants or maximizing variation (Merriam, 2002). Further, Merriam stated transferability is supported when researchers give a "rich, thick description" so readers can quickly determine similarities between the setting under investigation and their own (p. 29). Participants in this study

were selected based on their ability to provide rich information directly related to the research questions. These in-depth perspectives, along with the variety of individual experiences, heightened the transferability of this research to others who have completed the GaTAPP program within the same region of southwest Georgia and potentially statewide.

Dependability

Dependability of research concerns the consistency of the findings (Ary et al., 2019). The design of this study provided the researcher the opportunity to establish consistency of findings through replication logic. The researcher conducted this study in multiple locations with numerous participants. Therefore, the dependability of outcomes was assessed within each setting as well as across the entire study. "One of the best ways to establish dependability is to use an audit trail" (Ary et al., 2019, p. 447). Audit trails contain information about the data collection process and how and why decisions were made about data analysis (Merriam, 2002). The audit trail for this study included all raw data collected, the Source of Data Chart, all documentation about how and why decisions were made during the collection and analysis processes, and findings of the study. Additionally, data triangulation was accomplished through the collection and analysis of multiple sources of information, including multiple interview transcripts, numerous documents and artifacts from participants, and researcher memos, to test for consistency of data (Patton, 2015).

Confirmability

According to Wolcott (2009), by providing meticulous details, "[the researcher] is the best source of information about the confirmability of what has been reported" (p.

86). In qualitative research, confirmability relates to the researcher's neutrality (Ary et al., 2019). I accomplished this through reflexivity, whereby I utilized self-reflection to gain awareness and identify bias based on my own experiences (Ary et al., 2019). Peshkin (1991) contended identifying potential biases permits the researcher to write with awareness and free of undetected orientations which may intervene in the research. Throughout the process, research participants provided feedback to help ensure the plausibility of the findings based on the data collected (Merriam, 2002). I immediately addressed unforeseen researcher bias as it arose during this study through independent measures and with support from the research team.

Ethical Procedures

The protection of rights, safety, and dignity are paramount when conducting research with human participants (Ary et al., 2019). Initial contact with the participants in this study was made via phone calls and email communication. Opening correspondence included an overview of the research topic and the participant's relationship to the research questions. Additionally, prior to initiating any data collection, participants were informed of the purpose of the research, their right to refuse participation or withhold information, and their right to privacy (Ary et al., 2019). My objective was to obtain first-hand information through these interviews, not to change people or their experiences (Patton, 2015). While there were no perceived threats of harm associated with this study, all participants received a complete description of data collection procedures and how information will be disseminated. Through the informed consent form, participants again made aware of the voluntary nature of participation and discontinuation of involvement at the participant's discretion at any point without penalty.

Additionally, the researcher notified participants of possible benefits of the study. Each participant provided verbal consent to participation prior to each interview. Participants were not asked to provide a signature on the informed consent document in an effort to protect their anonymity. To establish confidentiality and create a sense of safety to disclose information, a pseudonym was given to each participant. Organizations were accurately identified, as this information is public knowledge. As a second measure to protect the confidentiality of participants, I maintained all audio recordings, hard copies of transcripts, memos, documents, and jump drives containing electronic data in a locked fireproof safe only accessible by me.

Seidman (2013) contended that the function of a local Institutional Review Board (IRB) is to "assure that research done under the auspices of the institution is done with ethical regard to the rights and welfare of human participants" (p. 62). In accordance with Valdosta State University policy, I submitted a request and obtained IRB approval (See Appendix F) of this study. Interviews did not commence until after IRB approval was obtained. While the researcher anticipated all invited participants to agree to involvement in the research, the risk of refusal or withdrawal existed until the conclusion of the data collection period. If any of the participants decided to discontinue involvement, I would have been faced with the decision to seek additional participants or continue to collect information from the remaining contributors. While no participants elected discontinuation, I faced an initial selection dilemma when one of the participants recommended by a district leader failed to meet all participation criteria. When district administration was unable to identify a suitable replacement, the researcher, with district

permission, reached out directly to school leaders for recommendations until a second participant was selected.

Summary

Merriam (2002) explained, “The key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (p. 3). In this qualitative study, the researcher explored the past experiences of six veteran teachers as they completed the GaTAPP. Qualitative data collection methods were employed to enrich the available data. The researcher used purposeful sampling to select participants who met the defined criteria for this study. Each subject participated in a three-interview series using in-depth interview techniques to “focus on the experiences of participants and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2013, p.16). Data were securely collected and organized to protect participant anonymity and integrity. I analyzed data using a traditional phenomenological coding approach. Threats to trustworthiness were minimized to ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research. The researcher strictly followed all ethical measures to provide maximum protection to subjects, research data, and the integrity of the results from this study, found in the next chapter.

Chapter IV

Participants

Mishler (1986) proffered, "…through language, we describe objects and events, explain how something works and why something has happened, express feelings and beliefs, develop logical arguments, persuade others to a course of action, and narrate experiences" (p. 67). The participants of a qualitative research study do all of these and provide first-hand accounts of their lived experiences through which we learn. "The purpose of an in-depth interview study is to understand the experience of those who are interviewed, not to predict or to control that experience" (Seidman, 2013, p. 54). The criteria for selecting interview participants for this study was established based on the following specifications:

1. Participants must have obtained teacher certification through the completion of the GaTAPP program.
2. Participants must work for a school district within an identified RESA located in southwest Georgia.
3. Participants must have remained a teacher for a minimum of 3 years following completion of the GaTAPP program and all certification requirements.

Through a series of individual interviews, participants narrated the stories of their lives. Their experiences, even with commonalities, were unique and wondrous. Through the recollections of their lived experiences, the researcher was granted access into their

thoughts, influences, and emotions in order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon at the heart of this study.

Abbey

Abbey requested to hold our first interview in her home. Initially, this caused some apprehension on my part. I had assumed interviews would take place in a public location, but as I considered the advantages versus the disadvantages of the request, my primary concern was to ensure her comfort, so I agreed to meet at her house. Her small white dog was less excited to have a guest and barked incessantly until Abbey put her in the backyard, where she barked for the duration of our meeting. Abbey, seemingly accustomed to the background noise, paid no attention to her tiny guard dog. Her home was neat and well-organized and showed few signs of the adolescent occupants I knew inhabited the space. As we settled in the living room, she slipped her shoes off and folded her legs casually on the couch. Her story easily unfolded as we sat comfortably for the duration of the first interview. Establishing rapport was effortless. Her soft, gentle voice candidly told the story of her childhood, the decision to enter the world of education, and the evolution of her career.

Abbey was born to a single mother in the same rural south Georgia town in which her mother lived for much of her life. For the first 4 years of her life, she lived between her mother's apartment and her grandparent's home in the same town. She had no relationship with her biological father, but at the age of 4, her mother married a man who adopted her and gave her a new last name and a traditional family environment. With her new father came a stepsister, who was 4 years older, but lived several hours away. Abbey said, "I was basically an only child" until, at the age of 13, her parents had another

daughter followed by another daughter a year later. The quiet single child household she had known her whole life grew quickly and required Abbey to adapt to being the oldest of three children.

Abbey made friends easily and considered herself popular in school. “I was the SGA (Student Government Association) president in elementary school, and then I was an officer in high school.” She was athletic and a self-described “tomboy.” Academically, she identified herself as a good, but not gifted, student who loved social studies. “School was never hard except for algebra. I didn’t make my first B until I was in high school.” Abbey attributed her love of history and passion for Student Government to her parents and the dynamic of being an only child for 13 years. “We didn’t talk about kid stuff…mom and dad talked about politics a lot. My parents talked about grown up stuff, so we had grown up conversations.” Surprisingly, those “grown up conversations” did not include discussions about where Abbey wanted to go to college or her career aspirations. Both of her parents are college graduates who work in the fields they studied in college. Her father is an accountant, and her mother has a Master’s degree in social work and works in an administrative role in a drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility. Abbey stated that her parents worked a lot when she was young. As a result, she learned to be self-reliant and independent. Her parents were supportive, but Abbey did not recall turning to her parents for advice when making big life decisions. “I don’t remember ever having a conversation with my parents about what I wanted to do. I was a very independent child. I just took care of everything.”

When it came time to select a college, Abbey revealed she intentionally chose a school she knew none of her friends planned to attend. Abbey explained, “I don’t think I

ever did anything to be opposite. I just didn't mind not following the crowd, like, I was okay being alone." Driven by her love of history, Abbey's decision to major in political science was also strongly influenced by an uncle who practiced law near her hometown. "When I first went to school, I went to go to law school. I wanted to be a lawyer, but not like a practicing attorney. I wanted to be a campaign manager and speech writer." A rekindled relationship with her high school boyfriend led Abbey to change schools and majors. She graduated in the traditional 4 years with a Bachelor's degree in history and a minor in political science.

Abbey's goal of becoming a campaign manager remained steadfast throughout college, but upon graduation, she found herself without an opportunity to accomplish this goal. She moved back to her hometown and began searching for temporary work. "While I was trying to figure out what my next steps were, I started working as a daily substitute, then long-term sub, before being hired as a paraprofessional at the high school in the self-contained special ed classroom." Abbey was fortunate to have an uncle who was the mayor of a city, larger than her own rural town, and who could provide some guidance and potential opportunities to join the political arena. With the prospect of working on Casey Cagle's campaign for Lieutenant Governor of Georgia, Abbey was at a crossroads. She could follow her dream and work on the campaign or keep her position as a paraprofessional. One option provided a reliable income and benefits while the other offered an unpaid internship for an unknown duration. Only one option allowed Abbey to pay the debt she had accrued from her undergraduate education. Her ultimate decision was the turning point in her professional life. Because her parents offered minimal financial support, Abbey was unable to accept the position working on the candidate's

campaign and was equally unable to pay for law school. Abbey admitted the influence of her boyfriend led her to relinquish her dream. “If my boyfriend at the time would not have been so overbearing and I wouldn’t have had the debt, I definitely would have gone to law school.” However, the abandonment of one plan led to an unexpected source of fulfillment.

Any disappointment Abbey experienced by not going to law school did not persist. Her work as a paraprofessional provided an opportunity for Abbey to acclimate herself to the notion of entering the field of teaching as a permanent career. While still feeling pressure from her boyfriend, Abbey began to see herself becoming a certified teacher. She confessed, “As a para, I developed the desire to want to be a teacher before I actually applied for a teaching position.” After being a paraprofessional for one semester, a special education teaching position became available for the following school year. She applied for the position and was hired immediately. She knew the next obstacle was to become fully certified, so she turned to her district’s human resources contact who provided guidance on her certification options. “I actually didn’t want to do TAPP. I wanted to go ahead and start a Master’s program.” An unfortunate issue with the university’s acceptance deadline and her district’s requirement that she be enrolled in a program prior to the beginning of the school year forced Abbey to participate in the GaTAPP program. “I didn’t really know what to expect.” She stated that when she started, she did not know anyone who had done it.

Abbey began teaching as a special education inclusion teacher and entered the GaTAPP program in her district’s RESA in the fall of 2009 with a few other teachers from her district. “It kind of felt like you were a little team.” As it was structured, the

program also offered a GaTAPP mentor/coach to each candidate who provided practical support and conducted classroom observations. When describing her GaTAPP mentor, Abbey said, "She was always checking with me and sending me resources and if I asked a question, she would make sure I got the answer." Yet, she soon found herself struggling somewhat at the school level to find the support she needed. Abbey recalled, "I don't remember my administrators ever coming and saying, 'Do you need help with anything?' They would say, 'Hey, how's it going?' but they weren't really asking, 'How can I help you?'" Although she did not have any district-assigned mentors, she did find support from the school-based special education coordinator and one of the regular education teachers she worked with each day. In Abbey's judgement, this lack of structured support from her school district created one of her greatest barriers in completing the GaTAPP program. The difficulties GaTAPP candidates typically experience were compounded for Abbey as she faced the additional challenge of trying to learn the legalities and logistics of the world of special education.

> I remember sitting in the first special ed training and just wanting to cry. All of the lingo and just all of the terms they use…I just had no idea what they were saying. It was like a foreign language. I would go home at night and work all night. It was super stressful, especially writing IEPs. I was lucky that my husband was a new special ed teacher, too, so we could talk to each other about it.

By the end of her second teaching year, Abbey had completed the GaTAPP program and had grown into a confident inclusion teacher. As she thoughtfully reflected on those years, she recognized the unique challenges she faced. She also concluded, "…once you learn it, it's easy and you can do it quickly. It just takes time." Abbey recognized the

positive impact district support may have made on her journey as she worked to balance the expectations of her job while obtaining teaching certification.

Abbey mentioned her love for and pride in her students multiple times over the course of our interviews. She remained a special education teacher for the first 7 years of her career. During that time, she obtained the Master's degree in special education she had desired when she was hired. Her administration recognized her dedication and innate leadership skills and asked her to leave the classroom to fill the role of school-level special education coordinator. Early on in her 2-year tenure in this position, Abbey felt a familiar aspiration stirring. "I have told many people that in lots of different situations, administration is kind of like campaign management." With her Master's in special education, she envisioned herself one day transitioning into the Special Education Director position and began coursework to obtain a specialist degree in Educational Leadership.

> I thought I wanted to go through and do special ed administration but being the special ed coordinator there is so much red tape. It was just so frustrating because you would want to do what was best for the kids, but your hands were tied. That's when I started considering school administration.

As expected, she reached that goal and is happily beginning her fifth year as a middle school assistant principal. "I think [the decision to teach] was easy once I fell in love with the kids. Like, now I don't look back and regret it. I am happy. I love my job."

In her personal life, Abbey is now a single parent of two elementary age boys. Both she and her ex-husband, also a successful GaTAPP completer, have remained in the

same school system, but neither are currently in the classroom. She admits her parenting style is quite different from her own parents.

> We talk about what they want to be all of the time. We already talk about colleges. We talk about careers people have in the things that [they] are interested in. I've taught my kids that you have to set a goal for yourself, even if it changes, even if you get there and decide that's not what you want to do. At least you have something you have been working toward.

Abbey summarized her story by emphasizing even though she did not choose to obtain her certification through GaTAPP, she does not regret the experience.

Desmond

Although he seemed eager to participate in the interview during preliminary correspondence, Desmond presented a sense of apprehension when our first interview began. As we sat greater than 6 feet apart at a conference table in an office, he laughed nervously as I explained the interview process and presented the initial formalities required prior to beginning the conversation. The office was quiet and bright, but the weather took a dark turn early in our meeting and there was a lack of natural light. When the initial conversation prompts began, I noticed Desmond was not making eye contact and took longer than expected before answering. He gave the impression that he wanted to provide meaningful answers and said things such as, "Is that what you are looking for," or "I hope I answered that." As our interviews progressed and the storm grew stronger, his demeanor became much less guarded, and significant components of his life story were revealed. He frequently answered the protocol prompts without guidance

leading to a relaxed, informal exchange. However, there was a distinct vagueness and uncertainty regarding the memories from his childhood.

Desmond was born in Cleveland, Ohio to 19-year-old parents. He described his family as "low income" but stated, "I mean we had what we needed." His father was in the Army and before his first birthday, the family moved to Germany where he lived for 6 years. During those years, Desmond's parents had two more children, a daughter and another son. He was the only one to attend school internationally and reported he attended both kindergarten and first grade on the military base before his family returned to the United States. The family moved to Savannah, Georgia, but after a year, he and his siblings were sent back to Cleveland to live with his grandparents. "I was able to finish at least one grade level up there and then eventually moved back down to Savannah joining my dad and my mom…and we resumed school in Savannah." Rejoining their parents, however, also meant adjusting to a new baby brother.

The transition and instability created a disjointed educational experience for Desmond during his elementary years. "First grade was in Germany and kindergarten. Second grade was in Savannah, third grade was in Cleveland, fourth and fifth grade were in Savannah and then finished all the rest in Savannah." He claimed the multiple changes were difficult for the family and may have had a negative impact on Desmond and his siblings. Yet, he stated he was able to overcome the challenges. As he recalled, "I was intrinsically motivated to do a lot of things. I was gifted identified and I was placed in all those classes so I think that kind of offset whatever dynamic moving created for me." At the age of 10, Desmond's oldest brother died of an undiagnosed case of appendicitis. It was also around this time that his father retired from the military and his parents

divorced, leaving his mother the primary caregiver to Desmond and his two siblings. Through this adversity, his drive to succeed in school continued through middle school when he was accepted into a magnet school for high achieving students where he remained until graduation. "…I never really felt the dynamic where I really had to fit in because I was so used to marching to the beat of my own drum, so I think that helped me navigate being in that kind of competitive academic atmosphere." He maintained his academic focus throughout his high school career and recognized this experience as the point his mother gave him educational autonomy.

The independence Desmond described seemed to translate beyond a strong work ethic. As he reflected on the entirety of his K-12 experience, he struggled to identify a single teacher he felt made a difference in his life. His initial memories were of teachers who had been discouraging or condescending to him and his classmates. Desmond only identified two adults with whom he felt any type of connection. The first was his middle school band teacher. "I got my mom to write a note on two separate occasions saying I wanted to quit. He did not let me quit. That stuck out." As we continued to discuss the connection, I was struck that Desmond never mentioned admiration or appreciation for the man as a teacher, he only associated this teacher with the benefit band gave him. "…[not quitting] actually benefited me because I ended up getting a band scholarship." The other person he mentioned was his high school counselor, whom he credits with helping him gain direction when choosing a college. "I was the first one in my family to go to college, so I didn't know what to do." His recollection of this process revealed the angst he experienced. As his classmates were choosing well-known state universities and Ivy League schools, Desmond's decision had implications he believed his friends did not

have to consider. “There was that element of that financial part for me that kind of stuck in my mind and influenced my thought perception about what I’m going to do.” He recognized his academic record may make him a competitive candidate, but the weight of significant debt going to a large school would bring was more than he wanted to accept. It was only after confiding in his counselor that he made the decision to attend Savannah State College. “She was like, ‘A degree is a degree is a degree. It’s what you do afterwards that matters. Maybe you can’t go wherever you want but you can still have success if you go to Savannah State.’” Desmond’s hard work was also rewarded with college credits through some summer programs he had completed and several scholarships. His next obstacle was to choose a career path.

Motivated primarily by potential earnings and work schedule, Desmond established a major in chemistry. “I wanted to be an optometrist ‘cause I felt like they made good money and they had sweet hours.” After his first year at Savannah State, Desmond became aware of a job opportunity through Jobs for Georgia Graduates (JGG). “It was a job opportunity working for a chemistry company basically doing quality assurance testing samples.” This first taste of working in a chemistry lab was exciting to Desmond and confirmed his professional path. This further prompted him to seek other internship opportunities. By the time he completed his undergraduate degree, he had accumulated hundreds of hours of chemistry research experience through a variety of industries and other universities.

Desmond’s educational journey continued when he was accepted into the PhD program at Vanderbilt University where he immediately started another series of paid rotations in chemistry labs. “I did about 3 years as an organic chemistry laboratory

teaching assistant where I taught organic chemistry. Then, I got a teaching fellowship." During his fifth and final year at Vanderbilt, Desmond worked in a lab conducting research for cancer treatment. "It was during that last year that I was really thinking, 'man, I don't know if I really want to work in a lab long-term. It was beyond the money at that point." As he assessed the totality of his college experience, he revealed that his drive to stay ahead of his classmates resulted in burnout before he even began his career. "I was burnt out and really didn't want to go to work. I didn't want to be stuck doing the same stuff. I was done with research altogether." Surprisingly, Desmond revealed that despite his vast experience and PhD, he did not feel his credentials were sufficient in such a competitive job market. "I didn't feel like I was a truly competitive applicant from a self-esteem standpoint coming out of Vanderbilt." Faced with the prospect of having to accept a post-doctorate position similar to what he had been doing for the past several years, Desmond reassessed his priorities and goals. "Because I wanted to have a family, that kind of influenced that decision of 'okay, well, maybe I need to kind of consider another path trajectory.'" This reevaluation of career options led Desmond to broaden his professional scope.

With a desire to remain in the southeastern United States, Desmond contemplated his next move. A PhD in chemistry and years of experience as a teaching assistant presented an unexpected opportunity. Desmond explained, "I had a vague familiarity with a school superintendent" but admitted, "I had an unrealistic perception of [teaching]. I really thought great hours, family atmosphere; I can just go teach some chemistry classes." He contacted the superintendent, was granted an interview, and quickly received an offer to teach science the following school year. The apprehension and self-doubt he

experienced when competing for a laboratory job quickly dissipated when he acquired a teaching position. Even after being acclimated to his teaching assignment and the requirements for certification, he revealed, "I thought, 'how hard could it be? I just finished the PhD program.'" His confidence was bolstered by the teaching experiences his position as a university teaching assistant had provided. However, Desmond learned proving himself worthy to a group of high school students was more difficult than he anticipated. "I had no idea what was really needed." However, over the course of the next 2 years, the GaTAPP program guided him as he honed his teaching skills and adjusted to the differences between high school and higher education. Desmond gained both confidence and momentum, and by the time he completed 8 years in the classroom he declared, "Oh, I'm in academics to stay." He credited three components of his experience with being "the difference makers" in his job satisfaction and decision to remain in K-12 education: a nurturing and polite environment promoted by both staff and students, a work schedule that allows him to achieve his personal ambitions, and a supportive administration.

While Desmond's life story began with struggles and tragedy, today his narrative indicates success, happiness, and the achievement of dreams. Intermittently throughout the interview, he referenced how his desire to have a family of his own was an ever-present factor when making important decisions about his life and career. He beamed as he described his wife and three children, ages 3, 7, and 11. He emphasized his consideration for his family when establishing goals for himself, which include eventually moving into an administrative role. As he looked thoughtfully into the distance, he summarized his journey into education by saying,

> I think there are some personality traits with me that might have pointed me in the academic direction. I really guess I value intellect, I value intelligence, I value knowledge, and so I think those all kind of ran as undercurrents…so yeah…that sums it up.

Desmond is currently an instructional coach in his school, which afforded him the opportunity to obtain Tier I Educational Leadership certification through completion of the Georgia Leader Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaLAPP) program.

Martha

The first time Martha and I met was a stormy summer afternoon in a steamy South Georgia town. We elected to meet in a study room at her local library, which provided an undisturbed location for us to talk, and remained our meeting setting for each subsequent interview. While the room was small, it offered adequate space for a table and four chairs. The proximity felt far too close for the social distancing advice being promoted at the time, especially considering this was the first time we had met. Without words, Martha and I agreed to keep our masks on during our conversation. Whether it was the lack of distance, nerves, or the masks, Martha mentioned a couple of times during the first meeting that she was hot. There was no thermostat in the room, so I offered to request a temperature adjustment, but she declined. Despite being out of school for the summer, Martha had selected a professional outfit and applied makeup. Her confident appearance was juxtaposed with a quiet, shy voice and a timid smile that was obvious even behind her mask. She did not seem nervous to be there, but rather shy by nature. She was forthcoming with personal facts from the beginning of the interview, and I found myself transfixed by her stories about the success of her life.

Martha was born in a small agricultural community in southwest Georgia. Her parents were never married and before she was a year old, they had no relationship, which resulted in her never really knowing her father. She credits her mother for never speaking ill of her father or the demise of their relationship that left her a young, single parent. Martha and her mother shared a strong bond and many life lessons. Martha revealed that her mother regularly took her to church and raised her with Christian values. In addition, her mother provided guidance to help her daughter navigate the challenges she knew she would face. "

> She taught me a lot of things about life at a young age. I remember being about 9 years old when she started teaching me about sex, drugs, relationships, friendships, when and how people will use you if you allow them."

Martha described herself as a quiet child who grew up primarily playing with cousins. "I was kind of on the reserved side, you know, I liked to have fun, but I didn't need it." She attributed her reticent nature to her mature relationship she and her mother shared.

Money was tight for Martha and her mother, but the essentials were always provided. Although she knew her mother eventually completed high school, she was uncertain about her education level. Martha stated, "It's kind of sad because she had some education but didn't finish. The thing that kept her from actually obtaining a career was not having transportation to get to a class or take a test to finalize her degree." Her mother did not let her challenges interfere with Martha's schooling and made sure her daughter understood the importance of a good education. "Education was big. She always made sure I knew that it was important and that you wanted to go off to college. You don't want to take out loans. You want to get scholarships…HOPE and all that stuff." As

an adult, Martha recognizes her mother's emphasis on education as a warning against her own incomplete education and the struggles she faced as a result.

Martha recounted her educational experience as a pleasant one. She attended the same school system from kindergarten through 12th grade and considered herself a good student who earned As and Bs. She recalled school being somewhat easy and regretted not trying harder to make straight As. Martha explained she enjoyed extracurricular activities such as band, dance, and basketball, but did not participate in some typical middle and high school rites of passage. "I didn't do parties. They weren't my thing, and my mom wasn't big on sleepovers, so I didn't do those. I had friends. I just didn't do normal things with them. I've always marched to my own drum." Although her mother's rules prevented her from participating in some social events, Martha did not remember ever feeling left out or excluded.

As she described her K-12 experience, she recalled three teachers who changed her life. Martha was careful, however, to emphasize the importance of the teachers' influence as secondary to her desire to please her mother and God. "I loved school, but middle school is when I developed a love for the English language." This love was directly linked to an unexpected realization about her seventh grade teacher and herself.

> You know it's funny because in the Black community, you hear slang, you hear a lot of incorrect grammar, and I was one of those kids because that's what I grew up hearing, but my seventh grade English teacher was a Black woman. That was the first thing that really caught my attention. 'Oh, there are Black teachers out there?' I think she was my first Black teacher. I have this memory of saying

something and she corrected my pronunciation. I was like, 'Oh, that's how you say it?'

Her teacher opened young Martha's eyes to dialectal differences and the opportunities having a command of the English language might bring. "She spoke proper English and I was drawn to that. That shaped the rest of my life as far as how I present myself." Martha spoke candidly about never having experienced prejudice as a young Black girl until people began to criticize her for using proper grammar and "acting White." As she matured, she developed a better understanding of herself and others. "[The teacher] inspired me to be different and be okay with that." Although neither she, nor the teacher, realized it at the time, this self-confidence was integral to her future.

While the middle school teacher gave Martha insight into the opportunities education can bring, it was the support and honesty of a 10th grade history teacher that Martha credited with giving her spiritual answers and enlightenment. Although her mother had always taken her to church and Martha trusted she was saved, a history lesson about the Puritans and their rituals brought her to tears and shook her spiritual foundation. "I asked her, 'how do you know if you are saved or not because that is a huge deal in a Christian's faith?" Her teacher's raw answer was more than Martha expected. "She said, 'well, if you are not sure, then you are probably not.' In that moment, I sat there the rest of the class period in tears because that was such a scary moment for me." The teacher found an appropriate time and location to discuss Martha's questions and concerns. She provided answers and encouragement and Martha stated, "…that moment was when I truly became a follower and a Christian." In her assessment, this experience is at the root of Martha's teaching approach today.

It was the inspiration of her high school Spanish teacher that most affected the trajectory of Martha's professional life; however, she did not realize it at the time. As her college preparatory track required, Martha was obligated to take 2 years of a foreign language. She chose Spanish and found she had a natural fascination with the language. "My classmates joked on me because I would speak Spanish at basketball practice or wherever. I even remember my coach saying, '[Martha] how do you say be aggressive in Spanish?'" After completing consecutive successful years, her teacher encouraged her to consider becoming a Spanish teacher. Martha admitted that old insecurities and stereotypes immediately flooded her mind, and she was quick to dismiss any aspirations of teaching, especially a foreign language. "I'm like 'puh, picture a Black girl teaching Spanish.' I remember that so well. She kind of knocked me back down and I was my 15-year-old naïve, ignorant self saying that." While she dismissed her teacher's suggestion at the time, her love of languages was never far from Martha's mind.

After high school graduation, Martha decided to major in biology after connecting with a cousin who had become a doctor. She admitted that, once again, her perceived scope of possibilities had been narrowed by perceived racial limitation.

> You don't see many Black people in these positions. Like wow…Black doctor…female doctor…awesome! I want to be that! But it was for all the wrong reasons, for money, of course, which is the biggest thing in our culture. 'Go make your mama some money.'

Yet after only a few college courses, Martha realized the vast difference between a high school biology class and the expectations of college.

Martha realized she had been "sheltered somewhat as far as ideas" and began to consider her interests and the type of job she would like to have for the rest of her career. She recalled the conversation with her high school Spanish teacher and although she had no desire to teach, she began to explore career options. She changed her major to Spanish and aspired to be an interpreter. "That was my plan all the way through my senior year of college, but I feel like the Lord just had other plans." Martha completed her degree in Spanish but found herself working at Walmart, where she was occasionally called to translate information between the pharmacy or customer service desk and native Spanish-speaking customers. It was a chance meeting with her former high school Spanish teacher that provided the life Martha lives today. "She stopped me while I was working and said she remembered that I was finishing up my degree. She said, 'I just want you to know there is a position open at the high school.'" Martha, again, dismissed the notion of becoming a teacher but after much prayer, believed her teacher had been placed in her path at that moment for a reason.

> Weeks prior, I had been praying to get away from that job, for the Lord to just open a new door, a new opportunity for me to use my skill, my degree. It didn't dawn on me until a week or 2 later.

She relinquished her doubts and accepted an interview with the high school principal. Martha recalled, "The dude hired me on the spot. Still blows my mind right now. He took a chance on me having no experience." Yet, Martha completed the GaTAPP program to become a fully certified Spanish teacher and recently completed her 14th year in the role.

Julia

Julia bound up the sidewalk leading to our first interview smiling and offered, "Hi! Are you Brecca?" At her request, we met in my office, a large space furnished with a conference table that allowed us to sit greater than 6 feet apart. Each meeting occurred after work hours or on weekends, therefore, we were uninterrupted as Julia explored her life's story. Her energy filled the room as we exchanged initial pleasantries and I gave an overview of the interview process. She spoke with a quick cadence and would sometimes complete my sentence for me, but not as to cut off the conversation. Rather, it seemed that she reciprocated the level of comfort I felt.

Julia's idyllic childhood began in Valdosta, Georgia where she lived for only a short period before she moved with her parents and older brother to LaGrange, Georgia. After living in LaGrange for 2 years, her family settled in Jacksonville, Florida, where her mother continued working as an elementary school physical education (P.E.) teacher, and her father opened his own industrial chemical company. At the time, her brother, almost 7 years her elder, was entering middle school and Julia was just starting first grade. "I don't remember lots of LaGrange…all of my memories start in Jacksonville for me." Growing up, Julia attended a neighborhood school and lived in a gated, close-knit community.

> Me and my brother could not have asked for a better upbringing. I rode my bike to school every day with a big group of friends. The only time I didn't ride my bike, or scooter, or walk, or rollerblade, or whatever, was if it was raining.

Her early elementary years were filled with fond memories of friends and teachers. "My second grade teacher was by far my favorite person in the world. She was just one of

those typical movie-like second grade teachers that you are just lucky to have." Julia described the relationship with this teacher and other childhood teachers and friends as ongoing connections that remains active today.

With a mother who taught P.E. and a father who played college baseball and once planned to teach P.E., Julia described her family as athletic. "Sports was my world. I played sports my entire life." She was a gifted soccer player and enjoyed the sport year-round. She was also on her school's volleyball team and coached gymnastics.

> We have a huge soccer complex in the neighborhood so we played soccer, and we were all on the swim team and in the summer, we had our swim practices, then we would walk to Starbucks, then come back and spend the day at the pool.

Competitiveness, determination, and tenacity were also part of her childhood. "I was very hard on myself. [My parents] at no point had to tell me to push myself or do something. I mean, there were points they were like 'cut yourself a break. You're okay. You're doing enough.'" Her drive to excel was evident in any athletic arena she found herself as well as in the classroom.

By the time Julia reached junior high school, her mother had obtained a leadership degree and was the principal of her new school. She reported that having her mother the leader of her school was not difficult for her, partially because of the neighborhood atmosphere but primarily because she was a model student. She described her drive and determination to win athletic competitions much like she described herself as a student. "I got straight As, graduated 11th out of over 400 kids, had a 4.3 GPA because they had weighted classes and that kind of stuff." While she did not struggle to maintain adequate grades, Julia admitted she had a strong aversion to science. She completed a number of

dual-enrollment and Advanced Placement courses in high school, which earned enough college credits to enter as a sophomore.

However, Julia did not follow the path she had originally planned for herself. “I was not smart, and I was following a boy, so I didn’t apply to many schools.” Rather than attempt a soccer scholarship at her dream school, Julia made plans to complete her degree at a small college in her hometown. By the time the flame in their relationship dimmed, application deadlines had passed and acceptance letters had been sent. “I was scrambling my senior year trying to figure out where I wanted to go and what I wanted to do because I knew I didn’t want to stay there.” With few options, a high school counselor was able to push her application through and she was accepted at a small community college a few hours away. “That was tough. Nothing is wrong with community college, but it wasn’t for me. It was easy.” After a year, Julia transferred to a large state school in the same city and began to really focus on her future. “I decided to do Family Relationships and Child Sciences. I was going to do this and go into counseling.” Yet her parents and her brother, who had since become a teacher, continuously encouraged Julia to maintain an open mind about the possibility of education. While she continued to report resistance to the idea of becoming a teacher, it was clear throughout our exchange that her decisions were heavily weighted in the opinions of others in her life.

Julia stated that she pacified her family by completing a program offered to Florida students called a Personal Training Option (PTO). This allowed her to complete five core education courses, earn a special seal on her diploma, and have the option to take the Florida teacher certification assessment upon graduation. If she passed with a satisfactory score, she would be eligible to be hired to teach and then complete an

abbreviated version of the GaTAPP program. Even after completing the required courses for the PTO, Julia still believed her true calling was clinical counseling.

> I had terrible self-talk. I was almost embarrassed to ever really ask for help. I think that's one of the reasons why I went the counseling route, because I see kids doing self-talk and they never come out of it.

Julia also recognized the impact her church life played in her decision to study counseling and her desire to have a Christian-based practice. She completed her undergraduate degree in just 3 years.

Through her college experience and the challenges of settling on a career plan, Julia fell in love. After graduation, the two married and moved to Savannah, Georgia. "At that point, the whole PTO thing was kind of null and void because Georgia doesn't have a program like that so it was kind of like I did all of that work for nothing." Her husband found a job in a church and Julia didn't have to look far for work of her own. The same church had a pre-school program and her degree in Family Relationships and Child Sciences was a natural fit. "I was able to jump right in and I became the 3-year-olds' teacher." After 2 years in that role, Julia was offered a position as a special education paraprofessional in an elementary school.

After 1 year in that role, Julia was offered the opportunity to become a fully certified kindergarten teacher by completing the GaTAPP program. "At that point, we had already decided to start looking for jobs and moving back [to her husband's hometown]. I think that was the point when I started kind of feeling like maybe I do just need to go be a teacher." Julia realized practicing the type of counseling she dreamt of required her to obtain a Master's degree and she was not eager to go back to school. "So,

I kind of started pushing that whole counseling route out mainly because I didn't want to go back to school." Instead, she began to send applications and resumes to public schools in and around the southern Georgia town where her husband's family owned land and where his mother was also a local educator. With so many voices telling her education was her calling, Julia softened to the idea of being a teacher and relinquished her defenses.

Her first interview went exceptionally well, and Julia was offered a third grade teaching position. Elated, Julia accepted and began learning about the GaTAPP process. The following day, the principal contacted her and withdrew the offer as a Family Relationships and Child Sciences degree was unfamiliar to the GaTAPP administrators at the time. Crestfallen, Julia tried to explain how her degree and the core courses she took as part of the PTO were applicable to the profession. After much conversation across the state, Julia was offered a second grade position which she thankfully accepted. She completed the GaTAPP program in just 1 year, rather than the traditional 2, and has just completed her 7th year of teaching. Over the course of those years, she has taught grades 1, 2, and 4 and earned her Master's degree in Elementary Education.

> I won't say [teaching] was a sacrifice. I did at one point feel like I'm giving up on something, but I didn't quite know if I was gonna get something in return and here I am teaching elementary for the past 7 years.

Julia reiterated her satisfaction with her decision to enter into the field of education and gratitude to those who supported her while obtaining certification throughout the interview series. She also stated that achieving all she did in just one year gave her professional confidence and reaffirmed that she was in the right field.

Nancy

Although Nancy responded to my participant letter faster than any other recipient, she and I experienced a number of scheduling issues. On more than one occasion, Nancy forgot our scheduled meeting, and it was difficult for her to commit to a new time. The location of our meetings was another issue for Nancy. As a part-time art teacher at her local cultural arts center, she indicated it would best suit her to hold our first meeting in the pottery studio at the center so she could "keep an eye on the kiln" while we talked. When I arrived at the basement studio, it was very much as I had envisioned. Every flat surface was littered with partially completed works of art, art supplies, and pottery dust. I held my notepad and tape recorder on my lap as I balanced on a dirty, paint-splattered barstool that was too short for the table it had been matched with. Nancy, too, was as I expected. Her clothes showed the evolution of her work, or maybe a student's learning. Her hair was pulled back from her face, but not particularly styled. She moved about the room unwrapping large blocks of clay and nervously fidgeting with other art supplies. The room was too warm to be comfortable for the summer month we were in, but I knew the kiln was at fault and wondered if she was content. To my surprise, as soon as Nancy began to tell her story, she stopped walking around and dismissed the distractions in the room. She stood in the same place across the table from me for the duration of our discussion, not checking the kiln even once. At one point, the memories of her youth overwhelmed her emotionally, and she began to cry.

Nancy was born the only child of her educator parents in a quaint town in southern Georgia where she lived until she graduated from high school and went to college. Her father was a special education teacher and her mother was a third grade

teacher for the majority of her tenure in the classroom. When Nancy was in high school, her father passed away as a result of a brain tumor following many years of living in a catatonic state. Shortly after his death, Nancy's mother remarried a piano tuner and left education to become a real estate agent.

Dealing with her father's illness, followed by his death, and the addition of her mother's new husband was difficult for young Nancy.

> I really…I mean I struggled most of the time. I was in gifted when I was young, but then all of the brain tumor stuff with my dad started happening. I was having a lot of trouble and I was out a lot during third grade with his surgeries and things like that.

It was also around this time that her father was moved out of the family home and placed in a nursing home about 30 miles away. During her father's illness, Nancy's mother taught in one of the three school systems in her town.

Over the course of her elementary and middle school years, Nancy was enrolled, withdrawn, and re-enrolled in all three school systems. At one point, in an effort to provide a smaller environment for her daughter, Nancy's mother moved her to a private school. "I went there for 4 years and that was miserable." Nancy described herself as a "B-C kind of student" who did not like school and struggled with low self-esteem. Math was a particular challenge for her throughout school. The only teacher Nancy identified as having a meaningful connection with was her mother. "I mean there were supportive adults, but they were mainly supportive of my mom so my mom could be more supportive of me and she did the best that she could, I think." It seems that the transient nature of her enrollment record left Nancy with only superficial relationships with both

the adults in her schools as well as her classmates. She recalls knowing a lot of people as a result of the numerous transitions in her school placements, but not being a popular student. “I kind of felt like I was on the fringes. I didn’t have a niche. I didn’t have a place. I wanted to be smart, so I wanted to be friends with the smart people.” Being friends with these students potentially exacerbated Nancy’s insecurities. “I didn’t make the grades that they made nor did the high achieving things that they did. I did a few things here and there, but I didn’t feel like I was okay.” She admitted being surrounded with smart students and taking rigorous classes was more important than her self-esteem at that time.

Her relationship with her stepfather during her high school years was tumultuous and by the time she graduated, Nancy was ready to leave the only home she had known and start fresh.

> I did not care for him, and I had had my mom kind of to myself for a few years, so we butted heads. At the end of high school, I was ready to go away. I could not stand being there anymore.

Thankful for the distance, Nancy was accepted at a private university about 5 hours from her hometown; however, more strife was ahead for her relationship with her parents after she got to college.

> I did not want to do education because I had grown up in a household of educators and I wanted to stay away from that. I thought I would be an art major, but it was frowned upon. So, I was faced with finding something else but I just kind of couldn’t find something else. I had this idea that it would be better, more respectable, to live as a starving artist than an art teacher.

Her parents discouraged Nancy from following her initial attraction to art, in her opinion, because it would not provide a steady income.

Left feeling dejected after just over a year at college, Nancy withdrew from college at the encouragement of her mother. “At school, I made mediocre to kind of lowish grades there and because I was getting all these conflicting messages, I didn’t know where I wanted to go.” Nancy then enrolled in a small community school where she began to study art. “In retrospect, I look at that and say, ‘gosh, why didn’t I just finish my associate’s there?’ I thought I had to be in the big time.” So, Nancy moved to Atlanta and enrolled at a state school. Her mother, exasperated by Nancy’s indecisions, told her she would only provide financial assistance if she “could prove [herself]” by becoming serious about finishing college. “My mom was one of those highly successful teachers, you know. She was a major overachiever. Yeah, that put pressure on me. I was only squeaking out passing grades in some classes.” Nancy was soon faced with a familiar nemesis…algebra. After several attempts to pass college algebra, including taking an additional remedial course, Nancy decided to forgo the tension an art degree placed between her and her parents and she dropped out of school.

She and her husband, who had just obtained an Associate’s degree in computer technology, left familiar territory and moved to Colorado. After enduring two winters, the couple moved back south and found work in Madison, Georgia. “We moved to Madison and he just got a jobby job and did computer technology and networking and that sort of thing.” The two remained in Madison for approximately 10 years. With the addition of two sons, Nancy and her husband were ready to take their family back to southern Georgia. Once back in her hometown, Nancy began to explore the possibility of

completing her bachelor's degree and enrolled at the local college. "I thought, 'I'll do psychology.' My first psychology class was just the worst and I hated it so much, but I left that as my major for a while. I didn't have a vision. I was very floaty." Although her direction for a major was observably absent, her love of art was unwavering.

An unsolicited offer to teach pottery at the local art center was just what Nancy needed to visualize her professional future with crisp precision. "The director there at the time said, 'You know, I think you ought to just teach.' I had gotten that from other people before." She began teaching the pottery classes while continuing to complete her bachelor's degree at the local college, eventually changing her major to art. "I was one of the last classes to get a true art degree from [the college] because they changed their program, so it didn't take much to finish out my degree." Nancy did complete her art degree and continued to pick up work at the art center.

When her husband experienced a health scare, Nancy truly took a career in K-12 education seriously. "My kids were [in a small private school] and I was teaching their art classes over there and it just fell into place. I just became what I needed to do." After observing friends complete education art degrees, Nancy was well aware that her degree was not adequate to obtain teacher certification and teach in a public school. She passed the GACE in art. "I had gotten a full-time job at Belk and every time the art teacher would come in, I would say, 'When you gonna retire? I got my GACE. I'm ready.'" Nancy was eventually offered a part-time position teaching art in a middle school. After 1 year, the position was made full-time, and her adventure really began. Nancy completed all certification requirements through the GaTAPP program and has just completed her tenth full year teaching art. She said her local art community created something she had

never found before. “It is a network of people and I realized, ‘Hey, that’s my tribe! There it is!’” While Nancy admitted she continues to hold most people “at arm’s length” she and her stepfather did resolve their differences and, at the age of 30, he legally adopted her. She and her husband continue to raise their two sons in her hometown with the loving support of her parents.

Eleanor

Scheduling times to meet with Eleanor was challenging. Although I had received confirmation from two of her superiors that she was a willing participant, Eleanor did not respond directly to me. I sent email messages, left voicemail messages on both her work and cell phones, and with a receptionist. When she did finally respond, she stated she was “happy to help.” We initially made plans to meet her at her office in a south Georgia Board of Education. This meeting however, was cancelled the day before by Eleanor via text message. Subsequent meetings were rescheduled for a variety of reasons. Each time, Eleanor was apologetic and emphasized that she wanted to participate. At our first encounter, she did not present a nervous affect, nor did she seem terribly excited to be in our meeting. Rather, she maintained a neutral expression. Each time we met, our exchanges were pleasant, and I got the sense that she was eager to provide information about her experiences. Her remarks were candid and, while some subjects may have been uncomfortable for her to discuss, she did not refrain from sharing private information about her life and seemed to value the research process. As I had with Julia, Eleanor and I met in my office. This was at her request. Unlike Julia, Eleanor was familiar with the campus and had been in my office years before when it was occupied by someone else.

This familiarity seemed to contribute to her easy adjustment to the surroundings and quick comfort as she revealed intimate details of her story.

Eleanor was the second child, but first daughter, for her biological parents. By the age of 2, Eleanor's parents divorced and her father gained full custody of her and her older brother. Of her biological mother, Eleanor recalled, "She always had some issues." Eleanor considers her stepmother her "mom" and did not initially speak of her biological mother but said she thought I might want to know "for research purposes." She explained that her biological mother lives about 3 hours from her hometown, but she does not have any type of relationship with her. Her father and stepmother were married when she was 3 years old and welcomed her half-brother 2 years later. Her stepmother has been the primary mother figure in her life since she was 3 years old, and Eleanor reported she does not remember a time that her mom was not a stable fixture in her household.

Eleanor's family completed various levels of education. Her father was a high school graduate who acquired a trade certificate and worked as a diesel mechanic, eventually working in his family's business. Her mom taught middle grades English Language Arts for many years. She continued to advance her certificate level until she reached her Specialist. After retirement, she continued to work in her RESA. Eleanor's older brother dropped out of high school in the 10th grade and started working with their father. Although he did not earn a high school diploma nor a GED, he now owns the family business. Her younger brother experienced success in school and completed 3 years of college before withdrawing to enlist in the United States Air Force.

When describing herself, Eleanor said she made "mostly As and Bs" in her earlier years. "I mean in high school I probably wasn't as motivated, you know. I mean, I still

passed everything." She completed grades kindergarten through 12 in just two school buildings and considered herself social and popular. She was involved in extracurricular activities and felt that she was a well-rounded student. Being in such a small school district presented a unique experience for Eleanor. "I had the same middle school teacher for sixth, seventh, and eighth grades because there were literally only about 30 people in my grade." That teacher was her mom. "It was probably a disadvantage because she was like, 'we are related so I expect more from you. She was an old-time schoolteacher. She was no nonsense. I was a good student so it was fine." Her small school setting was important to her and helped her forge life-long friendships.

In remembering high school experiences, Eleanor recalled bonds with teachers, but said her favorites were, "Really it was the fun teachers. They were older but they didn't judge you." While she recollected going to some teachers' classrooms when she had a bad day, her parents provided guidance when life presented challenges. When the time came to select a college, Eleanor said, "I never really had a dream of a college. I had a boyfriend and he was playing football at Florida State and so I wasn't too far apart." With a plan to enter the School of Nursing, Eleanor felt the field would provide a good way for her to support herself. "I remember when I was in school and mama saying, 'You know nursing has flexible hours and you have days off in the week. You can work when you want to.' I thought that sounded alright." Yet Eleanor disliked math and sciences. After completing 2 years of core courses and a semester in the nursing program, she knew it was not for her. "I remember going in and we were going to scrub a wound with my instructor and she kept saying, 'Don't you throw up.' I thought, yeah, I can't do this.

I'm a real laid-back person, but that wasn't for me." This decision left her with a career conundrum.

Without a plan for completing a degree, Eleanor returned home and began taking short-term jobs. "My parents said, 'you gotta get a job, you know figure out what you are going to do.' I didn't want to continue school at the time so they were like get a job. So I did." Over the course of the next year, Eleanor "got off track." She started dating someone 2 years her senior, who she described as "having some issues," and followed him down a destructive path. "He finished high school, but his parents were very wealthy and he had a trust fund. You know he was raised by the nanny…in and out of rehab…that kind of rich." After knowing him less than a year, the two married and moved to Dallas, Texas, where they remained for almost 4 years, and Eleanor completed cosmetology school. "It wasn't what my mama wanted me to do originally but at that point, she was just glad I was doing something." It was during this time she was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. Seeking the support of family, they moved close to her husband's parents in Central Florida, where Eleanor put her training to use as a hairdresser. In less than a year, she became pregnant and needed to find less physically demanding work. "Because I was high risk because of the diabetes, I was on bedrest over half of the pregnancy." Things had grown troublesome in her marriage and while her husband's job offered benefits, "At that point, we had been married 5 years and I kind of knew the pattern and I knew what I needed to do." Eleanor took a job as a quality assurance manager at a company her in-laws owned.

The sense of urgency to escape the environment before her baby was born dissipated and she continued to postpone her plans to leave her husband. The family

returned to her hometown, where they had met, and Eleanor found steady work with her local hospital system. Eventually, her husband was incarcerated in Tennessee and Eleanor filed for divorce and established a safe, healthy environment for her 4 year old daughter and herself. With a new outlook on her future, Eleanor began dating. "During that time, I decided that I was gonna start taking classes at [a local university] and I kinda wanted to do education. But I didn't think it was possible because of student teaching." She remarried and enjoyed her clerical position at the hospital and continued to work there.

A new and exciting opportunity presented itself and the newlyweds, and their daughter. "We wanted to have a sibling for [my daughter], but we didn't want a baby. After I had [my daughter], they did not recommend that I have more kids, so we wanted to adopt." By the time the children were identified in the foster system and the adoption process was complete, Eleanor's daughter was 7 years old, and the new additions were a 5 year old girl, a 6 year old boy, and another 7 year old girl. With so much change in the household, and particularly for her biological daughter, Eleanor and her husband felt their family needed her full attention. After working for the hospital for 8 years, she resigned from her clerical position and became a stay-at-home mom of four.

> When we adopted, I decided to stay home for a year. It was a lot. I don't know if you have ever been around anyone with foster kids, but they are bad. We were their fourth home in a year.

Time proved to be the remedy for many of the initial growing pains and after that year, the children were adjusting well and Eleanor was ready to return to work.

Her experience with the hospital had sparked Eleanor's interest in obtaining a business degree with the goal of returning to the hospital and advancing in her former department. While working to complete the degree requirements, she began working in her children's' school district as an administrative assistant in the nutrition department. In just over a year, she had earned her business degree, but decided she was not finished. "When I finished my degree in business and after working with the school system, I started to feel like, 'I really do want to go into education.' That's when I applied for positions as a business teacher." She was hired as a middle school business teacher in a neighboring school district and enrolled in the GaTAPP program shortly thereafter. Uncertain about the logistics of obtaining teaching certification but armed with a fresh business degree, Eleanor felt confident as her new adventure began. "I only wanted to teach business, so I didn't want to try to teach history or something I didn't know. It was easy to make the move because years before I had thought about education." Eleanor also had the benefit of an experienced teacher for a mother and a veteran school administrator for an aunt. "I felt like maybe having family members who had been in education gave me a little advantage to know some of the struggles that teachers face." Throughout the interview, Eleanor referred to the support her family provided as she traversed the tricky balance of her family and work obligations.

She successfully navigated the challenges of completing the requirements of the GaTAPP program and taught business education classes for 7 years before moving to the board office this year to serve as the district-wide Instructional Technology Specialist. As she considered her varied work history and circuitous route to the field of education, Eleanor said, "You know a part of my motivation was to help students know that they

had other options out there. Especially the kids who weren't going to college. There are options out there." Eleanor recognized her past occupational experiences as motivation to continue to pursue professional advancements.

Summary

These six research participants obtained teacher certification through completion of the GaTAPP program in the same identified RESA in southwest Georgia. They have each remained in education for a defined period of time. However, they provided six extraordinarily different paths to reaching those criteria. Attained only through their point of view, their stories paint a mural that illustrates the intricacies of their journeys to becoming certified educators (Seidman, 2013). It is the task of the researcher to make meaning of their stories. "…narrative accounts can be analyzed in systematic ways to generate meaningful and promising findings" (Mishler, 1986, p. 76). The profiles presented in this chapter provided background information to create familiarity with these subjects and establish the participants' points of view. In the following chapter, the researcher provides the findings of this study through the analysis of participants' experiences in the GaTAPP program.

Chapter V

Results

High rates of new teacher attrition have a significant negative financial impact on America's school districts as 40% of new teachers leave their jobs during their first 5 years of teaching at an estimated national cost of over $8 billion annually (King, 2018; Phillips, 2015; Sutcher et al., 2019). The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of successful veteran completers of the GaTAPP, a non-traditional teacher development program. Many school districts rely on alternative certification programs such as this to help relieve teacher shortages created through an imbalance in increasing student enrollment and high rates of teacher attrition. Purposeful sampling was utilized to identify six veteran teachers who successfully completed the GaTAPP program in an identified RESA and have remained in the field of education for a minimum of 5 years. Findings from this research addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the life and career experiences of successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in southwest Georgia?

RQ2: What were the perceived barriers of successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in southwest Georgia?

RQ3: What strategies were used by successful veteran teachers who completed Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in southwest Georgia to mitigate completion barriers?

Two participants each, were selected from three school districts in southwest Georgia, providing the researcher with six participants. This procedure allowed the researcher to gain insight into the varied experiences participants experienced with common factors. This also highlighted the extent to which identified barriers are exacerbated by district practices and ways alleviating strategies can be improved by school districts. The six subjects in this study participated voluntarily and were provided an Informed Consent prior to the initiation of each interview. Participants were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. Table 1 details the demographic information of each participant.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Profiles

Pseudonym	Age Range	College Major	Teaching Assignment During GaTAPP	Years of Teaching Experience	Highest Degree Level
Abbey	30-35	Political Science	Elem. Special Education (Inclusion)	12	Specialist
Desmond	30-35	Chemistry	H.S. Science	8	PhD
Eleanor	40-45	Business	M.S. Business	8	Masters
Julia	25-30	Family Relationships/Child Development	Second Grade	6	Masters
Martha	35-40	Spanish	H.S. Spanish	14	Bachelors
Nancy	50-55	Art	H.S. Art	11	Bachelors

The researcher collected data through review of documents and artifacts from participants obtained during the GaTAPP program, as well as a series of individual interviews, as outlined by Seidman (2013). Although the researcher developed interview protocols for each interview, a semi-structured approach was used to obtain participants' perspectives (Merriam, 2002). Each interview lasted between 60 and 120 minutes and was audio recorded to ensure the accuracy of each participant's views. A professional transcriptionist converted recordings into text within days of each interview. Transcriptions were shared with the interviewee to ensure accuracy of information and provide the opportunity for member checking (Seidman, 2013).

Discussion of Themes

The analytical approach a researcher utilizes is as unique as their study (Patton, 2015). As Roberts (2010) noted, the coding process involves taking data from a holistic viewpoint, identifying individual parts, and then putting it back into a universal perspective. “The process of working with excerpts from participants’ interviews, seeking connections among them, explaining those connections, and building interpretive categories is demanding and involves risks” (Seidman, 2013, p.129). As soon as the collection of data began, the researcher-initiated attribute coding, the development of organizational charts, and the construction of researcher memos (Saldaña, 2016). Next, the researcher reviewed transcripts to identify preliminary categories and patterns. The four categories that emerged from the experiences of the six participants in this study were: a) school environment, b) teaching experience, c) GaTAPP experience, and d) self-efficacy strategies. These tentative categories were color-coded. Through a second evaluation of the transcripts, the researcher identified consistent sub-categories. Participant responses were then sorted and grouped according to the research question addressed. All material was organized into chunks to allow the researcher to make meaning of the data. (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Table 2 depicts a list of codes developed from multiple reviews of participant responses and the categories that emerged from these statements.

Table 2

Open Coding Symbols

Code	Code description	Category
LS	School Leadership Support	School Environment
CW	Relationships with Coworkers	
MPE	Mentor Program Effectiveness	
E	Participant's Expectations of Teaching	Teaching Experience
C	Challenges of Teaching	
R	Rewards	
JS	Job Satisfaction	
D	Duration of GaTAPP	GaTAPP Program
PD/R	Program Difficulty/Rigor	
MS	Mentor Support During GaTAPP Program	
P	GaTAPP Program Preparation	
PS	Peer Support within GaTAPP Program	
M	Motivating Factors	
FA	Familiarity/Awareness of Self-Efficacy	Self-Efficacy Strategies
PE	Use of Performance Experience During GaTAPP	
VE	Use of Vicarious Experience During GaTAPP	
IE	Use of Imaginal Experience During GaTAPP	
SP	Use of Social Persuasion During GaTAPP	
PES	Use of Physical/Emotional States During GaTAPP	
ID	Impact of Self-Efficacy Strategies During GaTAPP	
IR	Impact of Self-Efficacy Strategies on Retention	

After thorough review of the codes and categories, three themes evolved. These three main themes were: a) school and district culture, b) GaTAPP experience, and c) self-

efficacy strategies. All transcripts, documents, and artifacts were reviewed a final time to confirm the identified themes. Table 3 provides an example of the chunking process utilized.

Table 3

Example of Theme, Subcategory, and Supporting Commentary Matrix

Theme	Subcategory	Supporting Commentary
School and District Culture	Leadership Support	"He [the principal] did not like to hire first year teachers." "It was very nice with the administration at my school." "They were really hands off." "I always felt well informed about school operations."
	Relationships with Coworkers	"There were a few people who would check on me." "Even though we taught the same standards, we had our own way." "We did everything together." "I had a really good relationship with all of the art teachers in the county."
	District Mentor Program	"The only support we got as special ed teachers was from the special ed department. We didn't get anything for general ed support." "I had a great first year and the reason that was the case was because of my mentor teacher." "I had a mentor who had been through TAPP and a new employee mentor."
	Job Satisfaction	"I didn't feel like I had options." "I can't think of a way [my district] could have given me better support."

School and District Culture

Abitabile (2020) emphasized the impact of school culture on job satisfaction and teacher retention. The most prevalent theme revealed through this study was the role school and district culture played in the participants' completion of the GaTAPP program. Each participant identified aspects of school and district culture as key factors in their GaTAPP experience. Of the subthemes identified within the school and district

culture theme, all six participants specified mentor program effectiveness as having the greatest impact on their success. Four of the six participants specifically identified their district-assigned mentor as the mitigating strategy with the greatest influence on their success. In stark contrast, two of the six identified the absence or weak mentor program a primary barrier in their completion of the GaTAPP program.

Connecting the right mentor to the TAPP candidate is monumental in the success of the candidate. Administrators who take the time to learn about the new teacher and assess what he or she will need regarding support are more likely to produce a stellar candidate-mentor pairing (Antonetti, 2018, Mentor Choice section). Martha not only recognized her school-assigned mentor as the person who fostered the idea of becoming a teacher, but also, she credited her with much more.

> I followed her footsteps. I watched the way she handled things and was able to draw on that. I saw how her professionalism was through the roof and I admired that. She always came off as calm, cool, and collected although when I would talk to her outside of the meeting it was a different story, so I had to learn to do that. Looking back, she definitely nurtured me in that way and guided me along.

Martha's situation was unique. Her school-assigned mentor had been her high school Spanish teacher years earlier and was the person Martha recognized as driving her first career aspiration as a foreign language interpreter. When her mentor suggested Martha explore teaching, her confidence in her former student carried a strong influence. Martha summarized the depth of this partnership by stating, "I wouldn't have survived if it weren't for my mentor." The collegial spirit of their relationship extended beyond the years Martha was competing certification requirements. Although her mentor has retired,

Martha recognized the lasting impression her mentor made and reported emulating her mentor's teaching practices in her current work.

Interestingly, Martha also found her greatest barrier within the same theme. While she identified ways school and district leaders provided some support, the additional pressure placed on her by those same administrators evolved into her greatest struggle and stressor.

> I remember feeling pressure to complete the GACE exams. I did not finish the reading section of the basic skills exam and I failed the cultural section of the Spanish content exam on my first attempts. That was stressful. I passed the exams at the very last opportunity that I had.

She credited her mentor with helping her overcome this obstacle and create the priorities and balance to successfully achieve her certification goals.

Julia was living in a new town when she was hired as a second grade teacher. Her only experience with teaching was limited to the single year she worked as a classroom support teacher in a church-based preschool. While this familiarity with teaching gave her some level of assurance she would enjoy the profession, she admitted she was unprepared for the hurdles obtaining Georgia certification would entail along with the stresses of teaching. When the principal introduced Julia to her mentor teacher, she was not only relieved to have someone to turn to for support but also, she recalled how this pre-assigned partnership blossomed into a long-term friendship.

> We weren't partner teachers because each class is self-contained, but we were very much like partner teachers. We did everything together. I know I would probably not be the teacher that I am today if it wasn't for [my mentor] showing

> me how to do everything. We are extremely close to this day. Her being my mentor was the beginning of our friendship.

Julia considered herself lucky to be partnered with the mentor she had. “That was a total God thing.” Her understanding of the impact her mentor had on her success has inspired her to talk to her district about creating a position to allow her to oversee the mentorship program in her district. “I feel like sometimes the ball gets dropped on that and I would love to figure out a good mentoring program because I think that is huge when trying to keep teachers.” Although her district does not currently have a position solely for mentorship training and management, Julia’s passion has been directed to supporting other new teachers when she has had opportunities to serve in a mentor role.

The professional relationship Abbey shared with her partner teacher also evolved into a friendship. However, Abbey’s experience proved some situations require support from multiple sources. As a special education teacher, her school-assigned mentor was the school’s special education coordinator. Abbey emphasized the importance of having a mentor who understood the challenges of being an inclusion teacher. “She’s what got me through it. I mean she’s the one that sat down and taught me how to do everything.” While this support was crucial, Abbey also felt her district did not fully recognize the challenges she was facing.

> [The regular education teacher] just kind of took me under her wing. My mentor wasn’t in the classroom, so the daily things about the school and with the kids, she didn’t have to do those things so they just weren’t on the top of her mind. It would have been even harder without my general ed teacher just to learn those things from.

Looking back on the totality of her experience, Abbey stated, “I feel like even when you’re a special ed teacher, you should get general ed support.” During the GaTAPP process, Abbey identified both her school-assigned mentor and the regular education teacher with whom she worked as being the greatest mitigating factors to the barriers and challenges she faced while completing the GaTAPP program.

As a middle school business education teacher, Eleanor believed she faced struggles a regular education teacher would not typically encounter nor understand. She credited the two mentors her school provided with helping her overcome the daily challenges of an “exploratory teacher.” One mentor was a dance teacher and the second taught computer science. Interestingly, she is the only participant given a mentor who also obtained certification through GaTAPP.

> I had one mentor who had been through TAPP and then another mentor who was like a new employee mentor. Basically, [one mentor] helped me with any questions I had about the TAPP program. I went to [the second mentor] for everything else. He took it seriously and really helped me. I never felt like I didn’t have support.

Unlike Abbey and Eleanor, two participants found the mentor program in their district to be the greatest barrier to their success in completing the GaTAPP program. Both participants worked in the same school district during their GaTAPP experiences. While they recognized the value of the GaTAPP mentor, they individually discussed the impact the lack of school-based mentor support had on their experience.

When asked about the support his district provided during his first year in school, initially, Desmond could not identify any support beyond his principal. He then

remembered a co-worker he believed was assigned to "check on him." As Desmond recalled, not having an active school-based mentor exacerbated the struggles the program presented.

> I didn't really look at them as a source or the person I need to get a question answered from. I didn't feel comfortable enough that I wanted to ask this person a question. We checked off the box or whatever and they were nice to me and it's nothing against that person. I don't know. I wish there was a way you actually had a choice in your mentor.

He described feelings of isolation and frustration. "You wonder, 'why am I still at this school when everybody else gets to go home?'" He also believed, at the time, having his PhD meant people expected him to be capable of things he had not learned to do. "In hindsight, I know for a fact that there weren't any teachers that were out to get me or saw me as threatening or all of these other previous unrealistic notions…" Overall, the greatest barriers in the GaTAPP process for Desmond were due to the absence of a school-based mentor. "If I had had that person, things may have been easier. There were so many moving parts in the classroom and getting my footing was my focus."

In Nancy's case, the task of finding a mentor was left to her. As the only art teacher in the school, she struggled to find anyone who could offer true mentor support.

> There was one Spanish teacher that I talked to, but she was in a transition of leaving. I could go to other teachers, but I didn't have one person in particular. In the long run, it would have been nice to have one particular person who I felt like I could have gone through it with…especially through TAPP.

Nancy recalled drawing support from the "art community" she established through her work at the community cultural center. She primarily found support from art teachers in other schools and in the community as a whole. "I had a good working relationship with all of the art teachers in the county schools, the city schools, and [the private school]. I try to make sure I know all of the art teachers around." Nancy explained while its members have changed over time, this support system remains intact.

Although Desmond and Nancy worked in the same school district while completing the GaTAPP program, they worked in different schools. Both participants stressed the administrative support they received from their building and district leaders provided some level of compensation for the lack of mentor support and helped create a positive school climate. They each revealed mitigating strategies within other themes of this study.

GaTAPP Experiences

Non-traditional program completers made up 15.7% of the total new teacher workforce in the 2020-2021 school year (GaPSC, 2021c). The second theme to emerge from the interviews was GaTAPP Experience. A multitude of factors influence a candidate's GaTAPP experience. The candidate's home district, the subject for which they are obtaining certification, and the facilitating agency overseeing the program impact the overall experience. In this study, all participants obtained certification in the same RESA in southwest Georgia. Two participants from three school districts within the identified geographic region comprised the totality of contributors. This provided a comparison of perspectives from within the same district. While participant criteria did not define subjects taught, the variety of teaching positions gave the researcher a greater

understanding of the varied experiences GaTAPP program candidates have. Just as participants differed in their opinions in the first theme, some participants revealed barriers while other divulged powerful mitigating strategies within their GaTAPP experiences.

Table 4 provides information regarding program duration and the specific areas of certification each candidate obtained through GaTAPP.

Table 4

Participant GaTAPP Experiences

	Years to Complete Program	Area of Certification	Year Completed
Abbey	2	Middle Grades Social Studies (4-8), Special Ed. Gen. Curriculum, Special Ed. Consultative, Special Ed. (P-5,4-8) all content areas	2011
Desmond	2	Science (6-12)	2015
Eleanor	1	Business Education (6-12)	2014
Julia	1	Elementary Education	2016
Martha	2	Spanish (P-12)	2009
Nancy	2	Art (P-12)	2012

Three participants, Desmond, Eleanor, and Martha, described their GaTAPP experiences with favorable memories. As Desmond recalled his experience, he stated, “I felt a positive endorsement from my TAPP mentor. She was very supportive.” Eleanor echoed this sentiment. “It was definitely a lot of work, but I had a TAPP mentor who was really good. By the time I finished, I felt well prepared.” Martha’s experience was similar. In addition to mentor support from her GaTAPP assigned mentor, there were also other teachers in Martha’s district who were enrolled in the same GaTAPP cohort. This peer support provided a level of comradery unique to participants in her cohort.

> There were times when I was nervous or wasn't sure about an assignment. I could just call on those people. I was familiar with them. We worked in the same school, so it was just a support system. That was the most beneficial part of [the program] for me.

In Nancy's case, the GaTAPP experience provided challenges beyond her expectations, but also gave her the key to successfully completing the program and obtaining her certification. She stated, "People are often surprised at how challenging it is. It is almost like getting a Master's. It is almost that much work." With the absence of a designated school-based mentor presenting her greatest completion barrier, Nancy may have been left to navigate these challenges on her own if it had not been for the team of mentors provided through GaTAPP. In total, Nancy had three mentors through the GaTAPP program. All were retired teachers who understood the compilation of demands from administration and parents, the stressors created from daily teaching challenges, and the struggles of a first-year teacher. When speaking about the mentor she referred to as her "main go-to" she indicated, "You do establish great relationships with your mentors, and you need it. It is the greatest part of the program. I just always enjoyed being around her." Her mentors were also facilitators for the GaTAPP program who had insight a traditionally trained, school-based mentor may fail to hold. In summation of her experience, Nancy mused, "My experience was very positive. I am grateful for it and as difficult as it was and as much of a hassle, I look back and I am so thankful." Her unique perspective of her success allowed Nancy to reflect on the benefit of the program and her appreciation for the support that led to her certification.

While the GaTAPP program provided a pathway to the ultimate goal of becoming a certified teacher for all six participants, three candidates identified certain aspects of the program to be the greatest barriers in completing the process and becoming prepared to teach in the positions for which they were hired. Eleanor, Abbey, and Julia expressed feelings of doubt and frustration regarding their own professional development during the program.

When Eleanor was directly asked to identify the most difficult aspect of the GaTAPP process, she quickly responded, “Having the time to get all the requirements done. I would just say it is a lot of work and it's very time-consuming.” Eleanor recognized peripheral factors which exacerbated the magnitude of the challenge to complete tasks. “[My principal] really wanted me to get finished in 1 year. I'm very task oriented and if I've got something to do, I just can't rest until it's done.” Her principal, who was also her aunt, warned her, “I expect more from you. Stay out of the teacher's lounge, mind your business, do what you are supposed to do.” This directive, along with Eleanor’s work ethic and desire to remove the time draining tasks of the GaTAPP program, set the foundation for her own greatest barrier.

Abbey, with a degree in political science, was hired as a special education inclusion teacher. Her familiarity in this specific area was limited and she expressed to the district-level administration that her preference was to go through a Master’s program to complete the requirements for certification. In contrast to her request, the district required her to complete GaTAPP.

> TAPP was great, I just was frustrated that I put two years into it and didn't have a master's degree. I actually didn't want to do TAPP. I wanted to go ahead and start

> the Master's program at VSU but I had missed the fall enrollment deadline for that program and there was a push that you had to be enrolled in a program if they were going to hire you. So TAPP was my only option. Even looking back on it now, it took me two years to do TAPP and then I had to go back and get my Master's. So yeah, I was kind of pushed into TAPP. That was frustrating.

Abbey found learning the legalities and characteristics of special education, along with complying with district protocols and requirements, presented a trial for which she was not receiving adequate preparation through GaTAPP. She expressed disappointment with the training she received regarding providing a sufficient foundation for special education teachers. "I was so overwhelmed with the whole thing. I wish they would have better understood the perspective of someone coming in not knowing anything." This program deficiency created Abbey's greatest barrier in completing the GaTAPP program and almost led to her leaving the profession.

As the first elementary education GaTAPP candidate in southwest Georgia, Julia recognized glaring inadequacies in her experience. "I was actually their first and only elementary candidate the year I did it." This presented a unique opportunity that was not always advantageous to Julia.

> They literally would give me something and [say], 'Well, I don't even know. Can you do this?' My coach would come sit down with me and [say], 'What do you need?' and I [replied], 'I don't know' and she [responded], 'I don't either.' We said, 'We're just gonna hope and pray that we can figure this out.' They had always just done the upper grades where it was one subject. I had to do reading

and math. When they saw there was a math task [for elementary education] they [asked], 'What is this?' Nobody even knew how to go about this at all.

One benefit Julia recalled was the individualized time her GaTAPP mentor provided as they worked together to meet the program requirements. Even with the personalized support, figuring out the assignments as the regional elementary certification pioneer was challenging and isolating. "It was a sink or swim feeling. We even did the math task completely wrong. I didn't even pass, but they were like, 'We're not making you redo anything. You're good." Julia laughed as she recounted this situation and confessed, "Now they use my math task as 'don't do it this way' for elementary ed people going through TAPP." Being the "guinea pig," as she put it, created the greatest barrier for Julia. "Dealing with the stress of being a new teacher and completing the [program requirements] on my own made completion of the GaTAPP program very difficult." This reflection was revealed as Julia recalled the frustration and pressure to be successful she felt when program facilitators were not familiar with the final requirements.

Self-Efficacy Strategies

The final theme identified in this study was Self-Efficacy Strategies. "General self-efficacy refers to our overall belief in our ability to succeed…" (Ackerman, 2020, "What is the Meaning of Self-Efficacy?" section). Levels of familiarity with Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory were assessed during the first interview. The researcher provided an introduction and explanation of each strategy to each participant, as needed, prior to the initiation of the second interview. The second interview addressed the use of the following strategies: performance experience, vicarious experience, imaginal

experience, social persuasion, and physical and emotional states. For the purpose of this study, these strategies are defined as follows:

Performance Experiences – This is the strategy identified as the most influential source of self-efficacy. Experiences of success provide self-guided interpretation of achievement. Long-term success counteracts occasional failures.

Vicarious Experiences – This strategy occurs through observation of another person's success. The individual believes they will succeed because they know others have. The observer judges their own abilities greater than or equal to the person modeling the behavior (Bandura, 1994).

Imaginal Experiences – Imagining success can lead to feelings similar to actually experiencing it. Imaginal experiences are unique because they may be attained through other self-efficacy sources such as performance experiences, vicarious experiences, or social persuasion (Maddux & Gosselin, 2012).

Social Persuasion – This strategy is the influence of words. The influence may have a positive or negative connotation. It is most powerful when accompanied by personal success in similar situations.

Physical and Emotional States – This strategy is related to perceived self-efficacy and associated with mood, stress, tension, fatigue, physical pain, etc.

Each participant identified multiple self-efficacy strategies utilized during their experience. "It requires a strong sense of efficacy to remain task oriented in the face of pressing situational demands, failures, and setbacks that have significant repercussions" (Bandura, 1994, p. 74). The strategies the participants found most beneficial are represented in Table 5.

Table 5

Self-Efficacy Strategies Used During GaTAPP

Participant	Performance Experience	Vicarious Experience	Imaginal Experience	Social Persuasion	Physical and Emotional States
Abbey	#1	#2			
Desmond	#1			#2	
Eleanor	#1			#2	
Julia	#1			#2	
Martha		#1		#2	
Nancy		#1		#2	

Three of the five strategies, performance experience, vicarious experience, and social persuasion, were reported most often. While some participants discussed connections to imaginal experience and physical and emotional states, these were not judged to be primary strategies used during this specific experience. Abbey, Eleanor, Julia, and Desmond identified performance experience as the strategy they relied on most often during their involvement with the GaTAPP program. Martha and Nancy found vicarious experience to provide the greatest motivation and benefit while completing the GaTAPP program.

"Seeing people similar to oneself succeed by sustained effort raises observers' beliefs that they too possess the capabilities to master comparable activities to succeed" (Bandura, 1994, p. 72). Martha relied on vicarious experiences throughout her first years in education. "I learn by watching. I feel like I am just following in [my mentor's] footsteps. Just seeing the route that my mentors have taken, seeing their success, and

improving professionally is inspiring for me." Similarly, Nancy drew from the experiences of others to gain confidence and determination.

> Seeing what [coworker] went through as a new teacher helped me. I always look at other people and say, 'Yeah, I can do that, too.' I knew [a coworker] going through TAPP and I knew I could do it, too.

Vicarious experiences were the self-efficacy strategy Abbey found to be instrumental and second only slightly to performance experiences. "I remember thinking, 'Well, if she can do it and she's a great teacher, then I can be a great teacher like that.'" Abbey demonstrated a firm understanding of the influence of this strategy. She described her use of the strategy when she reflected on her time in the classroom of a teacher who yelled most of the day. "One of the teachers I worked with was a yeller. She would just escalate the kids' behavior. It was terrible. It was definitely a non-example of classroom management." This example demonstrated one of the ways Abbey masterfully used vicarious experiences to recognize ways she could use others' failures to ensure her own success.

For Julia, the most impactful self-efficacy strategy was performance experience. In our conversation, she drew parallels to her use of this strategy between her athletic experiences and the GaTAPP experience. "I know there are times I am going to mess up, but the success I felt reaffirmed the feeling of 'this is what I am supposed to be doing.' I don't get into negative self-talk. I know I'm okay." Martha confirmed performance experience was used most often in her experience but referenced her reliance on social persuasion at times. "Words of affirmation help me, so I used social persuasion sometimes." Ultimately, as an exploratory teacher, she viewed teaching the same lesson

multiple times a day as an opportunity to use performance experience to repeat or modify aspects of each lesson. “It could be week to week or period to period. If something didn’t work first period, I could swap it up a little bit for second period and try that.” Bandura (1977) explained this strategy, “Indeed, occasional failures that are later overcome by determined effort can strengthen self-motivated persistence if one finds through experience that even the most difficult obstacles can be mastered by sustained effort” (p. 195). Participants who recognized their use performance experience as a source of self-efficacy also described the understanding that failed experiences do not define their effectiveness as a teacher.

Desmond’s experience as a graduate assistant proved to be a major contributing factor in his successful completion of the GaTAPP program. He found the use of the self-efficacy strategy, performance experience, not only the most commonly drawn upon, but also identified it as the most effective mitigating tool applied to compensate for the lack of a school-based support system.

> Having a year of teaching experience at the collegiate level helped with the initial nervousness and understanding how to prepare lessons. I intentionally took time to review the materials needed to complete TAPP and I realized that much of what was being requested of me were things I was already doing. This made the tasks attainable. Also, because I had recently completed a PhD program, I already felt empowered and saw [TAPP] as just another task.

Bandura (1994) identified performance experience as the “most effective way of creating a strong sense of efficacy” (p. 72). Desmond’s previous success in challenging situations generated a foundation of accomplishment from which he could build.

Participant Barriers and Mitigating Strategies

Because each participant's experience was unique, the identified barriers and strategies used to reduce perceived obstacles were also exclusive to the individual. Even when participants echoed the struggles of one another, the degree of impact and pervasiveness varied from person to person. The researcher found the same to be true of the strategies participants used to overcome these hindrances. For example, having a strong school-based mentor was clearly the most common mitigating strategy. However, the four participants who identified their mentor as the greatest mitigating strategy provided different perspectives about why this was key to their success. One knew no other people in her school, one needed to compensate for lack of knowledge of the field, one had multiple mentors who filled voids in different ways to provide comprehensive support, and one was building a collegial relationship based on a foundation that began as a student-teacher connection.

Close analysis of all data collected exposed participants' individual perceived barriers and corresponding mitigating strategies. At least one mitigating strategy emerged within each of the identified themes discussed in this chapter. Participant barriers fell equally between two of the themes. Notably, none of the six participants acknowledged barriers within the Self-Efficacy Strategies theme. Table 6 provides a summary of the barriers, mitigating strategies, and related theme identified by each participant.

Table 6

Participants' Greatest Barriers and Mitigating Strategies of the GaTAPP Experience

Participant	Greatest Barrier / Theme	Greatest Mitigating Strategy / Theme
Abbey	Lack of special education specific training within GaTAPP program / GaTAPP Experience	School-Based Support System / School and District Culture
Desmond	Lack of effective school-based mentor program / School and District Culture	Performance Experience / Self-Efficacy Strategy
Eleanor	Time Management: completing GaTAPP requirements and meeting district expectations / GaTAPP Experience	School-Based Support System / School and District Culture
Julia	Program provider's lack of familiarity with elementary education GaTAPP requirements / GaTAPP Experience	School-Based Support System / School and District Culture
Martha	School and district administrator pressure regarding GaTAPP and GaPSC requirements / School and District Culture	School-Based Support System / School and District Culture
Nancy	Lack of effective school-based mentor program / School and District Culture	GaTAPP-Assigned Mentor / GaTAPP Experience

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher presented the findings revealed through interviews with six successful GaTAPP completers. Data collected through interviews, participant provided artifacts, and researcher memos, conveyed the journeys these six participants endured to obtain teacher certification through the identified alternative certification program. While all participants in this study completed GaTAPP at the same identified RESA in southwest Georgia, no two participants were in the same cohort, enhancing the unique experience of the individual. Required program tasks and the method of delivery varied from year to year and influenced the overall experience.

Through close examination of the data, three themes emerged: a) school and district culture, b) GaTAPP experience, and c) self-efficacy strategies. These themes connect the participant's experiences to the body of existing literature. These findings also highlight some gaps in existing research. The researcher will discuss the conclusions and implications of these findings in Chapter VI.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

Over the past 4 decades, the number of college students obtaining a bachelor's degree in education across the nation has plotted a steady decline (King, 2018). The reduction in conferred education degrees in addition to poor teacher retention rates has created a teacher shortage crisis most school districts are unable to combat through traditional means (ED, 2017; GaPSC, 2019). High rates of new teacher attrition have a significant negative financial impact on America's school districts as 40% of new teachers leave their jobs during their first 5 years of teaching, at an estimated national cost of over $8 billion annually (King, 2018; Phillips, 2015; Sutcher et al., 2019). In 2009, Georgia reacted to this predicament by offering school districts a way to combat teacher shortages in their districts by implementing an alternative certification program (GaPSC, 2009). Through the GaTAPP program, school districts in Georgia can hire individuals with a bachelor's degree and place them in a teaching position prior to the candidates obtaining teaching certification (GaPSC, 2018b).

While the introduction of the GaTAPP program provided a new strategy to fill teaching vacancies, districts continued to experience a financial burden due to disproportionate numbers of resignations and terminations and the cost of training programs designed to retain teachers (Phillips, 2015). Therefore, understanding factors that influence a GaTAPP candidate's success is critical to effectively utilizing the

program as a mitigating strategy. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of successful veteran completers of the GaTAPP, a non-traditional teacher development program. The data collected from the six participants in this study provided first-hand accounts of the barriers they faced and strategies, including self-efficacy, used to alleviate identified challenges. The findings from this study revealed the importance of district support on the successful completion of the GaTAPP program and on retention of these candidates. These findings may provide valuable information to district stakeholders regarding best practices for hiring non-certified employees for certified positions and how to adequately support GaTAPP candidates to maximize program completion and annual retention. Research findings contributed to the resolution of the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What are the life and career experiences of successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in southwest Georgia?

Research Question 2: What were the perceived barriers of successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in southwest Georgia?

Research Question 3: What strategies were used by successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in southwest Georgia to mitigate completion barriers?

In this phenomenological study, the researcher employed purposive sampling to acquire six participants representative of the population central to this study. Each participant obtained Georgia teaching certification through completion of the GaTAPP

program in an identified RESA in southwest Georgia and remained an educator for a minimum of 3 years after becoming fully certified. These parameters ensured participants' rich knowledge of the central phenomenon of this study. To reduce the risk of threats to validity and to maintain triangulation, data were collected from multiple sources including a series of individual interviews with each participant, a collection of documents and artifacts from the participants related to their experience, and researcher memos (Maxwell, 2013). Interviews followed Seidman's (2013) interview schedule, which provided in-person, semi-structured interactions and allowed the researcher direct insight into their backgrounds, their interpretations of their experiences while obtaining certification through the identified alternative certification program, and their reflections on the totality of the phenomenon. Data analysis commenced at the conclusion of the first interview and continued beyond the conclusion of the final interview. All data underwent multiple successions of coding and analysis until clear themes emerged from the participants' stories. The three fundamental themes expressive of the participants' lived experiences were: a) school and district culture, b) GaTAPP experience, and c) self-efficacy strategies. Each identified theme comprised a number of subthemes. In this chapter, the researcher reviews each theme in relation to the foundational research questions and related literature, the study's limitations, implications, and offers recommendations for future studies.

Research Questions: Summary Discussion

In this qualitative study, the researcher examined the lived experiences of six successful completers of the GaTAPP program who have remained in the field of education in rural southwest Georgia. These participants were selected because of their

rich knowledge of the program and challenges faced by individuals who enter the profession without formal training. Their stories offered first-hand accounts of the phenomenon at the crux of this study (Patton, 2015). Data collected from a series of individual interviews with each participant were closely analyzed. Analysis of this information included phenomenological reduction (retaining focus on the phenomenon), horizontalization (treating all data as equal), and imaginative variance (utilizing a variety of perspectives to analyze data) (Merriam, 2002). Chapter V contains the findings from this study. In this section, the researcher responds to the guiding research questions for this study through the identified themes and relative existing literature.

Research Question 1: What are the life and career experiences of successful veteran teachers who completed the GaTAPP in southwest Georgia?

The personal details of each participant's life experiences began to unfold with the first interview. The participants' reminiscence of background experiences extended through their participation in the GaTAPP program and culminated with their current professional status to establish the basis for participant experiences. The totality of these events created the lived experiences necessary to answer RQ1. Each theme and subtheme offer awareness into the participants' experiences.

Several interesting details were uncovered while following Seidman's (2013) interview series. First, only two participants were born into a family structure with two parents. Both Abbey and Martha were born to unwed mothers. Desmond and Eleanor's parents divorced when they were young and Nancy's father suffered from a terminal illness the majority of her childhood until his death when she was in elementary school. Only Julia grew up with both biological parents. The majority of participants' parents

eventually married. Only Desmond and Martha lived in a single parent household for the duration of their childhood. Some studies suggest demographics that include a single parent or absent parent households correlate with children's reports of lower self-esteem and reduced self-confidence (Barber & Eccles, 1992). These same studies revealed these negative feelings may diminish over time (Barber & Eccles, 1992) which is consistent with the findings of this study.

Four of the participants, Desmond, Eleanor, Julia, and Nancy, revealed connections to teaching prior to seeking employment in education. Those who had family members who were teachers recognized the probable influence. Family guidance along with a "desire to make a difference…and [a] sense of self as a teacher" (Low et al., 2017, p. 39) attributed to these candidates' transition into this profession. Eleanor, Julia, and Nancy all had at least one parent who was an educator. Eleanor's step-mother and aunt were teachers when she was young and both moved into administrative roles later in their careers. Julia's mother, father, and brother were all educators. While she was still young, her mother became a school-level administrator and now holds a district-level administrative position. Julia referenced a variety of camps and other situations placing her in an instructor role. In Nancy's case, both parents were educators until her father's illness forced him to stop working. She described her mother as a "highly successful teacher" who worked in education for 32 years. Nancy's own experience leading art classes at the local cultural center provided experience and awareness of teaching. Desmond's connection to educators came in the form of personal experience. While in graduate school, Desmond worked as a graduate assistant. His responsibilities included providing instruction to students in courses he had already completed. He referenced this

experience multiple times throughout the interviews as a "game changer" for his future. Traits of quality teachers are frequently influenced by the educator's understanding of the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Young, 2018). Based on the prior experiences, these participants, either consciously or subconsciously, entered into their first teaching jobs with preconceived ideas about the profession. Each participant revealed their notions about school and district culture, their understanding of the need to obtain certification, and self-efficacy. The influence of prior knowledge of education was directly linked to each of the themes. Applicable subthemes for these experiences include participant's expectations of teaching, challenges of teaching, school leadership support, and motivating factors.

When reviewing career experiences, participants concentrated on their individual paths to being hired, the adjustments required to fulfill district demands and GaTAPP requirements, their current professional status and future aspirations. Again, these experiences encompassed all three themes identified through the meticulous data analysis process. All participants, with the exception of Nancy, recalled the decision to move into the field of education as an easy one. Many described a sense of relief when they were initially hired in a school district. Specifically, Martha reported feeling "honored" when the administrator offered her the position during her first interview. Abbey, who works in the same district as Martha, explained that her principal had a history of "only hiring veteran teachers" which increased her excitement when she was hired as a GaTAPP candidate. Julia's first experience was described as an "emotional roller coaster." She was elated when the principal offered a 2nd grade teaching position to her. Days later, the offer was rescinded due to the lack of elementary education GaTAPP training at her local

RESA. Crestfallen, Julia worried about her next move. Her anxieties were alleviated when the offer was reinstated because program providers elected to have Julia as their first ever elementary education GaTAPP candidate. In Eleanor's case, her aunt was the principal of her school. She explained how this was both an advantage and disadvantage due to the extra pressure from her aunt to complete GaTAPP. Desmond applied for his position out of desperation and self-described "burnout" from his work in the medical research field. The opportunity to teach science and the change in work schedule presented a professional alternative Desmond welcomed. These introductory experiences laid the foundation for many of the identified research subthemes, primarily school leadership support, participant's expectations of teaching, job satisfaction, motivating factors, in addition to the five subthemes related to the use of self-efficacy. Nancy, however, identified her transition into teaching out of her family's need for financial stability. Although she was thankful she was hired, and had been teaching since 2012, it had never been her "dream job." This too influenced the subthemes of relationships with coworkers, participant's expectations of teaching, challenges of teaching, job satisfaction, motivating factors, and all five subthemes within the self-efficacy strategies theme.

As the interviews focused on each participant's individual GaTAPP experiences, despite the fact no two participants were in the same GaTAPP cohort, many similarities emerged. This is largely attributed to the experiences occurring within a single identified RESA. The first participant was Martha, who entered the program in 2007. Julia was the last participant to complete certification requirements in 2016. Some characteristics of their experiences were steadfast over the 9-year span. All participants reported overall satisfaction with the program. Four of the six participants found the GaTAPP assigned

mentor most beneficial to their success. Abbey and Martha shared experiences with another individual. The duration of the program was another similarity among participants and resulted in the subtheme duration of GaTAPP. While the program design allows candidates to complete requirements within 1 to 2 years, "most GaTAPP provider programs last 18 months to 2 years" (GaPSC, 2021a, GaPSC, 2021d). Abbey, Martha, Desmond, and Nancy completed the program in 2 years. Eleanor and Julia finished all certification requirements within only one year. Eleanor claimed pressure from her aunt to become fully certified prior to her retirement at the end of that year pushed her to finish. As the first and only candidate at her local RESA to enter the elementary education track, Julia found it easier to work at a rapid rate. She enjoyed individualized sessions with the GaTAPP providers and mentor, which aided in the pace she maintained and allowed for her completion in a single year. One of the sole differences among the candidates' recollections of their GaTAPP experiences was the subtheme GaTAPP program preparation. When participants were directly asked to share their analysis of the adequacy of preparation they received, four individuals agreed the program was adequate. Two of the four reported feeling their preparation was even superior to traditional EPP experiences. Contradictory to this sentiment, Abbey and Julia recognized inadequacies in the preparation they received. Abbey explicitly described frustrations with the lack of cross training for the expectations of her role as an inclusion teacher. In a similar vein, Julia explained feeling like "the guinea pig" as the first person to complete alternate certification for elementary education in her region. The six subthemes within the theme GaTAPP experiences were built from the details of these participant's experiences as they became fully certified teachers.

As this researcher focused on self-efficacy of these successful completers of the GaTAPP program in this study, the influence of self-efficacy was woven throughout each interview. Participants' awareness of self-efficacy was unanimously non-existent during their program experiences. Over the series of interviews, participants were introduced to each of the five strategies (Bandura, 1977, Maddux, 1995) and were provided interval opportunities to reflect on their use and effectiveness. While the focus of this study was self-efficacy during the GaTAPP program, all six participants identified sources of self-efficacy throughout their lives. Comments such as, "I have always needed people to tell me I can do something" or "If I know somebody else has done it, I am more likely to try it" were continually echoed. Nancy commented, "I wish I had known about these when I was going through it. I think it would have helped me be more aware of myself." Interestingly, four of the participants, Abbey, Julia, Eleanor, and Desmond, expressed their greatest source of self-efficacy was performance experience. It should be noted, these are the same four individuals who currently hold, or aspire to hold, leadership positions in their districts. "Thanks to Bandura's work, psychologists now recognize that humans are the agents of their self-development, who can adapt and self-regulate to achieve their desired future" (Tugsbaatar, 2020, "An Agentic Perspective" section). For Martha and Nancy, the greatest source of self-efficacy was vicarious experience. Remarkably, the secondary source of self-efficacy was social persuasion for all participants with the exception of Abbey. Eight subthemes around the theme self-efficacy strategies emerged from the collection of participant experiences. With the combination of the guiding protocols and the storytelling atmosphere, every participant divulged information contributing to all subthemes and enriching the collection of data.

Research Question 2: What were the perceived barriers of successful veteran teachers who completed the GaTAPP in southwest Georgia?

While the GaTAPP program provided a pathway to the ultimate goal of becoming a certified teacher for all six participants, participants encountered a multitude of obstacles along the way. Participants faced these identified barriers at various times during the process of completing the alternative certification program to become fully certified in the specific content area and grade band for which they had been hired. Analysis of the participant accounts revealed all perceived barriers fell equally within two of the identified themes: school and district culture and GaTAPP experience.

"Teachers' perceptions of their principals' effectiveness can influence a school district's ability to retain their teaching staff" (Abitabile, 2020, para.1). A principal's effectiveness reaches beyond what a teacher observes and directly influences the climate and culture of a district and the schools within (Abitabile, 2020). School and district culture emerged as a dominant theme in this study. This theme contained the greatest barriers for three research participants. Desmond, Martha, and Nancy identified aspects of their school and district practices as creating challenges that are specifically difficult for GaTAPP candidates. Desmond and Nancy work in the same school district and, understandably, each identified the lack of an effective school-based mentor program as their prevailing burden. Because they were not enrolled in the GaTAPP during the same year and did not work within the same school when completing GaTAPP, it can be assumed the absence of an effective mentorship program is a consistent and pervasive practice in this district. Martha explained her greatest hindrance was classified in the subtheme school leadership support. Although her school administrative team was

generally supportive, Martha experienced vast pressure from her school and district leaders regarding GaTAPP and GaPSC requirements. When she did not pass all sections of the mandated state assessments, the gravity of her situation increased her concerns. As she recalled a meeting with her principal, she remembered leaving the conversation with the understanding that she must pass the assessments, "Otherwise, I'll get the boot." Although her successful completion of this requirement eliminated this barrier, her opinion of the school and district culture had been negatively influenced by this event.

The remaining three candidates, Abbey, Julia, and Eleanor, identified aspects of the GaTAPP program to be the greatest barriers in completing the process and becoming prepared to teach in the positions for which they were hired. Abbey and Julia both expressed dissatisfaction with the level of preparation the alternative certification program provided in their fields. Admittedly jaded by the district's requirement that she complete GaTAPP instead of a university Master's degree, Abbey was seeking special education certification. Her primary complaint was the lack of special education specific training she gained. As she described it, her assigned workload as an inclusion teacher required content and pedagogical knowledge of both the special education and regular education settings. In her opinion of the GaTAPP program at that time, special education candidates did not receive the depth of knowledge necessary for either setting. Julia found the GaTAPP program preparation was inadequate yet, her situation differed from Abbey's in many ways. Julia was the first elementary education GaTAPP candidate in this region. Prior to 2015, the RESA had declined other candidates in the region seeking certification in elementary education as this had been the one area of education not affected by teacher shortages. The RESAs unfamiliarity with this certification placed

particular pressure on Julia. Program requirements were unique to elementary teachers and program providers did not always have a clear understanding of these requirements. Julia recalled having an extra requirement because, unlike teachers of older students, elementary candidates had to complete tasks for both reading and math (GaPSC, 2021a). Eleanor summarized her greatest perceived barrier as time management. She and her husband adopted three children months before she began the GaTAPP program. Balancing the requirements of GaTAPP and learning a new job was compounded by new family obligations and resulted in Eleanor's time management dilemma. In her opinion, many of the required tasks were "busy work" and she failed to find value in completing them.

Research Question 3: What strategies were used by successful veteran teachers who completed the GaTAPP in southwest Georgia to mitigate completion barriers?

School districts with meaningful professional development, advancement opportunities, a positive work environment, and an effective mentoring program to support new teachers, generally enjoy above average annual teacher retention rates (Swanson & Wagner, 2016; Young, 2018). Swanson and Wagner (2016) recognized teachers in alternate certification programs are particularly vulnerable to pitfalls experienced by new teachers and in need of additional systems of support. The single most utilized mitigating strategy identified by the participants in this study was their assigned mentor. These experiences were secured in the theme school and district culture. Four of the six participants described their school system's well-developed mentorship programs provided the greatest alleviating strategies to barriers encountered as they obtained certification.

As an inclusion teacher, Abbey perceived her greatest GaTAPP completion barrier as the program's lack of cross training between special education regulations and regular education pedagogical training. Abbey resolved this professed shortfall by pursuing the wisdom of two school-based mentors. Her school district employed a special education lead teacher in each school whose fundamental purpose was to provide support and guidance to the school's special education department. Abbey credits this individual with providing the majority of mentoring support she required. In Abbey's words, "I would not have survived without her." In addition to this leader, Abbey's school assigned the teacher she worked with each day as her regular education mentor. The combination of these two advisors fulfilled the void she determined was created by the program's design.

Abbey and Martha worked in the same school district, but not the same school when completing the GaTAPP program. Martha's recount of the mentor support she recognized as her greatest mitigating factor was expected and consistent with Abbey's experience. One difference, however, was the content areas these participants taught which determined the certification required. Martha was hired to teach high school Spanish. Her school-assigned mentor was not only a Spanish teacher, but Martha's former teacher. "It was a blessing, like a fantasy, for me to walk in with no experience and have her as my mentor." Martha explained the preexisting trust and rapport she and her mentor shared bolstered her confidence and was the strongest influence in her relationship with her mentor. This bond proved to be the greatest advantage to mitigating strategies during GaTAPP. Her mentor has remained a source of support as Martha's decision to begin teaching blossomed into a successful career.

Eleanor's experience as a middle school business education teacher presented challenges unlike traditional classroom teachers. In her first year, she was afforded two school-assigned mentors to provide guidance and support in this unique setting. The first mentor was a fellow business education teacher. His support focused on curriculum and daily school operations. Eleanor described him as being "so good to me" and recalled his collaborative approach to mentorship and encouragement when she contemplated pursuing a Master's degree. The second school-assigned mentor was an exploratory teacher, though not in business education, and obtained teacher certification by completing the GaTAPP program. This individual was instrumental in providing guidance and examples of completed tasks for her subject area. "I could go to either of them but basically [one mentor] helped me with TAPP and [the other mentor] was my 'go-to' for everything else." This multilayered approach to mentorship proved vitally important as Eleanor worked at an accelerated rate to complete GaTAPP requirements.

The two candidates who found alleviating strategies outside of their school or school district were the same candidates who reported not having an assigned school-based mentor, which was the greatest source of support within the theme GaTAPP experiences. Based on her recognition of the benefit of mentor support, Nancy turned to the GaTAPP mentor/program supervisor for guidance and advice. This individual made regular visits to Nancy's classroom and worked with her school administrators to smooth the transition into education. Because she was employed through the GaTAPP program provider, she was highly familiar with the program requirements and effective support methods. While the mentor Nancy relied on to help her overcome program obstacles was

not school-based, it is noteworthy she was the fifth participant to identify mentor support as the greatest mitigation factor while completing the alternative certification program.

Desmond utilized his own sense of self-efficacy to compensate for the lack of mentor support within his school. This experience contributed to the collection of data generating the theme of self-efficacy strategies. Specifically, Desmond identified performance experience as the principal source of his own efficacy. His previous achievements provided the fundamental confidence from which he drew self-assurance. He recounted experiences as a teaching assistant at Vanderbilt as he navigated classroom challenges in his new position, such as writing lesson plans and classroom management. A new dynamic for Desmond was the involvement of parents. Again, he described prior experiences as regulatory controls to navigate this unfamiliar element of K-12 education. Interestingly, Desmond cited "burnout" in the medical field as a primary reason for leaving. Ackerman (2020) suggested those with high self-efficacy, specifically teachers, suffer from less stress and occupational burnout. Desmond's recognized use of self-efficacy strategies and his reported job satisfaction as a teacher strengthens the relationship between Ackerman's theory and the findings of this study.

Implications of the Study

This phenomenological study was conducted to explore the lived experiences of successful veteran completers of the GaTAPP. The purpose of this study was to examine these experiences to identify barriers participants encountered as they completed the requirements of the GaTAPP program and the strategies they used to alleviate the obstacles. After data analysis was completed, three main themes emerged which provided the underpinning for the implications of the study. While the six participants in this study

revealed journeys with positive outcomes, implications from this research may be valuable to anyone working to close the disproportionate gap between student populations and certified teachers, which attributes to the ongoing national teacher shortages (ED, 2017). This research focused on the most commonly utilized alternative certification program in Georgia, GaTAPP, however findings may hold benefits to other programs or other states. The study of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory and the overall successful completion of the GaTAPP extends existing literature related to each of these topics.

Implications to School Districts

The six participants in this study represented three school districts. The researcher chose to select two participants from each district to gain various perspectives of the district practices. The implications for school districts are found within the first identified theme, *school and district culture*. Seven subthemes were ascertained within this category: a) school leadership support, b) relationships with coworkers, c) mentor program effectiveness, d) participant's expectations of teaching, e) challenges of teaching, f) rewards, and g) job satisfaction.

The principal strategy identified by participants to mitigate perceived barriers was mentor program effectiveness. Four of the six participants found this practice the most beneficial to them as new teachers and as GaTAPP candidates. The two individuals who identified other mitigating strategies were from the same school district. Both participants from that district identified the absence of an effective mentor program as the most devastating barrier of their experience. Participants throughout each session repeated the power of this single practice. According to Podolsky et al. (2017), the most effective

mentoring programs are multifaceted and include reciprocal peer observations, mentor feedback, formal meetings, and extra classroom support. Ideally, a mentor teaches the same subject and grade band as the novice teacher (Podolsky et al., 2017). School leaders who consistently provided this level of support retained teachers at greater than twice the rate of districts who did not have comparable programs (Podolsky et al., 2016). The findings from this study suggest a similar participant satisfaction with mentorship and recognition of the influence the program had on their successful completion of the GaTAPP program while undergoing their first years in the classroom. This implies one of the greatest indications of GaTAPP success and new teacher retention is dependent upon the school district in which the candidate is hired.

The amount and type of support offered also holds significant influence on a GaTAPP candidate's success. Another implication for school districts was the value of leader support. Abitabile (2020) advised, "Newer teachers want to interact with their principals considerably more than their veteran counterparts" (Be Seen section). Because participants extensively discussed administrative support as prominent factor in their experiences, school leadership support was identified as a subtheme within the theme school and district culture.

If districts offer GaTAPP candidates an opportunity to openly discuss struggles and challenges, without fear of repercussion, mitigation strategies may be offered or these barriers may be removed altogether. A third implication of this research was the lack of planned opportunities to listen to GaTAPP candidates. Participants with mentors revealed opportunities to ask questions, however the consensus was that information was primarily only flowing toward them with few opportunities to discuss how they were handling the

influx of demands and requirements. Information directly from the teacher may allow districts to improve support plans and prove beneficial to that individual, as well as to future GaTAPP candidates. By making changes to customary procedures, districts may find an increase in teacher retention and overall school morale.

Implications to GaTAPP Program Providers

The 23 GaTAPP programs are primarily a function of RESAs around the state. There are 14 programs at RESAs, seven within school systems, one in a technical college, and one is provided by the Georgia Charter Schools Association (GaPSC, 2021c). The participants in this study all completed the program through a RESA in southwest Georgia. Implications from this study may apply to all program providers with particular significance to other RESA programs.

The first implication was the importance of mentor support. All six candidates revealed the benefit of their GaTAPP assigned mentor throughout their experience. Some discussed the advantage of having an advisor who had direct knowledge of the program requirements, and all participants expressed the importance of constructive and positive feedback they received from this individual. Within the identified theme GaTAPP program, the subtheme mentor support was identified as the most valuable mitigating strategy to one participant whose home district did not have an effective mentor program.

A second implication for GaTAPP program providers was the need some participants expressed for cross-training based on the expectations of their district. One participant discussed her feeling of despair trying to balance the demands of being an inclusion teacher. She voiced the stress of trying to learn the dynamics of a regular education teacher while simultaneously learning the legalities and intricacies of a special

education teacher and the feeling of not being adequately trained for either. Another participant's feeling of isolation as an exploratory teacher was partially alleviated by talking to other exploratory teachers in her school, which leads to the next implication for GaTAPP providers.

Program providers hold distinctive knowledge and understanding of the dynamics GaTAPP candidates face. RESAs have a particularly unique opportunity to provide school district training for building comprehensive mentor programs. The RESA may then offer systems of monitoring and support to ensure districts' adequate implementation and consistent maintenance of the mentorship.

Like the implication for school districts, conversations with candidates regarding their identified barriers may hold great value to GaTAPP program providers. This practice may allow providers the chance to discuss possible strategies to ease the burden or possible methods to completely remove the obstacle. Providers may assume identified barriers may be shared among candidates. Open discussions could eliminate stressors to candidates and increase confidence and job satisfaction leading to retention. Additionally, such conversations may promote dialog about district practices that may be used in professional learning courses through the agency.

A final implication for program providers was the lack of awareness participants held of self-efficacy strategies prior to this study. Once the researcher discussed the strategies of self-efficacy, every participant recognized junctures during their experiences when they employed these strategies to motivate and encourage their endurance and self-confidence. For example, some participants attributed their decision to enter the field of education to social persuasion or vicarious experience. Some recognized performance

experience as the greatest factor in completing GaTAPP requirements. The effect of self-efficacy strategies was undeniable by every participant. Therefore, providing an awareness of self-efficacy strategies and the benefits of using these strategies may result in candidates' realization of intrinsic mitigating strategies when faced with extrinsic stressors.

Implications to GaTAPP Candidates

Some of the implications identified above may be replicated for the GaTAPP candidates; however, the benefit to the candidate is exclusively personal. The lived experiences of the six participants in this study all resulted in the individuals becoming fully certified teachers and remaining in the field of education. Each participant described a unique experience influenced by their background, personality characteristics, outside factors, and the district in which they were hired. Implications drawn from this study to potentially impact future GaTAPP candidates are generally self-directed.

The first implication revealed by the participants was the benefit of awareness of self-efficacy. While the majority of participants were unfamiliar with Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, all six recognized their use of the strategies prior to beginning the alternative certification program, during the program, and their continued reliance on some strategies. A strong sense of self-efficacy enhances the potential for achievement and success (Bandura, 1994). Participants agreed these strategies frequently occurred subconsciously but holding an understanding of the benefit of drawing on these strategies may have been advantageous at multiple stages in their experiences.

Another implication for the GaTAPP candidate was an awareness of the importance of mentor support. It is understood that a district's mentor program is outside

of the candidate's control; however, it is critical for candidates to recognize the difference having a mentor may have on the totality of their experience. Anthony et al. (2011) examined the impact of mentor programs and alternative certification candidates and revealed the vital benefit provided by mentors "to help teachers develop expected knowledge and dispositions during the shortened training component of their certification programs" (p. 47). Participants in districts without effective mentor programs found this extremely challenging, leading them to seek support from their GaTAPP assigned mentor or independently find advisors within or outside of the school setting.

This self-advocacy to identify and overcome barriers was the third implication for GaTAPP candidates. Participants revealed numerous barriers they encountered during the time they sought certification, including lack of support, relationships with coworkers, and typical challenges of teaching. The study participants who did not advocate for themselves described a greater sense of limitation by the barrier than those who pursued assistance.

This research also revealed participants' varied levels of program satisfaction related to the field of certification they sought. It is important for GaTAPP candidates to recognize the program is designed to provide equitable preparedness regardless of grade band and subject area. Requirements for preparation, however, may be differentiated, just as they are in a traditional EPP. In Julia's early education certification program, for example, she was required to complete tasks for both reading and math while her cohorts were only obligated to complete tasks for the specific subject they taught.

The participants in this study repeated the value of establishing rapport with their department chair, school administrators, and district leaders. This relationship provided

study participants with an increased sense of job security and greater job satisfaction. The final implication for GaTAPP candidates was the importance of building and district leadership to a candidate's successful completion of the GaTAPP program. Many GaTAPP candidates recognize they were hired to fill vacancies that were otherwise left unfilled due to the lack of fully certified applicants. What some do not comprehend is significance of acquiring certification to retain their position and the value of the leader-candidate partnership.

Limitations of the Study

Identifying a study's limitations is not only the ethical responsibility of a researcher, it provides significant information to the reader (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). The limitations identified in this study may influence the implications and recommendations found in the succeeding sections of this chapter and should be considered prior to future research on this subject. Upon examination of the study, four primary limitations were identified: a) researcher bias, b) lack of generalizability, c) minimal literature related to the topic and d) impact of COVID-19. It is at the reader's discretion how each of these limitations may apply to their perspective (Merriam, 2002).

Researcher Bias

A qualitative researcher is typically the primary instrument in data collections (Patton, 2015). It is essential that the researcher thoughtfully consider their own background and prior experiences to recognize any potential shifts in the interpretation of the data collected (Creswell, 2014). In my current job, I am deeply involved with recruitment and onboarding of new employees in my school district. I also have some level of responsibility for the assurance all teaching staff holds accurate and valid

teaching certification for the subjects and grade bands they are assigned to teach. In my experience, fully certified individuals are not always available to fill teaching vacancies. This has led to an increase in the practice of hiring non-certified individuals who hold a bachelor's degree in a related field or have the minimum number of college credits in an applicable subject. The district may then fill the vacancy while the individual obtains certification through the GaTAPP program. Recognition of these prior experiences promoted reflexivity and control of researcher bias.

Generalizability

Another limitation of this study is the limited generalizability of the findings. "External generalizability refers to [a study's] generalizability beyond that case, setting, or group, to other persons, times, and settings" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 137). The relatively small sample size, the focus on one specific geographic region, and the method of sampling contributed to this limitation.

Sample Size

Six subjects represented only three school districts in southwest Georgia. My research focused on a limited number of individuals who completed the GaTAPP program and their interpretation of their experiences, therefore, findings cannot be generalized beyond the scope of this study. The application of non-randomly selected participants makes generalization of these findings is statistically impossible (Merriam, 2002). Additional demographics, including race, gender, specific grade levels, and subject areas taught by participants, did not bind the design of this study. The six participants were comprised of one male and five females. Four of the participants were White and two were Black. One participant taught special education, one taught

elementary grades, one taught a high school content area (science), and three taught exploratory courses (high school Spanish, high school art, and middle school business education). The varied characteristics and areas of certification of study participants restricts generalization of their experiences. Therefore, findings may or may not be applicable to all races or ethnic groups, genders, grade levels or subject areas.

Geographic Region

The scope of this research focused on the over 5,000 square miles identified as southwest Georgia, specifically in the geographic region served by an identified RESA (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The GaDOE according to guidelines of the Federal Rural Education Initiative (Title V, Part B) classifies every school district within this area as rural. The GOSA considers 67% of these school districts high-need rural districts (GOSA, 2015). If the study had been conducted with a broadened scope of geographical regions, the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings could be generalized to school districts beyond the concentrated area of rural southwest Georgia.

Purposive Sampling

Also influencing the ability to generalize the outcomes of this study is the use of purposive sampling. This technique may be misleading because the participants are only typical of this population at this specific time (Ary et al., 2019). As the landscape of GaTAPP candidates changes, the subject studied in this research may fail to represent this demographic. The third criterion specified an employment duration in an effort to ensure participants exhibited intent to remain in the field of education. This, however, resulted in limited recall of the experience by some participants. Due to the length of time between completing GaTAPP and this research, most participants no longer retained artifacts from

their certification journey in the GaTAPP program, which limited the researcher's ability to compare such resources between districts and participants. Additionally, the intentional selection of two contributors from each of the three participating districts was intended to provide different perspectives of the district practices. However, because participants did not complete GaTAPP within the same cohort, changes in district practices and leadership may have influenced the candidate's overall experience. The findings exposed barriers of the GaTAPP program and school district at the specific time each candidate experienced it, which may not reflect current practice.

Limited Related Literature

While the GaPSC thoroughly tracks enrollment in the GaTAPP program, it is difficult to locate current data related to the retention of these candidates, specifically identified factors in their retention. The third identified limitation was the minimal literature related to retention of GaTAPP candidates. In this study, the researcher focused on six educators who successfully completed Georgia's alternative certification program and have remained in the field of education. As the program has grown and evolved since 2009, little research has been found to determine pertinent factors in the program's success. Specifically, there is extremely limited documentation to articulate strategies school districts should employ when hiring potential GaTAPP candidates or how to ensure their success so they may relieve the burden of teacher shortages by becoming veteran teachers. No literature was found on GaTAPP candidates use of self-efficacy strategies or the role self-efficacy plays in the alternative certification process or retention of these individuals.

Impact of COVID-19

At the time this research was conducted, the world was experiencing an on-going global pandemic. Perceived risk of exposure to coronavirus (COVID-19) dictated people's comfort with daily activities. COVID-19 vaccinations had been introduced only months prior to the initiation of participant interviews. Vaccination status did not limit the collection of data, however, safety precautions mandated by current national, state, and local laws and guidelines challenged the ability to conduct lengthy face-to-face interviews in some public locations. While the researcher and participants' conducted each interview in person, social distancing requirements and the use of masks for the duration of interviews compromised the comfort level of each person.

Recommendations

This phenomenological study adds new information to the current body of literature on self-efficacy and alternative certification completers. Six successful completers of the GaTAPP program explored their lived experiences to identify the perceived barriers and mitigating strategies utilized while obtaining teacher certification and working in a role for which they had limited training. Participants' sense of self-efficacy maintained an in-depth focus throughout this research. After a detailed analysis of all research data, limitations of the study, and existing literature, the following recommendations for future research emerged.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Increase Sample Size and Expand Diversity

Future studies related to completion of GaTAPP, retention of GaTAPP completers, and the role of self-efficacy should use a larger sample size. This study

engaged six participants. This sample size is adequate for the methodology employed in this study; however, generalization is limited by the relatively small sample. It is also recommended that researchers conducting future studies consider gender specificity. This researcher collected the experience of only one male. All other participants were female. It is recommended that future researchers address different perspectives related to GaTAPP completion barriers, methods of alleviating difficulties, and self-efficacy related to a specific gender. This researcher did not focus on the role race or ethnicity played in a participant's experience. Four participants were White and two were Black. To further the current body of literature, future researchers should consider a study on an individual racial subgroup to assess the impact of race on the participants' lived experiences.

Specify Grade and Content

It is suggested that future researchers on the topic consider a specific focus of grade band and content area. The criteria of the current study did not limit participant perimeters by grade or subject. The varied grade levels and subjects further limits generalization of the current findings.

Study Unsuccessful GaTAPP Candidates

The purpose of this study was to explore the lives of successful GaTAPP candidates who have remained in the teaching profession. Information ascertained from unsuccessful candidates may prove equally beneficial to stakeholders. Further research could focus on either GaTAPP candidates who did not complete the program or those who became fully certified but ultimately left the profession.

Conduct Quantitative, Mixed Methods, or Longitudinal Studies

This research was a qualitative phenomenological study. The implementation of a quantitative or mixed method research approach is recommended for future studies of GaTAPP participants. Both of these approaches may allow for easier management of larger samples of participants and improved generalization of research findings.

Of the six participants in this study, two have moved from classroom teachers into administrative roles, two others have school-level leadership aspirations – one of those has completed the GaLAPP program and is awaiting advancement. Bandura (1986) stated, "It is true that some performers respond to their notable attainment by affirming a strong sense of self-efficacy and setting themselves even more challenging goals to accomplish" (p. 364). Current literature could be extended through a longitudinal study of GaTAPP candidates' professional trajectories.

Expand Geographic Region

In this study, the researcher focused on participant experiences from an identified RESA in southwest Georgia. This is considered a rural region of Georgia. The 23 GaTAPP program providers are strategically located to serve each region of the state. The researcher recommends future scholars study the experiences of GaTAPP candidates from other geographic regions. Information obtained may ensure consistent delivery of program content, candidate support, and program satisfaction from districts and teachers.

Study Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic

Research participants in this study completed all program requirements well before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The GaTAPP program was originally designed to include in person meetings, face-to-face sessions with their GaTAPP

assigned mentor, and collaborative work with fellow candidates. At the time these subjects were GaTAPP candidates, they were able to complete the program as designed. The onset of the global pandemic necessitated drastic adjustments in any requirement that could compromise the health and safety of program participants. Future research should study the effects of such modifications on the experiences of those who participated in the GaTAPP since March 2020.

Summary

In this qualitative study, the researcher focused on the experiences of six successful completers of the GaTAPP program in southwest Georgia. "Qualitative researchers try to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study. This involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges" (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). The phenomenon of mitigating teacher shortages in Georgia by hiring individuals who will obtain certification through the GaTAPP program was viewed through the lens of the self-efficacy theory. Bandura (1994) explained the relationship between a strong sense of self-efficacy and one's ability to accomplish goals and attain success.

In Chapter I, the researcher described the ongoing dilemma school districts face when trying to fill teaching vacancies created through teacher attrition or the need for new positions and the immense financial burden placed on districts as a result. The disproportionate number of students in K-12 schools and graduates emerging from traditional EPPs has exacerbated the teacher shortage crisis. In Chapter II, the existing literature related to traditional teacher preparation, teacher certification, teacher shortages, alternate certification, and self-efficacy was presented. In Chapter III, the

researcher provided the methodological foundation for this phenomenological study. I also conveyed procedures for data collection and analysis as well as strategies for protecting trustworthiness and ethical procedures. To give the reader a sense of understanding and familiarity with each contributor, the researcher provided descriptive profiles of each participant in Chapter IV, along with an explanation of data analysis procedures and subsequent findings of the research. In Chapter VI, I offered my summative interpretations of the research. The answers to each research question were revealed as well as the limitations of the current study, implications for relevant stakeholders, recommendations for future research, and my concluding statements.

Analysis of all collected data provided robust answers to the fundamental research questions on which this study was based. The answers to these questions surfaced some additional researcher thoughts. Prior to this study, the researcher failed to recognize the level of reliance GaTAPP candidates have on the mentorship programs within the school in which they work. Related to mentorship is the difference in support needed by a certified new teacher and a GaTAPP candidate in the process of attaining certification. Pedagogical content knowledge, education-specific acronyms and terminology, and ethical obligations of an educator are unique to the profession. GaTAPP candidates, unlike traditionally trained new teachers, require additional support as they attain the essential understanding of these crucial facets of the profession. Quality mentor programs were the most effective method of providing this assistance to the participants in this study.

One of the most significant points of interest from this study was the suggestion that GaTAPP candidates hold an increased level of aspiration for advancement. Four of

the six participants are currently in leadership positions or desire to move into a leadership role outside of the classroom. Because I did not follow a traditional route to the leadership roles I have held, I found this particularly interesting. Root causes may include a dissatisfaction with a traditional classroom setting, as this was not their initially planned career, or a natural inclination for professional advancement that may have manifested itself regardless of occupation.

Another researcher realization that became evident through this research was the inability to ensure those hired without certification will be a "good hire." When compiling a list of potential participants, I experienced difficulty finding candidates who met the criteria specified in the methodology of this study. Of the potential participants in the identified school districts, many did not meet the third criterion: Participants must have remained a teacher for a minimum of 3 years following completion of the GaTAPP program and all certification requirements. It is unclear if this was because districts did not retain GaTAPP completers, if they had moved to other Georgia districts outside of the scope of this study, or if they completely left the profession. A prevailing inference of this for school districts is, it is impossible to know the probability of retention with any degree of certainty at the point of hire. However, examining the findings and conclusions of this study may provide retention advantages to school districts.

Participants in this study provided rich knowledge of the GaTAPP program and first-hand accounts of their unique lived experiences while obtaining alternative certification. The barriers identified by participants should be used as a gauge for school districts and GaTAPP program provider improvements. Administrative bodies should consider recognized strategies to reduce these obstacles as methods to eliminate potential

candidate barriers. Based on all data and contributing factors, I conclude that self-efficacy is a fundamental and necessary means of mitigating challenges faced by GaTAPP candidates.

This study was founded on a common theory surrounding those who have obtained a bachelor's degree in one field then chose to obtain teacher certification through the GaTAPP program. The conceptual framework for this study was based on Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory as it relates to alternate certification candidates. Bandura's theory identified four sources of self-efficacy. A fifth source, Maddux's (1995) imaginal experiences, was added to the conceptual framework for this study. These five factors were proven essential to the participants of this study before initiation of GaTAPP, throughout the completion of the GaTAPP process, and remained vital as the newly certified teachers made decisions to remain in the profession. While the specific sources of self-efficacy necessary for the alternate certification candidate are unique to the individual, the findings of this research solidify the supposition at the foundation of the conceptual framework underpinning this study. Although self-efficacy is not an intentionally embedded aspect of the GaTAPP program, utilizing the five self-efficacy strategies identified within my conceptual framework is an integral contributing factor to the successful completion of this alternative certification program.

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Appendix A

Request to Conduct Research

[redacted]

[redacted] County Schools

[redacted]

[redacted]

Dear [redacted],

My name is Brecca Pope and I am a doctoral student at Valdosta State University.

As I am sure you are well aware, high rates of new teacher attrition have a significant negative financial impact on America's school districts as 40% of new teachers leave their jobs during their first 5 years of teaching at an estimated national cost of over $8 billion annually (King, 2018; Phillips, 2015; Sutcher et al., 2019). My study, entitled "Phenomenological Study of Self-Efficacy and Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy Program Completers," seeks to explore how teachers in Southwest Georgia used self-efficacy strategies as they completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) program.

Although the GaTAPP program provides districts some level of relief when trying to fill vacancies, each year school districts lose millions of dollars in efforts to replace teachers lost through resignations, terminations, and training programs to help teachers stay at the schools (Phillips, 2015). Through a series of interviews with teachers who successfully completed the GaTAPP program and remained in the teaching field, and with the guidance of my dissertation committee researcher, Dr. Bill Truby, I hope to provide school districts a better understanding of the unique challenges these individuals face as they work in a field for which they have no professional training while seeking certification. This information will help district leaders make better informed hiring decisions, provide appropriate support during the GaTAPP process, and ultimately retain these teachers to lessen the burden of teacher shortages particularly evident in Southwest Georgia.

I am writing seeking your permission to speak with two teachers in your school district who obtained certification through the GaTAPP program and have remained a teacher for a minimum of 3 years. Interviews will be conducted during the summer months and will not involve student data in any form. My research proposal has been approved by Valdosta State University and your permission is the final evidence I need to complete the IRB application process. If you are willing to allow me to speak to two teachers who meet this criteria, please write a short Letter of Cooperation/Permission that I may include with my application. Thank you so much for your help!

Sincerely,

Brecca Pope, Ed. S.

Appendix B

District Approval to Conduct Research

[redacted] COUNTY

[redacted] Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
Phone: (229) [redacted]
Fax: (229) [redacted]

May 19, 2021

Office of Sponsored Programs and
Research Administration Valdosta State
University
1500 N. Patterson Street
Valdos
ta, GA
31698

To Whom It May Concern,

After review of her information, I give Brecca Pope, graduate student at Valdosta State University, permission to conduct research for her study entitled "Phenomenological Study of Self-Efficacy and Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy Program Completers" within the [redacted] County school system.

Sincerely,

[redacted] Ed.D.
Superintendent

[redacted] COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

[redacted], **Chairman** – District 4
Ga. [redacted]
Member – District 1
[redacted] GA. [redacted]
, **Member** – District 2
[redacted], Ga. [redacted]
, **Vice-Chair** – District 3
Ga. [redacted]
, **Member** – District 5
Ga. [redacted]
Member – District 6
[redacted], GA. [redacted]

[redacted]
Superintendent
[redacted]
[redacted], GA [redacted]
(229) [redacted]
[redacted].k12.ga.us

[redacted]
Senior Assistant Superintendent of Finance & Business Services

[redacted]
Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources

[redacted]
Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction

[redacted]
Assistant Superintendent of Student Services

May 19, 2021

[redacted]
County Schools
[redacted] Street
[redacted] GA [redacted]

Dear Mr. [redacted]

My name is Brecca Pope, and I am a doctoral student at Valdosta State University.

As I am sure you are well aware, high rates of new teacher attrition have a significant negative financial impact on America's school districts as 40% of new teachers leave their jobs during their first five years of teaching at an estimated national cost of over $8 billion annually (King, 2018; Phillips, 2015; Sutcher et al., 2019). My study, entitled "Phenomenological Study of Self-Efficacy and Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy Program Completers," seeks to explore how teachers in Southwest Georgia used self-efficacy strategies as they completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) program.

Although the GaTAPP program provides districts some level of relief when trying to fill vacancies, each year, school districts lose millions of dollars in efforts to replace teachers lost through resignations, terminations, and training programs to help teachers stay at the schools (Phillips, 2015). Through a series of interviews with teachers who successfully completed the GaTAPP program and remained in the teaching field, and with the guidance of my dissertation committee researcher, Dr. Bill Truby, I hope to provide school districts a better understanding of the unique challenges these individuals face as they work in a field for which they have no professional training while seeking certification. This information will help district leaders make better informed hiring decisions, provide appropriate support during the GaTAPP process, and ultimately retain these teachers to lessen the burden of teacher shortages, particularly evident in Southwest Georgia.

I am writing seeking your permission to speak with two teachers in your school district who obtained certification through the GaTAPP program and have remained a teacher for a minimum of 3 years. Interviews will be conducted during the summer months and will not involve student data in any form. My research proposal has been approved by Valdosta State University, and your permission is the final evidence I need to complete the IRB application process. If you are willing to allow me to speak to two teachers who meet this criteria, please write a short Letter of Cooperation/Permission that I may include with my application. Thank you so much for your help!

Sincerely,

Brecca Pope, Ed. S.

I, [redacted], Superintendent of [redacted] County Schools, grant permission to Ms. Brecca Pope, VSU Doctoral Student, to conduct interviews as outlined above., this day, May 20, 2021.

[redacted]

The [redacted] County Board of Education is an equal opportunity provider and employer and is committed to a policy of nondiscrimination in relation to race, color, religion, gender, age, national origin, political affiliation, disability, genetic information and testing, and the Family and Medical Leave Act. We prohibit retaliation against individuals who bring forth any complaint, orally or in writing, to the employer or the government, or against any individuals who assist or participate in the investigation of any complaint or otherwise oppose discrimination.

[redacted]

Academics · Arts · Athletics EST. 1900

[redacted] Interim Superintendent

[redacted]

May 19, 2021

Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Administration

Valdosta State University

1500 N. Patterson Street

Valdosta, GA 31698

To Whom It May Concern,

After review of her information, I give Brecca Pope, graduate student at Valdosta State University, permission to conduct research for her study entitled "Phenomenological Study of Self-Efficacy and Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy Program Completers" within the [redacted] School System.

Thank you,

[redacted]

[redacted]

Appendix C

Letter to Applicants

Dear Participant,

My name is Brecca Pope and I am a doctoral student at Valdosta State University. With permission from your Superintendent, I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study entitled "Phenomenological Study of Self-Efficacy and Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy Program Completers." This study seeks to explore how teachers in Southwest Georgia used self-efficacy strategies as they completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) program.

Through a series of interviews with teachers, like you, who successfully completed the GaTAPP program and remained in the teaching field, and with the guidance of my dissertation committee researcher, Dr. Bill Truby, I hope to provide school districts a better understanding of the unique challenges you faced as you worked in a field for which you had no professional training while seeking teacher certification. This information will help district leaders make better informed hiring decisions, provide appropriate support during the GaTAPP process, and ultimately retain GaTAPP teachers to lessen the burden of teacher shortages particularly evident in Southwest Georgia. Participation should take approximately 60-90 minutes. The interviews will be audio and/or video recorded in order to accurately capture your concerns, opinions, and ideas. Once the recording have been transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed.

You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about how school districts can better support teachers as they are completing the requirements for teacher certification through the GaTAPP program.

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Data will be kept in a locked safe and password protected file storage spaces on the researcher's computer. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of a pseudonym to let the researcher know who you are.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your participation in the interview will serve as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 years of age or older.

Sincerely,

Brecca Pope, Ed. S.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Brecca Pope at *bspope@valdosta.edu*. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-253-2947 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Appendix D

Informed Consent

VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled "Phenomenological Study of Self-Efficacy and Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy Program Completers." This research project is being conducted by Brecca Pope, a student in in the Department of Leadership, Technology, & Workforce Development of the Dewar College of Education and Human Services at Valdosta State University. The purpose of this research is to learn more about your experiences as you obtained teacher certification through the GaTAPP program. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

As described in more detail below, we will ask you to participate in a series of interviews to provide a recount of your lived experiences as you completed the GaTAPP program while teaching. Additionally, we will focus on self-efficacy strategies you may have consciously or subconsciously utilized throughout this process. It is important for you to know that you can stop your participation at any time. More information about all aspects of this study is provided below.

This form includes detailed information to help you decide whether to participate in this research. Please read it carefully and ask any questions that you have before you agree to participate. Please be sure to retain a copy of this form for your records.

Procedures: Your participation will involve [*please give a detailed description of what participants will be asked to do, taking care to use easily understandable terms. Ensure that you include a task-by-task and* ***total time estimate*** *(e.g. "you will participate in three separate surveys which should each take 15 minutes. Your total participation in this project is expected to be 45 minutes")].* If you agree to participate, the researchers will also collect [*discuss any data about the participant that you will gather that you are not receiving directly from them, as well as the source (e.g. "gather information about your ACT scores, high school GPA, college major, and completed courses from the Registrar's Office at your institution")*].

Identify which, if any, of the procedures are experimental and indicate if there are any alternatives to the experimental procedures. If there are no alternatives to the experimental procedures, you may state, "There are no alternatives to the experimental procedures in this study. The only alternative is to choose not to participate at all." If the study involves collection of research data about an educational strategy in a required course, be sure to differentiate

clearly between the activities that are part of the research project and therefore voluntary and those that are required for course completion and academic credit.

If the study involves concealment or deception, provide a general explanation of procedures in a statement similar to the following: "There are some details about the study that you are not being told in advance. When your participation is over, the study will be explained to you in full detail, and all of your questions will be answered. At that time, you can decide whether or not you want your information to be used in the study."

Possible Risks or Discomfort: This is a minimal risk research study. That means that the risks of participating are no more likely or serious than those you encounter in everyday activities.

Identify possible discomforts or risks that the participant might experience, including minor issues such as embarrassment or uneasiness in dealing with sensitive issues. State the risk level (minimal or more than minimal), considering the probability and the magnitude of harm, as part of the explanation. Do not say that the study carries no risk for participants. If risks are unknown, the following statement may be used: "Although there are no known risks associated with these research procedures, it is not always possible to identify all potential risks of participating in a research study. However, the University has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize potential but unknown risks."

If the possibility of either physical or psychological injury exists, include this statement: "If you [are injured/experience psychological distress] as a result of your participation in this study, please contact [researcher name] at [telephone number]. Neither the researcher nor Valdosta State University has made special provision for services required to treat any [injury/ psychological distress] that results from participation in this research study."

If the study population includes VSU students and/or employees, add the following phrase to the above sentence: "beyond those normally provided to VSU [students/employees]." As appropriate, VSU student participants should be informed that they may request counseling services from the Student Counseling Center at 229-333-5940 or health care services from Student Health Services at 229-333-5886. As appropriate, VSU employee participants should be informed that they may request counseling services from the Employee Assistance Program through Office of Human Resources & Employee Development at 229-333-5709 or health care services from their own private health care provider under their selected health insurance plan.

If the participants are not VSU students or employees, you may provide contact information for community services, such as a community crisis hotline or an urgent care center. Indicate if the service is free to the participant or if the participant will be expected to pay for services rendered.

The Possible Risks or Discomfort section should end with the following sentence: By agreeing to participate in this research project, you are not waiving any rights that you may have against Valdosta State University for injury resulting from negligence of the University or its researchers.

Potential Benefits: *Describe any anticipated or possible benefits to the participant and/or society. Be realistic in terms of both benefits for the participant and potential contribution to the discipline or society. The following phrase may be used when there are no direct benefits anticipated for the participant: "Although you [may/will] not benefit directly from this research, your participation will help the researcher gain additional understanding of… Knowledge gained may contribute to addressing …"*

Costs and Compensation: *Describe any costs to the participant for participating in the research. (Note: One of the most common costs to participants is the cost of self-provided transportation to the research site.) Describe any compensation (money, gifts, or services outside of the research activity; inclusion in a lottery for any of the preceding types of compensation; or extra academic credit) that participants will receive. Provide details of how, when, and for what activities compensation will be provided. If there are no costs to participants or compensation for their participation, simply state: "There are no costs to you and there is no compensation (no money, gifts, or services) for your participation in this research project." Be sure that any compensation offered is reasonable for the time, effort required of the participant, and that the compensation offered would not be viewed by the average person as being coercive. When offering extra credit for students' participation in research, an alternative activity (such as review of a journal article or similar activity) may be substituted so that students do not feel pressured to participate in the research to qualify for extra credit. Make sure that the time and level of effort required for the alternate activity is not significantly greater than that required for participation in the research study.)*

Assurance of Confidentiality: Valdosta State University and the researcher will keep your information confidential to the extent allowed by law. Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a university committee charged with reviewing research to ensure the rights and welfare of research participants, may be given access to your confidential information.

If the study is funded by an external sponsor and the grant or contract gives the sponsor rights to participants' research data, add, "Representatives of [name of sponsor], which is providing financial support for this research, may also be given access to information about you."

Describe how the participants' information will be protected, including where it will be kept, who will have access to the information, how it will be protected from unauthorized access, how long it will be kept, and how it ultimately will be destroyed.

Do not tell the participant that he/she will remain anonymous or his/her data will be anonymous if there is any way that you or anyone else can link the identity of the person to his/her information at any time during or after the study. Use of a code number linking identity and data, a video or audio recording, or capturing of an email address that can be linked to participant responses destroys the participant's anonymity, even if the code list, recording, or email address is destroyed or deleted after receipt of information and/or entry of data into a database. Such action may render the data anonymous to any other individuals in the future, but this does not change the fact that the data were not anonymous to the researcher at an earlier

time in the study. Instead, explain how you will ensure that information about the participant will be kept confidential and protected from unauthorized access.

As appropriate, inform the participant how data from the study will be reported (e.g., reported in combination with information obtained from other participants, not associated with participants by name, not individually identifiable, use of pseudonyms, etc.).

Voluntary Participation: Your decision to participate in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you agree now to participate and change your mind later, you are free to leave the study. Your decision not to participate at all or to stop participating at any time in the future will not have any effect on any rights you have or any services you are otherwise entitled to from Valdosta State University.

If the participants are VSU students, indicate as appropriate that a decision not to participate will not affect their grades.

If the study involves surveying or interviewing participants, add the following sentence: "You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer." (Note that, if you are using an internet survey tool, it must be programmed to accept a non-response.)

If the study involves collection or use of data that remains identifiable to the researcher, also inform participants that, should they decide to withdraw after data collection is complete, their information will be deleted from the database and will not be included in research results.

If the study involves concealment or deception, reiterate the participant's opportunity to decide whether to allow his/her data to be used in the study after his/her participation is over and the research has been fully explained.

Information Contacts: *Please use the following statement:* Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to [*name of researcher]* at [*e-mail address]*. This study has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-253-2947 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Appendix E

Interview and Source of Data Chart

Interview and Source of Data Chart

Interview One: Life History

Interview Question	Research Question	Related Literature	Source of Information
1. To begin, please tell me about yourself as a child, including your home life.	RQ 1: What are the life and career experiences of successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in Southwest Georgia?	Merriam, 2002 Mischler, 1986 Seidman, 2013	Interview
2. What did your parents do for work?		Merriam, 2002 Mischler, 1986 Seidman, 2013	Interview
3. What was the household attitude about school and education and teachers?		Merriam, 2002 Mischler, 1986 Seidman, 2013	Interview
4. Tell me about your educational experiences as a K-12 student.		Merriam, 2002 Mischler, 1986 Seidman, 2013	Interview
5. What were your relationships like with your K-12 teachers?		Merriam, 2002 Mischler, 1986 Seidman, 2013	Interview
6. What post-secondary school(s) did you attend?		Merriam, 2002 Mischler, 1986 Seidman, 2013	Interview
7. Did you work in that field prior to becoming a teacher?		Merriam, 2002 Mischler, 1986 Seidman, 2013	Interview
8. If any exist, identify specific ways in which your college major has given you an advantage in your current job that a traditionally trained teacher wouldn't have.		Merriam, 2002 Mischler, 1986 Seidman, 2013 Will, 2018	Interview

9. What motivated you to change your career path? 10. Describe your current family make-up and dynamics. 11. Would you describe the decision to change career paths as an easy one?	RQ 1: What are the life and career experiences of successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in Southwest Georgia?	Low et al., 2017 Merriam, 2002 Seidman, 2013 Merriam, 2002 Mischler, 1986 Seidman, 2013 Feng & Sass, 2018 Garcia & Weiss, 2019c	Interview Interview Interview

Follow-up Interviews: GaTAPP Experience and Reflections

Interview Question	Research Question	Related Literature	Source of Information
1. What made you decide to become a teacher?	RQ 2: What were the perceived barriers of successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in Southwest Georgia?	Christensen, 2013 Daniels, 2018 GaPSC, 2019	Interview
2. What time of year did you begin teaching?		GaPSC, 2009	Interview GaTAPP Artifacts
3. How long after you began teaching did you enroll in the GaTAPP program?		GaPSC, 2016b	Interview GaTAPP Artifacts
4. Were there other teachers from your district enrolled in the program at the same time?		GaDOE, 2021a	Interview GaTAPP Artifacts
5. Are there currently other teachers in your district who obtained certification through GaTAPP the same time you did?	RQ 3: What strategies were used by successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in Southwest Georgia to mitigate completion barriers?	GaPSC, 2016a	Interview
6. Describe your relationships with your coworkers.		Ingersoll & Smith, 2003 Peshkin, 1991	Interview
7. Do you feel like you have a supportive administrative team?		Abitabile, 2020 McKillip & Farrie, 2019	Interview GaTAPP Artifacts
8. What was your relationship with your GaTAPP Support Team like?		GaPSC, 2018	Interview GaTAPP Artifacts

9. In what ways did your school or district support you as a new teacher?	RQ 2: What were the perceived barriers of successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in Southwest Georgia?	Ingersoll et al., 2018	Interview GaTAPP Artifacts
10. Describe how you balanced the simultaneous expectations of your school district and the demands of GaTAPP.		Baines, 2010 King, 2018 Long, 2020	Interview GaTAPP Artifacts
11. What was the most difficult aspect of being a first year teacher?	RQ 3: What strategies were used by successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in Southwest Georgia to mitigate completion barriers?	Baines, 2010 King, 2018 Long, 2020	Interview GaTAPP Artifacts
12. When you experienced professional difficulties, who did you turn to for help?		Maddux, 1995	Interview
13. When you experienced success, how did this make you feel?		Lopez-Garrido, 2020 Bandura, 1977 Bandura, 1994	Interview GaTAPP Artifacts
14. How did your success influence your attitude when you were unsuccessful?		Lopez-Garrido, 2020 Bandura, 1977 Bandura, 1994	Interview
15. Prior to entering the program, did you know anyone who obtained certification through the GaTAPP program?		Baines, 2010 Bandura, 1977 Bandura, 1994	Interview
16. Can you identify a time that you looked to another person's success or failures to determine your own success with a similar task?		Ackerman, 2020 Maddux & Gosselin, 2012	Interview

17. Did you have outside influence when you decided to enter into the field of education?		Bandura, 1977 Bandura, 1994	Interview
18. Describe your physical and emotional well-being during your first year of teaching, while enrolled in the GaTAPP program.	RQ 2: What were the perceived barriers of successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in Southwest Georgia?	Bandura, 1977 Bandura, 1994	Interview
19. As the first year progressed and you experienced some success in completing GATAPP requirements, how did this impact your attitude toward the remaining tasks?		GaPSC, 2016a Bandura, 1994	Interview GaTAPP Artifacts
20. Prior to becoming fully certified, did you feel you were treated differently (good or bad) than your traditionally certified counterparts?	RQ 3: What strategies were used by successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in Southwest Georgia to mitigate completion barriers?	Baines, 2010 Salgado et al., 2018	Interview
21. As you reflect on your journey to become a teacher, who or what made the greatest impact on your decision to remain in the teaching profession?		Forsbach-Rothman et al., 2007	Interview

22. As someone who has successfully changed careers, would you be open to doing that again to explore another field?	RQ 2: What were the perceived barriers of successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in Southwest Georgia?	Aleshina, 2019 Swanson & Wagner, 2016 Young, 2018	Interview
23. Overall, how do you feel about your past experience in the GaTAPP program?		Bruno et al., 2018	Interview
24. What would you say to someone who is considering obtaining certification through the GaTAPP program?	RQ 3: What strategies were used by successful veteran teachers who completed the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) in Southwest Georgia to mitigate completion barriers?	GaPSC, 2021a GaPSC, 2021d	Interview
25. What advice would you give to a person who has just enrolled in the GaTAPP program?		GaPSC, 2021a GaPSC, 2021d	Interview
26. What do you feel is the most common misconception about the GaTAPP program?		GaPSC, 2009	Interview
27. What do you feel are the most important things for school and district leaders to consider regarding GaTAPP candidates?		Antonetti, 2018	Interview
28. What is your opinion about self-efficacy?		Anthony et al., 2011 Bandura, 1994	Interview

29. What role do you think self-efficacy played in your completion of the GaTAPP program?		Anthony et al., 2011 Bandura, 1977 Betz & Hackett, 2006 Tugsbaatar, 2020	Interview
30. Which strategy, or strategies, do you think were most effective as you completed GaTAPP?		Betz & Hackett, 1986	Interview
31. Which strategy, or strategies, do you use as a teacher?		Betz & Hackett, 1986 Salgado et al., 2018	Interview GaTAPP Artifacts
32. Do you think understanding self-efficacy strategies was, or would have been beneficial as you completed the GaTAPP program?		Anthony et al., 2011 Bandura, 1986 Tugsbaatar, 2020	Interview
33. What role do you think self-efficacy played in your decision to remain in the profession?		Bandura & Adams, 1977 Betz & Hackett, 2006 Tugsbaatar, 2020	Interview

Appendix F

Institutional Review Board Approval

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
For the Protection of Human Research Participants

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

Protocol Number: 04171-2021 **Responsible Researcher(s):** Brecca Pope

Supervising Faculty: Dr. Michael Bochenko

Project Title: *Phenomenological Study of the Self-Efficacy and Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy Program Completers.*

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **Exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under Exemption **Category 2.** Your research study may begin immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- *Upon completion of this research study all collected data must be securely maintained (locked file cabinet, password protected computer, etc.) and accessible only by the researcher for a minimum of 3 years. At the end of the required time, collected data must be permanently destroyed.*
- *Exempt protocol guidelines permit the recording of interviews for the sole purpose of creating an accurate transcript. The recording must be deleted immediately from all devices upon creation of the transcript. The recordings are not to be stored or shared.*
- *The research consent statement must be read aloud to each participant at the start of each interview session, and understanding and willingness to participate confirmed.*

☒ ***If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.***

Elizabeth Ann Olphie *05.20.2021*
Elizabeth Ann Olphie, IRB Administrator

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.
Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-253-2947.

Revised: 06.02.16