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**HOW TEACHERS MANAGE RESOURCE INEQUITY IN DIFFERENT
EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS: A CASE STUDY &
RECOMMENDATIONS**

Elizabeth George
elizabeth.s.george@uconn.edu

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UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

**HOW TEACHERS MANAGE RESOURCE INEQUITY IN DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL
CONTEXTS: A CASE STUDY & RECOMMENDATIONS**

A SENIOR HONORS THESIS

SUBMITTED TO

THE HONORS PROGRAM

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

BY

ELIZABETH GEORGE

THE NEAG SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

ADVISORS: DR. RICHARD GONZALES AND DR. CATHERINE LITTLE

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Abstract

This study explores how teachers make decisions and navigate different contexts to support their students. I investigated how teachers use agency, ownership, and learning in the positive, adaptive choices they make to achieve better student outcomes. The purpose of this honors thesis is to surface ideas about how teachers can serve students in different schools with various needs and different amounts of resources.

The research questions framing the study are as follows: (1) How do teachers make choices about how to utilize their professional support network? (2) How do teachers make choices about their instructional approach to support students? (3) How do teachers make choices to demonstrate they like, care, and think about their students? In the study, four practicing teachers from two different school districts are surveyed on their teaching experiences in their given district.

Overall, the results showed some common themes about decisions teachers make based on the interviews conducted. When discussing how they use their professional support network, many teachers mentioned the importance of collaboration with colleagues, as well as feeling supported, and meeting the needs of educators. In terms of instructional approach, teachers discussed their focus on students and the importance of having professional choice. When demonstrating care for students, teachers mentioned a love for the community and taking time to learn about students and their culture. In conclusion, the results show that regardless of the district and varying resources available, teachers used similar methodology when making decisions to support their students. The results are important as they show how teachers manage resource inequity in different contexts with similar beliefs and teaching practices.

Part I: Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to examine how teachers make decisions and navigate different contexts to support their students. This information will help us prepare teachers to better serve students in different schools with various needs and different amounts of resources. I investigate how teachers use agency, ownership, and learning in the positive, adaptive choices they make to achieve better student outcomes. Specifically, I address the following questions:

- How do teachers make choices about utilizing their professional support network?
- How do teachers make choices about their instructional approach to support students?
- How do teachers make choices to demonstrate they like, care, and think about their students?

Part II: Review of Literature

Introduction

Are schooling experiences different in urban and suburban districts? Do teachers manage and navigate their classrooms differently? How do they successfully navigate their respective spaces to support students? Different schools may have different amounts of resources. Managing resource inequity is a problem and we often find that some schools may not receive the same resources as others. This can change the way teachers support their students. “Resource equity refers to the allocation and use of resources (people, time, and money) to create student experiences that enable all children to reach empowering and rigorous learning outcomes- no matter their race or income” (Travers, 2018, p. 1). This

can be in the form of funding, school staffing, access to professional development, and more.

Resource inequity has implications on students as the resources available play a role in their learning experience. Teachers have to find a way to use the resources available to support their students. Resource inequities may specifically impact teachers in aspects of their professional support network, instructional approaches, and how they demonstrate they like, care, and think about their students. Through agency, ownership, and learning, teachers use their respective resources to manage student behavior and learning in their classrooms. How can teachers utilize the resources they have, even if they are limited, to support their students? Learning about different teachers' experiences and how they use their available resources in urban and suburban districts helps us understand what teachers in different contexts do to support their students successfully.

Professional Support Network

Teachers make decisions about how they utilize their professional support network and such decisions affect student outcomes. Specifically, they make decisions about how they work in teams and with their peers. Social support from other teachers and school staff members has been noted as important. They can collaborate and gain insight and advice from one another. Lack of a support network can cause added stress and work for teachers.

Research has found that “enhancing social support from various sources will help teachers manage the emotional labour of the job more effectively, protect them from burnout, and engender job satisfaction. The inverse association between social support and depersonalisation also suggests that developing a supportive workplace environment is

likely to enhance job performance by helping teachers manage feelings of estrangement from the job role” (Kinman, G., Wray, S., & Strange, C., 2011, pp. 850-51). Lack of social support can cause stress and can ultimately lead to dissatisfaction and even burnout. A support network can differ from school to school as each school community and the way it operates is different. Some teachers may not feel they can look to their coworkers and other school leaders for help, while others do. This leads to different teacher experiences in terms of support, whether that is professional development, support and guidance from school leaders, or other collaboration and good relations with coworkers.

Collaboration is found to be an essential part of teaching as it helps teachers to meet their needs and better provide for their students. Working together exposes teachers to new ideas and resources to bring back to their classrooms. Research shows that “relationships within each construct require specific attributes to bring about what is best for students. Considering organizational structures at Nagel, teachers and staff noted that being a ‘team player’ was the priority. Many teachers acknowledged that the structures in place like teaming, advisory, common planning time, and extracurricular activities would not work well if ‘everyone was not willing to collaborate’ ... Ms. Routon, a seventh-grade teacher, explained that collaborative relationships are essential to ‘making different things work, because people are expected to work together and get creative and make something work for any child regardless of what they need academically or emotionally” (Cook, Faulkner, & Howell, 2016, p. 10). Collaboration is necessary to make things work successfully, and teachers make choices to work with other colleagues to ensure success in a school. Working with other colleagues and school leaders allows teachers to feel supported and cared for.

When teachers feel supported and as though their needs are being met, they may be more committed to their school. In one study on social support, “simple linear regression analysis was made to predict the effect of perceived social support of teachers on organizational commitment to their schools. In result of analysis, it is found that there is a meaningful, positive and low level relation between perceived social support level and organizational commitment and perceived social support explains 3% of the change in organizational commitment. It can be said in this context that perceived social support is a significant predictor of organizational commitment. If perceived social support increases 1 unit, organizational commitment will increase 0.111 units and because of that, it is predicted that organizational commitment will change according to the intensity of perception if perceived social support of students’ increases” (Tuna & Aslan, 2018, p. 990). The professional choice teachers make to collaborate with their colleagues allows for more success in the school as different individuals are working together to help support students. It also allows for teachers to feel better supported and become more committed to their organization. With this support, teachers may feel their needs are being met.

Regardless of their district, collaboration allows teachers to be introduced to new resources and teaching practices, to help inform their own teaching practice. In addition to collaborating with colleagues, teachers also make decisions about how they support their students through their instruction.

Instructional Approach to Support Students

Teachers have certain instructional techniques to support the various needs of their students. They use a toolbox of different methods and approaches to find strategies that work. However, regardless of resources and methods, the focus for teachers is always the

students. They work to make their instruction student-centered to best provide for students' needs.

One study done on responsive schools and meeting the needs of students discussed how, "at NMS, the teachers and staff have a strong understanding of the developmental needs of middle grades students and keep the child at the center of attention when making all decisions. To accomplish this task, they maintain a clear understanding of the role adolescent development plays in helping students have a successful middle school experience and, as such, work to create a school environment that is positive, safe, caring, and uplifting. The school is clearly focused around students and how they will be impacted and inspired" (Cook, Faulkner, & Howell, 2016, p. 8).

The focus is always the students so decisions about instruction are made around them. By listening to students and learning about their needs, teachers gain new perspectives and can adapt their instruction and tools. "Listening to the students, carefully listening to what they have to say, provides new insights into what they are thinking and feeling, and these insights in turn provide educators a new lens, a different perspective, through which to reflect on the education we are providing our children at all levels" (Storz, 2008, p. 264). Teachers make choices about their instruction but many choose to always make it student-centered. This allows teachers to guide their instruction to fit the demands of their class and gain insight into what their students want and need. Teachers also use this to guide new resources and ideas they look for. This ultimately benefits the students as the instruction is focused towards them.

In addition to making instruction student-centered, teachers should be able to make professional choices about how best to support their students, regardless of the amount of

resources a district has. This allows them to have more control over their classroom and decide what is best for their students. Having this professional choice can change one's teaching experience.

Studies show that “the movement of school culture toward supporting teachers’ autonomy can significantly increase the teachers’ identification with the introduction of changes, innovation and new reform programs in teaching, contributing to their personal and professional development. In this way, significant conditions could be created for substantial support to students’ autonomy in the classroom” (Tadić, 2015, pp. 26-27). Allowing teachers to have this choice allows them to grow professionally and allows for new ideas and methods of teaching. It may motivate teachers to seek new resources that they believe could help their students.

In a study she did on teacher autonomy in a Midwestern charter school, Professor Kristen Levin discussed how “the teachers' professional autonomy clearly impacted their confidence in their teaching. Mrs. Morris, a sixteen-year veteran teacher at [the school], explained that being ‘left to [her] own devices’ prompted her to research best practices and different teaching approaches and led to a deeper understanding of effective instruction (Dual Interview, May 3, lines 116-117). Ms. Baker readily admitted to her lack of experience and feeling intimidated by her autonomy at first, but claimed that her voice in curriculum development has helped instill a sense of confidence in her ability as a classroom professional (Interview, May 4)” (Levin, 2018, p. 221). Providing teachers autonomy over their classrooms drives many of them to seek out their own resources, which fosters new ways of thinking and learning. This choice can bring about new ideas and allow for teachers to better meet students’ needs.

In Levin's study on teacher autonomy, she also found that, "overall, the teachers in this study professed a deep appreciation for their professional latitudes and for the trust placed on them by their leaders. Generally, the reliance of the school on teacher input seemed to be a great motivating factor that encouraged the instructors to seek out novel ways to meet their diverse students' needs. Often, they would collaborate with their colleagues 'outside' of their scheduled meeting times, and I would frequently witness them discussing new ideas during their breaks and plan times. The leaders at Highland clearly understood how placing trust in their workers motivated them to work harder" (pp. 222-223). By placing trust in teachers and giving them autonomy over their classrooms, teachers were more motivated, sought out their own resources, and were able to grow personally and professionally. When teachers make choices about their instruction, it is usually focused on their students and what they need. By allowing teachers to make these professional choices based on the needs of their students, they can find new ways of teaching and improve learning in the classroom.

Demonstrating Care for Students

The way teachers make decisions about their interactions with their students can influence both the teachers' and students' classroom experience. Students' perception of their teacher can impact how they behave and their motivation to learn. A study done on urban middle school students and their perspectives on the quality of their education discusses that "there is a perception on the part of some of the students that a number of teachers in their school did not share the same level of care for their students as teachers in other districts' schools and that this lack of care affects the quality of their education. As one student states, I don't think we get a fair chance to learn because in Southlake (a

suburban district) they got teachers who seem like they actually care about what the kids do” (Storz, 2008, p. 258).

Additionally, the study mentions “another persistent theme in our work is the value students place on caring teachers both in the academic realm and beyond. There is a sense that caring is related to the quality of the student teacher relationship, the quality of teaching and learning, and the students’ level of care for their own education. Joanne and Marcus both allude to the quality of caring in their remarks. When comparing their schooling experiences to others, students often talk about the central role teachers play, particularly in terms of how teachers are perceived as caring for the students” (p. 258). Regardless of the resources a district has, teachers make decisions about how to show they care for their students. This has an immense impact on how students feel about their teachers and their relationship with them.

A strong student-teacher relationship is extremely important. “[T]he commitment, enthusiasm, and passion of the teachers truly helped students feel like they belong. Students consistently reported that teachers were happy, funny, caring, and energetic. Students also appreciated how teachers engaged students in conversation, shared their personal likes and hobbies, held students to high expectations, and enjoyed their role as a teacher. Numerous students shared comments like, ‘They are all very caring and actually talk to us. They share some about their life, their family, and they can relate to us’ and ‘They smile, they act like they are happy to see us, like they want us to be here.’ Furthermore, the dedication and commitment teachers exhibit to enhance student learning and the overall quality of the school experience for students is clearly noticed by students” (Cook, Faulkner, & Howell, 2016, p. 8). Teachers make choices to demonstrate they care for and

show they like their students. This can play a big role in how students view their quality of education. Students can have greater motivation and improved learning if they have a better relationship with their teacher. This impacts one's schooling experience.

Teachers also make choices to demonstrate they care for their community and students' culture and interests. Students' community and culture can play a big role in their lives, so it is important for teachers to be aware and accepting of this. Research shows that "preparing teachers who want to 'listen to their students' lives' . . . requires creating opportunities for prospective teachers to perceive and learn about their students' lives and how those unfold within and as part of complex systems. That means supporting prospective teachers not only in understanding students as complex beings who have to navigate different contexts (e.g., home, school, community) but actually seeing students in those contexts and understanding the contexts as multiple and intersecting ecologies" (Cook-Sather & Curl, 2014, p. 85). When teachers make the choice to learn about their students, they may be able to better understand them and how their cultures and communities play a role in their lives. When teachers make the effort to learn about their students, this can allow students to feel more cared for and can strengthen the student-teacher relationship, which can improve learning.

Learning about students and their unique characteristics and lives can also provide guidance for teachers' instruction and incorporation of students' interests and experiences to make teaching more student-centered. Teachers can then seek out new resources and ideas to incorporate students' interests and experiences into instruction. By making this choice to learn about students and demonstrate care for them, it not only benefits students, but also teachers, and can make for a better teaching experience.

Conclusion

Resource inequity is a problem in schools. Teachers may have different amounts of resources, and this can affect student outcomes. The way teachers navigate these different contexts with different amounts of resources is important. Teachers have the ability to make positive choices about how they work with their fellow colleagues. They also make decisions about their instructional approach to support students, despite the limitations of resources. Teachers make decisions about how they interact with and show that they care for their students and communities. They use agency, ownership, and learning when making these choices that ultimately affect student outcomes. This study will explore how teachers make these decisions in different contexts.

Part III: Methods

This study used an interview approach to explore how teachers navigate different contexts to support their students successfully.

Participants

The sample for this study consists of four different teachers. Teachers A and B are from District 1 in Connecticut and currently teach grade four at the same school. Teachers C and D are from District 2 in Connecticut and both teach grade two at the same school.

Demographics

The two school districts analyzed in this study are Districts 1 and 2. The schools in these respective districts are located approximately 10.7 miles away from each other. According to 2017-18 data from the CT School and State Finance Project, District 1 spends approximately \$20,335 per student. In this district, about 23 percent of students are eligible for free and reduced price lunch and 5 percent of students are English Language

Learners. District 2 spends approximately \$18,868 per student. In this district, about 83 percent of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch and 26 percent of students are English Language Learners.

Procedure

The principals of these two different schools were contacted by email asking for a recommendation of two teachers with a “positive descriptor for high professional capacity, strong instructional approach to support students, and demonstrates caring towards students.” The principals then recommended two teachers who they believed were ideal candidates for this study. All four teachers were contacted via email with an invitation to participate in the study.

After they consented, the study consisted of an in-person interview with each of the four teachers that lasted about fifteen to thirty minutes each.

Each participant was asked a series of questions, with follow-up questions asked at the interviewer’s discretion.

1. How does resource availability in your school and district influence how you work with colleagues and school leaders?
2. How does resource availability in your school and district influence your decision making when doing planning and problem solving to meet students’ needs?
3. What do you like about working in your school and district? What do you like about working with your students and this community?

The interview was recorded and later transcribed by the interviewer. These transcriptions were sent back to the participant for their approval and to ensure that the information captured was accurate.

Materials and Instruments

The interview was recorded using an audio recording application on a mobile device. Consent to be recorded was a prerequisite for participation. The recordings were transcribed and sent to participants via email for their review and approval. The transcriptions were secured on a password-protected device and the information is being kept confidential. The purpose of the recording is to be sure that all responses have been accurately obtained, as it would have been difficult to transcribe their responses accurately during the interview without delaying the participant significantly. Once the study was completed, the audio recordings were destroyed. Follow up contact was done by phone, email, or letter, depending on the preference of the participant.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using a coding system. Common themes were found between all of the transcriptions when reviewing specific quotes. These common themes were then organized into three different categories: professional support network, instructional approach to support students, and demonstrating how teachers like, care, and think about their students.

In Part IV, the results of the study will be examined through the three research questions listed earlier:

1. How do teachers make choices about how they utilize their professional support network?
2. How do teachers make choices about their instructional approach to support students?

3. How do teachers make choices to demonstrate that they like, care, and think about their students?

Part IV: Findings

How do teachers make choices about how they utilize their professional support network?

As mentioned previously, Teachers A and B are from District 1 and Teachers C and D are from District 2. Through examination of interview transcriptions, there were a few main themes found between the four teachers. A common topic mentioned was a heavy emphasis on *collaboration with their colleagues*.

Teacher A:

- “Often times change is really difficult and people don’t like to change with new initiatives but I feel like this particular district and this particular cohort of professionals, we embrace change and we work so well together that it’s easy to collaborate and it’s easy to talk about kids, especially in a small school like this because it’s more intimate and we all know the kids so well. “

Teacher B

- “In terms of planning, it makes planning so much easier because I sit down at grade level time with [grade level partner] and we develop our scope and sequences to see which lesson should go in which order to meet the different needs across the subjects but then we also always check in - how is everyone doing? Do we need a supplemental lesson here? Do you remember a better lesson that we’ve done in the past that would fit here? Do we need a small group? Might they need a certain intervention? So it makes it so much easier to plan and to also be on the same page as the other grade level teachers to make sure all kids are getting an equitable experience.”
- “I love working with [grade level partner]. We always joke we’re the same person but we work really well together and bounce ideas off of each other.”

Teacher C

- “... it’s the same curriculum for both, so [grade level partner] and I team plan together on that. The availability makes it really easy to work together and really easy to provide each other with what is working and what is not working.”

- “I love having [grade level partner] as a co-teacher, we get along very well and he’s very much just like me. We just know how to communicate the right way- it just clicks for us both.”

Teacher D

- “It’s a lot different in a priority district but what is awesome is the urgency of all the teachers coming together to meet the needs of the students. You’re not pocketed out. Everybody is tied into your kids and you’re all working together.”

Another common theme found was teacher’s *feeling supported and the needs of them being met.*

Teacher A

- “Instead of just being given a tool or a piece of technology if it doesn’t work for us, we have the ability and the funding to say it doesn’t work, is there something else we can try, and our administration really listens to that and they come back with different options for us.”
- “I feel like our work here as teachers is really supported. If we need anything we ask, and as long as there’s justification or there isn’t something else that we currently have that could be used, we’re funded.”
- “I feel like this is a great place to be, we have what we need and if we don’t we can ask and we’re rarely refused if we have good reasons. We’re lucky.”

Teacher B

- “... all the teaching materials are provided for us and having all those resources just takes the weight off our shoulders because we’re not creating something. We’re using something that’s research-based and then you’re available to use your time to talk about your results and your students with your colleagues so that you can help kids get to the highest achievement level possible.”
- “Having all of that at your fingertips is just invaluable; it saves you so much time. Then you can kind of take your time in leadership counsels or with my teammate to see how to adjust those programs to best meet the kids at [school name] versus starting from scratch. So, basically any resource we need, we’re very lucky because the district gets it for us.”

Teacher C

- “Also with my principal, we set goals together, so her and I, we actually just met yesterday. We set my goals for the year so then her and I can reflect back to that

and my goals pertain to reading so it's kind of like a big circle of things that work out."

- "There's a ton of resources and there's a ton of books over here. Every grade level in our district has this so it's really helpful. It's really easy to plan for it. Everything is leveled for each kid so everyone is receiving leveled instruction. I can service a student who's on yellow and a student who's all the way on white which is like a third grade level. Yellow would be kindergarten. So we can service all those kids in this room in small groups. When it comes to planning, it's pretty easy to follow along."
- "Within the building I feel very supported by my principal. I always feel like if I have a problem I can go to her and especially with there's a lot of behavior in this room this year with everything that I document and track. I feel that she always has a plan for the next steps and I feel like that has really worked out."

How do teachers make choices about their instructional approach to support students?

A common theme found between the teachers on their choices about their instructional approach to support students was ensuring *instruction was student centered*.

Teacher A

- "There's a really big focus on professional development and we are moving towards a student-centered learning approach with our students so the district does a really great job of talking the talk and they believe that if our school and district is going to be student-centered learning then our professional development should also be teacher-centered."

Teacher B

- "Our resources are there for us to use how we need to but our biggest concern is always our kids and what do the kids need. So, if a lesson doesn't make sense or isn't working, we always can kind of change it and modify it to fit the needs which is really great because some school districts you have to go lesson by lesson and that's not really student-centered. So, we want to make sure that it's what our kids need and what matches our teacher passions."

Teacher D

- "A pathway in second grade in a perfect world, it's really nice, but in [district name] a lot of kids aren't on grade level so we're working to get them there. You're going to add different lessons that are more accommodating to their needs. Often times they're going to be lower lessons and sometimes they're

going to be higher lessons so you can adjust them at any time. Any time you want, you're in control of that. You can watch what they're doing. So it's really just time to learn it and once you learn it the resources are endless."

All of the teachers also discussed how they have *professional choice* in terms of their instructional approach.

Teacher A

- "You have to really know your kids to know what resources are going to work for them and what you're going to need because we're blessed with so much that you have to make sure you're meeting the needs of that child and not just picking and choosing."

Teacher B

- "Well I think we use the resources as our skeleton, our road map, but if we need to kind of go off of that road map to meet an individual or a small group of students' needs we know that we have the empowerment to be able to do that as well."
- "What I love about working in [district name] is the resources we have available at our fingertips and the funding, the empowerment that teachers are given to kind of plan their own units, go off on our own if we want to or create a project or dig into something that we're passionate about."

Teacher C

- "Yes, I would say as long as you're following the guidelines of that you can adapt and plan your lessons how you want to. For me, I like to use the map as an outline for myself so I know what I need to teach in that amount of time and I use the book as a reference."

Teacher D

- "The resources in [district name] are pretty plentiful and what is there directly correlates with what the Common Core learning is so it's kind of all been tied together really nicely and there's a lot there and we still have the professional choice to seek additional resources, when necessary and wanted."
- "You can use your discretion. Ultimately you're still the teacher in the classroom. They provide you with what they consider really good resources and then you can go outside of that box if you want... "

How do teachers make choices to demonstrate that they like, care, and think about their students?

When asked how teachers make choices to demonstrate that they like, care, and think about their students, they all discussed how they make an effort to *learn about their students and their cultural backgrounds*.

Teacher A

- “It’s neat to be invited into their culture for a little bit and to learn from the kids. I get to learn from them instead of them always learning from me.”

Teacher B

- “We’re really focused on students and we really know our students and our families academically but then also personally which I think makes all the difference in the world.”

Teacher C

- “Our school also does stuff once a month, like tonight is our Hispanic Heritage Night so it’ll be a big feast so parents will bring in stuff and then there will be a performance and there’s always something going on.”

Teacher D

- “This whole experience is amazing because watching a 7 year old simultaneously learn English and Spanish amazes me. I’m proud to be a teacher of students who are proud of who they are. So, a lot of this is holding on to your culture, who you are, and your identity. Culturally, the exchanges that happen are amazing.”
- “I love the celebration of who they are. I love how important that is to them. I love the events that happen in the building like Hispanic Heritage Month and it goes on for the whole month where you learn about the cultures and it’s posted throughout the school and there’s ownership of who you are and where you’re from. And I’m learning a lot. I consider myself to be a lifelong learner so for me I was able to choose when the availability came what do I want to do and this was new.”

Another common topic discussed was the *strong love they have for their community*.

Teacher A

- “A history of family, a history of the community- a lot of the teachers here live in town too so they’re not only invested in the school but they’re also a part of the community. For me in terms of the students, I love the diversity of this community. I love all the different cultures that are shared.”

Teacher B

- “The kids here are just so excited about learning and love school and want to come to school and that makes me want to come to school too.”

Teacher C

- “I do like to make sure everyone’s involved. I do think this is a very happy community. Every parent I’ve had, I’ve at least spoken to once so far so I’d say they are involved.”

Teacher D

- “The school itself, the community itself, the outreach here is amazing. There’s a parent liaison in every building. They make sure to push everything out into the community. Anyone that can’t be here or doesn’t get the message or needs something. That happens. Home visits happen. Other things happen.”

There were many common themes between the four interviewees regarding the three research questions. When discussing the ways in which they utilize their professional support network, all interviewees mentioned collaboration with colleagues, feeling supported by faculty and staff, and their needs being met. Regarding choices about instructional approach, teachers mentioned the importance of making instruction student-centered and having professional choice. When making choices about demonstrating how they like, care, and think about their students, interviewees mentioned a love for their community and learning about their students and their backgrounds. A discussion of the findings will be presented in Part V.

Part V: Discussion

The research questions for this study were as follows:

- How do teachers make choices about how they utilize their professional support network?
- How do teachers make choices about their instructional approach to support students?
- How do teachers make choices to demonstrate they like, care, and think about their students?

The first research question was: how do teachers make choices about how they utilize their professional support network? Some common themes found between participants were collaboration with colleagues as well as the needs of teachers being met and their feeling supported.

The second research question was: how do teachers make choices about their instructional approach to support students? Making instruction student-centered and having professional choice were regularly discussed during interviews.

The third research question was: how do teachers make choices to demonstrate that they like, care, and think about their students? Interviewees discussed a love for their community and learning about their students and their backgrounds.

District 1 and 2 differ in terms of money spent per pupil as well as the number of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch and the number of English Language Learners. Regardless of the amount of resources a district has or different teaching experiences between schools, all four teachers had many common ideas and beliefs about the decisions they made. This was seen through the interviews when teachers from

different districts answered the same questions and often had similar responses. Despite their differences, their focus is always their students and what they can do for them. This is seen in their choices regarding their utilization of their professional support network, instruction, and demonstrating how they care for students.

The interviewees also mentioned the amount of autonomy they have in the classroom. Teachers discussed how they have the professional choice to focus their instruction to meet students where they are and make changes in their classroom. This professional choice allows them to seek out the resources they deem useful to best fit their students' needs. Regardless of the allocation of resources in a district, teachers make choices about the resources they seek out, whether that is working with colleagues and learning new ideas and teaching practices, or searching for other materials and activities to support learning. This allows them to incorporate students' interests and make their instruction more student-centered.

From reviewing the findings, it can be seen that good teaching is focused on the students and their needs. By using them as a focus, instruction can be centered around them and a teacher can seek out resources to complement the instruction rather than using the resources available to guide instruction. Despite the district and its resources, teachers should always focus on the students and make decisions about the use of materials and instruction to support the students and their needs.

As mentioned in the review of literature, teachers make choices about utilizing their professional support network, their instructional approach to support students, and how to demonstrate they like, care, and think about their students.

As discussed previously, a professional support network is found to be extremely important to educators as “enhancing social support from various sources will help teachers manage the emotional labour of the job more effectively, protect them from burnout, and engender job satisfaction. The inverse association between social support and depersonalisation also suggests that developing a supportive workplace environment is likely to enhance job performance by helping teachers manage feelings of estrangement from the job role” (Kinman, G., Wray, S., & Strange, C., 2011, pp. 850-51). Teachers make choices to collaborate with colleagues and ensure their needs are met through the utilization of their professional support network.

Teacher’s choices about their instructional approach to support students is also extremely important. “Listening to the students, carefully listening to what they have to say, provides new insights into what they are thinking and feeling, and these insights in turn provide educators a new lens, a different perspective, through which to reflect on the education we are providing our children at all levels” (Storz, 2008, p. 264). When teachers have the autonomy to make their own decisions about their instruction, teachers always ensure students are the focus of what they are doing.

How teachers make choices to demonstrate that they care for their students is crucial as it impacts the student-teacher relationship greatly. “Another persistent theme in our work is the value students place on caring teachers both in the academic realm and beyond. There is a sense that caring is related to the quality of the student teacher relationship, the quality of teaching and learning, and the students’ level of care for their own education” (Storz, 2008, p. 258). When teachers take the time to learn about students

and their interests, experiences, and their community, students feel cared for, and this may influence their schooling experience.

Consistent with research, these decisions can influence teachers greatly. These choices are what impact their teaching experience, and ultimately, a students' learning experience, regardless of their district and resources.

Limitations

There were limitations to this study. One of them was a small sample size. In this study, only four teachers were interviewed. Although there were common themes found between these four teachers, data may have been different if the sample size was bigger.

Another limitation was the sample profile. This study included only two districts in Connecticut, with two teachers from each district. Although the districts have very different demographics and resource allocation, they are within fifteen miles of each other, so data could have been different if the location of schools was different. In addition to this, only one school from each district was identified and two teachers were chosen from the respective schools. This not only limited the data set to two districts but, more specifically, to two schools. The school environment and teacher's experiences could have been different in other schools within the same district.

Implications for Further Research

Resource inequity is a big issue in schools today. Learning how to navigate this is extremely important. Teachers should be prepared to work in different districts where resource allocation is different. They should be prepared and know the choices they can make about the utilization of their professional support network, instructional approach, and demonstrating they care for their students. There is a lack of research on resource

inequity and teachers' choices between districts and different schools. It is important to explore these topics to better prepare teachers and ensure students have a positive learning experience, regardless of where they come from.

Conclusion

In this study, I investigated how teachers make decisions and navigate different contexts to support their students. I explored how teachers use agency, ownership, and learning in the positive, adaptive choices they make to see better student outcomes. Specifically, there was a focus on how teachers make choices about utilizing their professional support network, their instructional approach to support students, and how they demonstrate they like, care, and think about their students.

Through this study it was found that in terms of utilizing a professional support network, teachers make choices about collaborating with colleagues and ensuring they feel supported and their needs are being met. When making decisions about their instructional approach, many teachers discussed how they always choose to make their instruction student-centered and how they have professional choice in their classroom. Regarding making decisions to demonstrate they care for their students, teachers discussed choosing to learn about their students and their culture and having a strong love for their community.

This study is important, as resource inequity is a big problem today, but by ensuring teachers are adequately prepared to work in any district regardless of the amount of resources they provide, teachers and students can have a better experience. Students should always be the focus of instruction and resources should be used to support learning,

rather than instruction being guided by the resources available. Despite the districts or schools that teachers work in, the choices they make have a great impact on their students.

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