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A CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF UNEQUAL SCHOOL FUNDING:
TEACHER JOB SATISFACTION ACROSS UNDERFUNDED
AND WELL-FUNDED SCHOOLS

A Dissertation Submitted to Molloy University
The School of Education and Human Services
Ed. D. in Educational Leadership for Diverse Learning Environments

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

By
DAVID TOMASIC

Tricia Kress, Dissertation Chairperson
NOVEMBER 2023

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2023

Molloy University



**MOLLOY
UNIVERSITY**

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES

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Abstract

Unequal school funding is a phenomenon that promotes an educational structure where certain public schools receive higher financial support and resources while other schools receive lower levels. An important but overlooked dimension of the phenomenon is its potential effect on teacher job satisfaction in underfunded and well-funded schools. This dimension forms the basis of this study and exploration of the phenomenon of unequal school funding. Using Susan Moore Johnson's framework, this qualitative phenomenological study aimed to understand how unequal school funding affected nine high school teachers across both under and well-funded high schools on Long Island. The study sought to explore school funding through its effects on teachers' job satisfaction. The findings of this study revealed that teachers in well-funded schools experienced considerably greater job satisfaction than teachers in underfunded ones. Findings showed that teacher job satisfaction is linked to teachers' perceptions of school funding as it pertained to their respective schools. Reasons rendered by teachers in well-funded schools describing their high level of job satisfaction directly related to the perceptions they had of how well their school was funded, as the areas from which the job satisfaction dwells are financially related. Implications suggest that focusing closer on the role that school administration plays in teacher job satisfaction, specifically, the negative consequences on morale in administration attrition rates, and re-considering school funding formulas so that more monies could be made available to underfunded schools would be helpful to improve teacher job satisfaction and thus improve the learning experience for students. Recommendations, limitations, and suggestions for future research are provided.

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge many people who helped, supported, and guided me through finishing this dissertation and degree. At the top of the list, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the members of my dissertation committee. I must begin with my beyond-amazing committee chair, Dr. Tricia Kress. Without your dedicated mentorship, this dissertation would never have taken flight. Working with and learning from you has been a true honor as you represented a bright light of guidance upon completing my research study and writing the dissertation. I also thank my phenomenal committee, Dr. Alison Roda and Dr. Sherone Smith Sanchez, whose insight and wealth of experience significantly contributed to this dissertation. I am very fortunate to have worked with the three of you, as I felt it was a perfect fit for me from the beginning. Working with you has taught me a great deal, and I look forward to collaborating with you in the future.

Moreover, I want to acknowledge the faculty of Molloy University for the life-altering education I received during my years in the doctoral program. In a particular way, I thank Dr. Andrea Honigsfeld, Dr. Mark James, and Dr. Ryan Coughlin, who were my first professors in the program and brilliantly assisted me in laying the foundations for my success. I also want to sincerely thank Dr. Joanna Alcruz, Dr. Warren Whitaker, and Dr. Audrey Cohan for their continued assistance in my doctoral journey in courses I took with them, which immensely contributed to my extraordinary learning experience in this program. The gift of teaching that all of you have shared with me has shaped me as an educator and researcher.

I express my deepest gratitude to my family and friends who stood by me throughout this process. I am eternally grateful for the persistent support and ongoing encouragement you showed me, without which my journey would not have been possible to complete.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgments.....	ii
CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND.....	1
System of Allocation of School Funding in New York.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	6
Purpose of the Study.....	7
Research Questions.....	8
Sub Questions / Associated Questions.....	8
Significance.....	12
Key Terms.....	14
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	15
Chapter Roadmap.....	16
Structural Underpinnings, Historical Roots, and Constitutional Rights.....	18
Theory and Unequal School Funding.....	23
Unequal School Funding and Teacher Experience.....	26
Education Spending in the Context of Race and Class.....	28
Unequal School Funding and Effects on Teacher Experience Across Low and Well-Funded School.....	36
Conclusion.....	39
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN.....	42
Overarching Question.....	44
<i>Sub-Questions/Associated Questions</i>	44
Role of Researcher.....	44
<i>Methods</i>	47
<i>Population, Sample, and Sampling</i>	48
Data Collection Procedures.....	50
Data Analysis Procedures.....	51
Trustworthiness.....	52
Ethical Concerns.....	53
Limitations.....	54
Conclusion.....	55
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS.....	57
Participants.....	58

Loretta.....	59
Joy.....	59
Edward.....	60
Megan.....	60
Gabriella.....	61
Thomas.....	61
Yolanda.....	61
Solomon.....	62
Charlie.....	62
Analysis.....	63
General Satisfaction.....	65
Perceptions of School Funding and its Effects.....	66
School Building, Physical Plant, and Facilities.....	66
Resources and Curricular Support.....	66
Professional Development and Opportunities for Career Growth.....	66
Underfunded Themes.....	69
Well-Funded Themes.....	77
Shared Themes.....	83
Conclusion.....	86
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.....	87
Discussion of Findings.....	87
Finding 1: Teachers In Well-funded Schools Experience Greater Satisfaction Than Teachers in Underfunded Schools.....	88
Finding 2: Teacher Job Satisfaction Linked To Perceptions of School Funding.....	90
Research Questions and Findings.....	90
Implications for Practical Application: Administration.....	100
Implications for Policy.....	103
Implications for Future Research.....	107
Limitations.....	109
Trustworthiness.....	111
Concluding Remarks.....	112
References.....	114
Appendix A: IRB Approval.....	119

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

Vibrant, committed, and satisfied teachers play a central role in educating children and helping them be successful in learning (Johnson, 2006). The relationship between teacher job satisfaction and teacher workplace conditions represents a critical factor in determining the degree to which students receive a quality education and positive classroom experience from their teachers (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). According to Susan Moore Johnson, "the workplace can enable or constrain good teaching" (Johnson, 2006, p.1). The vital connection between teacher job satisfaction and workplace conditions hinges upon public school funding levels. In 2017 EdBuild conducted an extensive year-long study on public school funding and concluded that "nonwhite school districts get \$23 billion less than white districts despite serving the same number of students" (EdBuild, 2019, n.p.). The study looked at each state across the country. It exposed the glaring inequality of education across the United States in a clear quantitative fashion, revealing that the problem of unequal school funding grounds itself in historical racism and classism. Unequal school funding engenders an educational structure where certain schools receive higher financial support and resources while others receive lower levels. Reliance on local property taxes as the primary source of school funding coupled with gerrymandered school district boundaries both expresses and exposes the gross inequality inherent in the practice that cuts sharply along the lines of race and class. Poorer socioeconomic communities and communities of color are disadvantaged because they receive less funding than wealthier and predominantly White communities. The lower funding translates into an uphill struggle to provide a sound education to students inhabiting that district based on race and class, thus making unequal school funding a form of discrimination (Wesche, 2015). A substantial but

overlooked dimension of unequal school funding is its potential effect on teacher job satisfaction in underfunded and overfunded schools. This dimension formed the basis of my study and exploration of unequal school funding.

The general road map of the chapter consists of ten key sections. Following this background section, the first section describes how New York allocates education funding to districts within the state. This first section provides broad insights into the current state of teacher job satisfaction. Next, I expound upon the problem statement, followed by an explanation of the purpose of the study. The following section highlights the research questions guiding the overall study and describes the theoretical and conceptual framework. I used a two-tiered approach regarding the framework wherein a macro and micro theory will connect the inner workings of unequal school funding and the teacher experience. Critical theory represented the macro theory. The work of Susan Moore Johnson served as the micro theory to analyze how teacher job satisfaction relates to the quality of education that teachers perceive students receive in the classroom. The next section of the chapter describes the basic design and methods that shape the study's contours. The penultimate section of the chapter conveys the study's limitations, followed by the final section, which highlights the significance that the study holds for the interrelated topics of unequal school funding and the teaching experience of the phenomenon.

System of Allocation of School Funding in New York

To better understand unequal school funding and its potential effect on teacher job satisfaction, an overview of how funds for education are allocated and the sources from which schools in New York receive monies is necessary. School funding in New York State emanates from three specific sources. Funds for schools come from the federal/national government, the state's foundation formula known as the Adjusted Foundation Amount (AFA), and individual school districts charged with creating the local school budget, from which the bulk of funds come

from local property taxes. The money from the state government through the foundation formula amounts to approximately 46% of the total percentage spent on education in New York State. The funds and monies that New York State receives from the federal government represent the smallest portion of total school spending, accounting for only about 6% of the state's expenditure on education. Most of the local funds allocated for education come from local property taxes, accounting for about 48% of the total amount spent in the state (Peterson, 2022).

New York State receives financial support from the federal government primarily through grant programs created to assist overall funding for districts that contain at-risk students. The grant programs, designed to help fund initiatives that involve students with disabilities and districts with students from low-income households, are administered by New York State to individual school districts. New York, like other states, receives these federal monies to supplement resources on the state level by narrowing the funding gaps for at-risk students. For example, Title I ESEA grants make funds available to school districts that serve large proportions of low-income students. The ESEA program represents the largest grant program in New York. The funds become allocated through various formulas based on student eligibility and related provisions, such as students in low-income families. New York also receives federal funds for institutions that handle neglected or delinquent children in the foster home system. On the federal level, New York also receives education funds for child nutrition programs, which reimburse school districts providing free or reduced-price lunches to eligible students.

Like most states, New York employs a foundation formula for state-level education funding. The basic premise of the formula is that the state's financial aid is an established foundation amount, which is then added to the local monies raised by a given district. The foundation amount is established by policymakers and based on what they believe is required for

a school district to meet the student performance standards determined by the state. New York's AFA amount contains several components, such as a phase-in percentage, a regional cost index, and a pupil need index or PNI.

New York's funding formula is embedded in the CFE v. New York (2003) court decision, which ruled that the amount of state aid allocated to the public schools in New York City was inadequate and insufficient to provide a "meaningful high school education." The decision prompted state legislators to pass a new education aid package in 2007 designed to balance the disparities statewide by adhering to the principles established in the CFE ruling.

Through its foundation aid formula, the New York State education finance system establishes what is known as "weights" to districts with elevated concentrations of at-risk students, such as students from poverty-stricken families or English Language Learners (ELLs). These weights provide extra funding to the school districts in need. Guided by the principles of the CFE ruling, New York put in place fiscal remedies to minimize the disadvantages encountered by students in school districts with high poverty rates. However, the system continues to perpetuate inequality on various levels. In his extensive study on the equitability of New York's education finance system, Yinger (2019) concluded that while current weights are an improvement over the weights used previous to 2007:

They still understate the high costs of educating at-risk students and need to be updated.

The inaccuracy of these weights leads to an aid program that leaves many high-need school districts short of the funds they need to meet the state's student performance targets (p. 25).

Yinger (2019) found that there is an unmistakable racial divide regarding the unequal nature of New York's funding system, as "schools attended by Black and Hispanic students have

significantly lower proficiency rates on ELL and math students than the schools attended by White students”(p. 33).

My study aimed to understand the impact of unequal school funding by exploring its effects on teacher job satisfaction across low- and well-funded schools. The study examined the phenomenon in the context of teachers' work experience and sought to understand teachers' lived experiences across low-funded and high-funded districts. Understanding teachers' experiences, work conditions, and satisfaction levels across low-funded and well-funded schools provided insight into the discriminatory effects of unequal school funding. I used a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore how teachers perceive their job satisfaction and morale in under and well-funded schools. The study also sought to understand how teachers' perceptions of their job satisfaction impact the classroom experiences of students and the quality of education received.

As the issue of teacher job satisfaction occupies a central place in the study, it was necessary to describe the current state of the issue as it exists in American society. Teacher job satisfaction has plummeted to an all-time low in the United States. Several prominent surveys, most notably and recently the Merrimack College Teacher Survey (2020), revealed that many teachers are dissatisfied and disillusioned with their chosen careers in education. According to the survey, nearly half of the teachers surveyed report being highly dissatisfied with their jobs, while only 12% percent describe being "very satisfied" with their jobs. The unprecedented figure of 12% percent is down nearly 40 percentage points from nearly a decade ago. The survey also revealed that more than half of teachers regret their decision to pursue a career in education and would not choose to be teachers if they could do it over again. The survey also revealed that 85 percent of teachers expressed that their working conditions and overall school climate represent

the two most significant sources of dissatisfaction. The particular results of the survey point to working conditions and school climate as chief sources of elevated levels of teacher job satisfaction, reflecting the findings of contemporary scholarship, which offer an analysis of the sources at the root of the dissatisfaction. In commenting on the results of the Merrimack Survey, Susan Moore Johnson stated:

What people want is to be able to teach and teach well, and if they can't do it because they can't afford to do it because they have a toxic work environment, that discourages them from acting as teachers who are learning and growing and getting better and increasing their commitment to the work. That's the side of satisfaction we need to pay attention to. (Will, 2022, p. 4).

Johnson maintained that teachers' overall satisfaction depends on their work conditions. The author's research showed that individual schools and, more broadly, education policy on the administrative level need to focus on improving the workplace conditions necessary for teachers to do their jobs well, thus improving teacher job satisfaction.

Statement of the Problem

Understanding the problem of unequal school funding from the point of view of teacher job satisfaction is critically important because it is directly related to many students' inferior education, adversely affecting their future educational and economic opportunities. In the five districts represented in my study, \$38,000.00 per pupil was the average amount spent in high-income school districts, while \$21,000 was spent in low-income schools (*ERASE Racism*, n.d.). Lower per-pupil spending creates many educational disadvantages for more impoverished schools and communities of color (Yinger, 2019). New York school districts are structured and organized to make the state one of the most diverse in the country but simultaneously one of the

most segregated (ERASE-Racism, 2019). The school system's diversity is mitigated by more Black and Hispanic students attending segregated public schools than they did over a decade ago (ERASE-Racism, 2019). Even though there is clear evidence that students attend more racially diverse schools than ten years ago, the percentage of students attending districts with a majority of African-American and Latinx students has more than doubled (ERASE racism). This state of affairs, typified by New York's lingering segregation, exposes the systemic nature of educational injustice regarding the allocation of funding and resources. My study focused on examining the problem of unequal school funding from the perspective of teachers, attempting to understand the effects that school funding has on their level of workplace satisfaction and morale and exploring their perceptions of the quality of education their students receive.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to understand the phenomenon of unequal school funding by exploring the practice's effects on teacher job satisfaction across low- and well-funded schools. The study also sought to explore the consequences of the quality of education when teachers experience low levels of satisfaction and the effects on education quality when teachers experience higher levels of job satisfaction. The ultimate purpose was to explore school funding through its effects on teachers' job satisfaction. Specifically, my study employed Johnson's framework to help describe how school funding in low and well-funded districts may impact teachers' experiences and workplace morale. From April to June 2023, I conducted a phenomenological study in which I employed semi-structured interviews to understand from the teachers' point of view how differences in school funding contribute to their satisfaction, including their perceived ability to provide quality education to their students.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

Overarching Question

How do teachers in underfunded and well-funded schools describe their job satisfaction?

Sub Questions / Associated Questions

In what negative and positive ways do Johnson's (2006) benchmarks manifest themselves in the experience of teachers' job satisfaction?

What similarities and differences are evident in teachers' job satisfaction in underfunded and well-funded schools?

Theoretical and Conceptual Underpinnings

My study employed a theoretical and conceptual framework that is two-fold in nature. Firstly, a macro-leveled theory served as the study's broader and more general theoretical and conceptual framework, helping to shed light on the important historical background from which unequal school funding emerged. Specifically, critical theory represented the study's macro-level theoretical and conceptual framework. The theory lends insight into understanding the deep historical roots that gave rise to the phenomenon of unequal school funding. As the macro-theory of the study, critical theory provided broader background information about how the phenomenon continues to sustain itself today. The theory lent insight into the deep historical roots that gave rise to the phenomenon of unequal school funding. Specifically, the work of critical theorist Antonio Gramsci was employed to provide meaningful insight into the resiliency of the practice of unequal school funding and its ability to remain entrenched in New York's education finance system for decades. Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony expresses how control and domination are maintained through cultural, ideological, and policy means.

Gramsci's critical theory contributes to a broader understanding of how unequal school funding is culturally accepted, as the taken-for-granted assumptions of the practice hold ideological sway over discussions about education funding.

Susan Moore Johnson's (2006) work represents the micro-level theoretical framework helping to shed light on the centrality of the teacher experience, namely the issue of job satisfaction and how this affects the quality of education that students receive. The crux of Johnson's theoretical approach is that the "workplace can enable or constrain good teaching" (Johnson, 2006, p.1). Johnson puts forth 11 benchmarks for school workplace conditions that she believes relate directly to the issue of teacher retention. The benchmarks identified by Johnson are:

- Working relationships among teachers
- Support for new teachers
- Support for students
- Curricular support with resources and materials
- Assessment
- Professional development
- Professional influence
- Career growth
- Facilities
- Principal leadership
- Teaching assignments

These benchmarks served as the primary framework to explore how teachers described their job satisfaction in under- and well-funded schools, as the relationship between teacher work

conditions and the quality of education that students receive occupied a central place in the exploration of the topic.

Design and Methods

I chose a qualitative approach to the study because it was the most effective way to learn how teachers describe their job satisfaction concerning school-building resources and support from administration and staff. The solidity of this approach lies in its ability to place teachers and their workplace experience at the core of the analysis. Specifically, a qualitative phenomenological approach was employed to deepen understanding of the essence of unequal school funding from how teachers perceive their job satisfaction and morale in underfunded and overfunded schools. This design and methodology allowed teachers' voices to take center stage and open doors to understand the broader phenomenon of unequal school funding (Padilla-Diaz, 2015), especially as it relates to their levels of job satisfaction and the effects that the teachers perceive this has on the quality of education students receive. This kind of design and methodology focuses on exploring participants' personal experiences (i.e., how teachers describe their feelings of satisfaction) in the context of a phenomenon (i.e., unequal school funding). As applied to my study, this approach placed the teachers of my sample at the center of the analysis. It established the conditions for teachers to describe their job satisfaction and morale based on their work experience in the classroom.

Padilla-Diaz's (2015) description of the profound interview represents the chief method that the study employs to collect data. A phenomenological interview served as the dominant data collection procedure as it was the best fit for the study because it helped reveal the teachers' feelings and experiences. Interviewing the teachers allowed me to put a human face on the practice of unequal school funding. Specifically, questions for the interviews emanated from the

11 benchmarks designed by Johnson that relate to school workplace conditions. Johnson's benchmarks, while initially intended to explore the issue of teacher retention, were adapted and applied to the phenomenological basis of the study's focus on unequal school funding and teacher job satisfaction. I based questions from the interviews on the benchmarks. The benchmarks created an opening for teachers to express and describe their perspectives of workplace satisfaction as these pertain to the funding and allocation of resources in their schools and then to understand how this affects the student learning experience.

Site and Population

Data collection for the study entailed interviewing nine teachers from five high schools in New York State. Three of the five schools (Group A) had teachers from underfunded districts. The remaining two schools (Group B) had teachers from well-funded districts. The population of teachers in the two groups sit on opposite ends of the state's yearly per-pupil spending/funding spectrum. The underfunded schools in my study had an annual per-pupil spending of less than \$25,000.00. Well-funded schools had an annual per-pupil expenditure of over \$35,000.00. Teachers chosen for the selection each had at least three years' experience and consisted of male and female participants.

Limitations

My study's primary limitation is that the generalizability of the findings may prove difficult to establish because of the boundaries established by the Johnson framework. Johnson's thought represents the lens through which I analyzed how teachers of the sample described their level of job satisfaction in the context of how well their schools are financially supported and funded. Specifically, I used three of Johnson's 11 benchmarks to explore how teachers described their job satisfaction in under and well-funded schools. Marshall (2022) encapsulated the study's

limitations by explaining that "framing the study in specific research and scholarly traditions places limits on the research"(p. 101). Johnson's benchmarks focus on working conditions and support systems in schools to help understand teacher retention, all within the context of improving students' education level.

My study employed Johnson's benchmarks to garner insight from teachers about how they would describe their job satisfaction within the more significant phenomenon of school funding. My particular employment of Johnson's benchmarks thus narrows my study's focus to that area of teacher work experience, which highlights one of the chief limitations.

Also, another limitation of the study is that it does not examine other factors influencing teacher job satisfaction, such as salaries and benefits (i.e., medical/pension). This study focuses on one of many potential factors contributing to teacher job satisfaction and the connection to the quality of education students receive.

Significance

The specific focus on teachers' experiences represents the study's unique significance and innovative component. While significant educational research is related to unequal school funding in the context of race and class, insufficient research exists regarding the phenomenon's effects and practice on teachers. Not enough is known about the impact of an education funding system that negatively affects teachers who work in poorly funded schools. Also, not enough is known about teachers working in well-funded schools, which are often schools that serve students living in poverty and communities of color. The significance of the study is that it fills in the glaring research gap and provides a better understanding of the impact of unequal school funding on how teachers describe their job satisfaction in the context of their work experience.

The necessity of my study comes from an existing gap in the literature regarding unequal

school funding and teacher experience with job satisfaction. Current literature exploring the racist and classist roots of unequal school funding and teacher experiences reveals a body of research that is primarily quantitative. Much of the research on the topic centers on studies using various quantitative methodologies, providing valuable insight into the issue. However, the dearth of substantive qualitative research reveals the wide gap in the literature. The gap in the literature demonstrates that not enough is known about how and why unequal school funding affects the lived work experience of teachers on the front lines of the endeavor to provide quality education to students. The qualitative research I conducted in this study fills the existing literature gap by painting a picture of the teacher experience from the teachers' perspective, focusing on their day-to-day work experiences within the broader context of unequal school funding. The study was necessary because a more holistic description of the teachers' experiences with the practice of unequal school funding is missing and, therefore, necessary to address. School teachers' work experience, conditions, and satisfaction levels directly influence their ability to provide a sound and quality-based education to their students. Understanding these personal experiences, daily work conditions, and teachers' satisfaction levels across low-funded and high-funded schools provided invaluable insight into the effects of unequal school funding. Focusing on teachers' personal and professional experiences of unequal school funding provided a person-centered perspective. It helped better describe how systemic racism and classism affect the quality of education that students receive.

In conclusion, my study's significance contributes to advancing knowledge of the racist and classist underpinnings of unequal school funding in New York. By analyzing teacher job satisfaction in underfunded and overfunded schools and the effects that this satisfaction has on the teachers' perceptions of the learning experience, the study can uncover and explain the

existence of systemic injustice in education in general and school funding in specific. My study can be instrumental in changing laws and policies to reverse decades-old practices that have denied too many students quality education along the lines of race and class. Chapter two of the study delves deeper into the literature sources at the foundation of the research and chapter three more completely explains the qualitative phenomenological design of the study.

Key Terms

Unequal School Funding: Refers to allocating education funding based on local property taxes and state funding formulas that deny equal education and opportunity to students based on race and class (Wesche, 2015).

Discriminatory Practice: Term describing the nature of unequal school funding as a practice deliberately constructed through a combination of housing and education policies rooted in historical racism and classism (Rothstein, 2017).

Teacher Job Satisfaction: Refers to the general sense of contentment and morale experienced by teachers in their day-to-day work experience in both their individual classrooms and the broader context of the schools in which they teach.

Teacher Workplace Conditions: Refers to the structural educational environment of a particular school and individual classroom directly affecting teachers' daily work experience based on the 11 benchmarks Susan Moore Johnson identified regarding teacher retention (2006).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multiple factors contribute to the quality of public education across the United States. The neighborhood or community inhabited by students represents one key factor determining education quality (*Unequal School Funding in the United States.*). School districts nationwide are funded primarily through local property taxes (Peterson, 2022). Poorer communities and communities of color are at a clear educational disadvantage because those districts receive considerably less funding than more affluent and predominantly white communities (*Uneven Formula? Newsday*, n.d.). The lower funding translates into an inability to provide quality education to students inhabiting that locale based on race and class, thus making unequal school funding a form of discrimination (Wesche, 2015). The situation in the state where this study took place mirrors the national reality of how race and class are deeply intertwined, as there is qualitative evidence of a sharp divide when comparing poverty levels of racially concentrated districts across the country. Nationally, approximately one-fifth of students attend schools in predominantly nonwhite and poor districts. In contrast, only 5% of students inhabit mostly White districts that are similarly challenged financially (EdBuild, 2019).

Moreover, approximately 27% of the total national student population attends schools in districts that are predominantly non-White, while a total of 26% attend schools in predominantly White districts (EdBuild, 2019). Despite decades of court rulings that sought to create a level playing field for all students, race and class continue to be major dividing lines that have the direct effect of providing an inferior education to non-White students attending low-funded schools. Poor White school districts across the nation receive about \$150 less per pupil than the national average yet still receive about \$1,500 more per pupil than poor non-White school

districts (p. 4).

The quantitative data suggests that "it is far better in the United States to have the luck and lot to attend a school district that is predominantly white than one that enrolls a concentration of children of color" (EdBuild, 2019, p.4). The existence and persistence of unequal school funding cuts along racial and class lines. The long-established and persistent reliance on local taxes as the primary source of school funding both in the state where the study will take place and nationally, coupled with the sacrosanct nature of local school district boundaries, has created a political mechanism for unequal school funding to exist and persist (Kozol, 1991).

My study sought to understand unequal school funding through analyzing the effects on teacher job satisfaction across both low and well-funded schools, exploring what happens when teachers are dissatisfied and the consequences of unsatisfied teachers resulting from unequal school funding. Also, my study strove to understand the benefits and effects on students and the quality of education received from teachers who experience higher degrees of job satisfaction. Through an in-depth exploration of the relationship between unequal school funding and job satisfaction, this study sought to contribute to the empirical literature on the interrelated topics.

Chapter Roadmap

The literature review of this chapter reveals a three-fold breakdown of the data associated with unequal school funding and job satisfaction. The road map of the chapter unfolds along the contours of three generalized and interwoven pathways. The first pathway of the roadmap reveals information about the structural underpinnings, historical roots, and issues of constitutional rights associated with the phenomenon of unequal school funding. In a subsequent and related section of this first pathway entitled, "Education spending in the context of race and

class," data demonstrates how unequal school funding disproportionately affects non-White students and students living in poor and economically struggling communities. The first pathway explores critical court cases involving education funding across state and national levels. It examines studies conducted to evaluate the effects of the issue on both the legal and political fronts in both the 20th and 21st centuries. These sources are critical to the study because they demonstrate a clearly defined political system undergirded by firmly established legal precedents, both of which work in tandem to perpetuate educational inequality. The literature points to the roles that race and class play in the persistence of inequality.

The second pathway of the chapter's road map focuses on various theoretical frameworks that provide general background contributing to the explanation of the nature and essence of the phenomenon. Social reproduction theory (Bowles & Gintis, 1976), critical theory (Noddings, 2016), critical race theory (Milner, 2007), as well as the theory of cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1972) are presented as a means to elucidate the systemic nature of unequal school funding and the resiliency of the phenomenon to survive over several decades and generations. The literature of this second pathway offers insight into how a practice such as unequal school funding came into existence and continues to be maintained and preserved.

The third and final pathway of the chapter's roadmap presents data about unequal school funding and the teacher experience. The work of Susan Moore Johnson (2006) represents the central source of this final part of the literature review precisely because her work serves as the primary theoretical framework of the study. Johnson's work focuses on the reality of the centrality of the teacher experience in the workplace and its subsequent effects on the quality of education that students receive. My study focused on the teacher experience in the context of the discriminatory practice of unequal school funding using Johnson's Theory. In a subsequent

and related section of the third pathway entitled, "unequal school funding and effects on teacher experiences across low and well-funded schools," data will show a solid base of empirical research that sheds light on how unequal school funding affects teacher satisfaction.

Structural Underpinnings, Historical Roots, and Constitutional Rights

Studies examining structural inequality within the intersectionality of race and class were explored in this study to better understand the effects of unequal school funding. I discovered that there are two general categories. The first category's basis is legal and political. It examines critical court rulings from New York State and U.S. Supreme Court cases and policy and legislative action. These studies examined the ramifications of crucial landmark decisions in court cases dealing with education equity and the effects these rulings and policies have had or failed to have on funding and resource allocation to schools. (Alliance for Quality Education, 2018; Center for Educational Equity, 2017; New York State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2019). Other studies focused on the economic realities of unequal school funding, examining how inequality cuts directly along racial and class lines (ERASE Racism Report-Civil Rights Rollback, 2019; New York Equity Coalition, 2020). Both categories of studies explore the inequality in education today, demonstrating that a political system undergirded by firmly established legal precedent perpetuates inequality. Both sets of studies point to the primary roles that race and class play in the existence and persistence of education inequality.

The seminal work and research of Jonathan Kozol chronicled the extreme inequality in American education between rich and poor students and between White and non-White students. His primary concern was that the American education system is intrinsically and systemically unequal. Kozol posited that an archaic funding and resource allocation system reflects deep-

seated classism and racism in the American education system. According to Kozol, classist and racist views represent key contributing factors to unequal funding of public education in the United States.

Kozol (1991) presented evidence that persistent classism and racism undergird the structure of the inequality in education funding. The basic formula guiding public education finance in the United States for the last century is known as the foundation program. It is a formula that attempts to honor the principles of liberty and equity. The liberty part of the equation gives local communities the right to control their schools, including their funding through local property taxes. The equity part of the equation stipulates that the state has the obligation "to lessen the extremes of educational provision" (Kozol, 1991, p. 251) by providing lower-income communities with the necessary funds so that they can be raised to the level of the established foundation. States, however, deliberately adopt low foundations, thus providing a mere minimum or basic education for students who live in impoverished communities.

This dynamic perpetuates an unequal education system based on income and wealth and race and segregation (2001). The landmark Supreme Court Case of *San Antonio v. Rodriguez* (1973) ruled that education, on the federal level, is not a fundamental right. In a 5-4 decision, the Court ruled that the state of Texas, whose funding formula is similar to other states and whose constitutionality was at the center of the case, was under no obligation to fund districts equally as the unequal funding correlation to the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment was rejected by Court. The Court's decision was a setback to those who advocate for equity in public education. It represented a departure from *Brown v. Board of Education's* spirit, which emphasizes equity concerns over and above those of local control. In the years following the case, individual states have made substantive legal efforts to level the playing field regarding

education funding. In 1971, for example, the California Supreme Court in *Serano v. Priest* ruled that the state's funding system violated the rights of poor students in low-income districts to receive a quality education. The Court required that the state legislature fashion an entirely new funding system to directly address the enormous gaps in income and wealth throughout school district boundaries. Similarly, in 1990, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled in *Abbott v. Burke* that the mechanism for funding schools was responsible for creating tremendous chasms disadvantaging low-income urban youth in a way that would permanently affect their futures. In 2003, the New York Supreme Court ordered in *Campaign for Fiscal Equity v. the State of New York* that the legislature create a new funding system to guarantee an adequate education for all youth in the state. The decision specifically addressed low-income children in New York City. The three lawsuits mentioned above are considered pivotal in the struggle for education justice and equity funding. All three made significant connections between class and race inequities as these lawsuits prompted significant strides to confront the harmful effects of unequal school funding.

Another researcher relevant to the study's legal dimension is Wesche (2016), who focused on unequal school funding from a constitutional law perspective. According to Wesche, unequal school funding exists and persists today primarily because education in the United States is not recognized as a fundamental constitutional right. Central to Wesche's perspective is an analysis of the 1973 Supreme Court case of *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, in which the majority rejected the position that education is a fundamental right. Wesche's underlying theory is that abolishing unequal school funding hinges upon establishing education as a fundamental right. Wesche presents evidence from a subjective interpretation of constitutional law that supports the belief that courts should establish education as a fundamental

constitutional right for all citizens. Wesche made direct connections between education and relevant sections of the U.S. Constitution, arguing that "education is a fundamental right because it is inextricably linked to the constitutional guarantees of liberty, voting, and freedom of expression" (Wesche, 2016, p.28). Wesche posited that the Supreme Court's "failure to recognize education as a fundamental right resulted in the nation's pervasive practice of unequal school funding and the wildly varying protection of educational rights throughout the states" (Wesche, 2016, p.21). Wesche provided examples from individual states whose courts issued divergent rulings on the topic.

Wesche believes that the Supreme Court's failure to recognize education as a fundamental right allowed the practice of a school district's funding derived from unequal property within the district (i.e., unequal school funding) to remain fully intact in 49 states. Also, Wesche maintains that unequal school funding strips those victimized by it of the constitutional guarantees of liberty, voting, and freedom of expression. Wesche's findings revealed that a citizen's education level directly correlates to that citizen's ability to exercise those rights.

Walters (2001) also focused on inequality in education funding as a problem created by policies enacted by individual states throughout the country. Specifically, Walters's work revealed how the nature of inequality is inherently and primarily racial, so much so that "this particular educational cleavage has been deeper and has proved more resistant to change than any other" (Walters, 2001, p. 40). Walters acknowledged other historical culprits of inequality in education (such as class and gender) but maintained that the inequity in educational funding and opportunity between Whites and African Americans is by far the most pronounced and enduring. Walters advanced the view that the persistent reliance on local taxes as the primary source of school funding and the establishment of iron-clad local school-district boundaries created

political mechanisms for racial inequality in funding to persist. Walters employed historical research as the specific modality of the qualitative-based approach. The author traced the roots of racial inequality in education back to the creation of common schools in the early 1800's and then examined subsequent historical periods, providing multiple examples of how states consistently created policies that established inequalities in funding and opportunities along racial lines.

Walters' historical and sociological perspective is relevant to the research topic because it allows for a more comprehensive analysis of how a society-wide practice such as unequal school funding developed and how it is structured within society today. The sociological bent led Walters to develop the distributional process of educational opportunities. The process raises several pertinent questions about racial inequality, illuminating the intersection of race and class. Questions include "Who has access to state social goods? Under what conditions do changes in the allocation of social goods occur? Do all groups have access to the same quality of social goods?" (Walters, 2001, p.42). The questions raised by Walters in her work are useful in the exploration of the topic of unequal school funding because they apply to education spending as it exists in the state of New York and in the context of not only race and class but also public policy and the distribution of social goods.

Rucker Johnson's work (2019) provides valuable historical research regarding the critical issue of integration in education. Johnson presented evidence that school integration efforts in the decades following *Brown v. Board* were tremendously successful both educationally and in the context of the future lives of students who were part of those efforts and who attended integrated schools. In *Children of the Dream*, Johnson employed original longitudinal studies from the 1960s, demonstrating that students who attended integrated and well-funded schools

experienced success in life much more significantly than those who did not attend integrated schools. Johnson's research demonstrates that integrated schools represented a primary means of social mobility in the decades following the *Brown v. Board* decision. Johnson lamented the racial backlash that began in the 1990s, expressing disappointment with how political and cultural integration fell by the wayside. He presented evidence of grave patterns of re-segregation that have taken hold of communities and how this has negatively impacted students' educational experiences, particularly students of color and those living in poverty, who gave up on integration. Johnson's work is pivotal to this research topic because it highlights the significant dimension of segregation in the context of unequal school funding and how the pathway to greater equity lies in confronting re-segregation patterns by reinvigorating efforts to integrate schools. The following section or second pathway of the chapter's roadmap delves into several broad-based theoretical perspectives that provide general information about unequal school funding.

Theory and Unequal School Funding

As expressed by Bowles and Gintis (Bowles, 2002), social reproduction theory shapes the research theoretical framework by helping to explore how patterns of educational injustice repeat themselves from generation to generation as they profoundly exist in the very structures of the education system. The social reproduction theory challenges the popular conception that public education represents the great equalizer in American society by providing a level playing field wherein all classes can compete from the same fundamental position of equality. Social reproduction theorists posit that American schooling reinforces the inequality found in society. Bowles and Gintis (2002) explored how and why patterns of educational injustice (such as unequal funding) repeat themselves from generation to generation and examined how they

directly correlate to the structures of the economic system and class relations. Bowles and Gintis take the position that the U.S. system of education reflects the structure of class relations in society (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). They emphasized the "correspondence principle," which describes the direct connection between how the American school system is structured and the capitalist economy's systemic needs. According to Bowles and Gintis, the education system (and its funding) aligns with American society's broader class structure, claiming that the education system operates, at an ideological level, to promote and support the attitudes and values of the capitalist economy. From this perspective, students are systemically bifurcated so that children from less affluent socioeconomic backgrounds receive one type of education while those from wealthier backgrounds receive another. Bowles and Gintis' thoughts assist in analyzing unequal school funding from the perspective of class and race. Their view was instrumental in analyzing judicial rulings and legislative policy decisions made regarding school funding. In particular, the correspondence principle provides a lens to view the racist and classist roots of unequal school funding by shedding light on the broader economic and political systems that affect educational policy.

Bowles and Gintis's social reproduction theory share common ground with critical theory as both provide a macro-level perspective on unequal school funding. Critical theory provides a lens to view the historical factors that brought the practice into existence and observe the present-day beliefs and attitudes that sustain it. The Frankfurt School provided the foundation for critical theory, which dates to the 1920s and 1930s. Leaders of the Frankfurt School such as Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, and Theodore Adorno, challenged the traditional and analytical philosophy of the time, which advocated a strict detachment from historical realities, embracing a neutral or position-less form of truth. Critical theorists "are concerned with political freedom

and dignity, and their focus is real, historically situated human beings" (Noddings, 2016, p.34). Critical theory focuses on exploring how society exercises power and how the exercise of power affects the marginalization of people, especially in the context of race, class, and gender. Critical theory contains a distinct emancipatory dimension seeking to "empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices" (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 22). Critical race theory, in particular, contributes to understanding the structural impediments caused by the sustained practice of unequal school funding in the context of both race and class.

Specifically, Milner (2007) and his work on *interest convergence* lends insight into examining public policy issues by providing a contextualized understanding of how race factors into decisions that revolve around funding and expenditures in the context of social goods. Critical race theory's element of *interest convergence* provided insight for the topic of this study because of its use to understand the persistence and widespread acceptance of school districts' unequal funding throughout New York State in the specific context of race. Milner referenced Donnor (2005), who defined interest convergence as "an analytical construct that considers the motivating factor to eradicate racial discrimination or provide remedies for racial injustice"(p. 47). Interest convergence represents a valuable research tool to explore why the discriminatory practice of unequal school funding persists on Long Island from a political and legal perspective.

Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony frames how a practice such as unequal school funding came into existence and how it continues to be maintained. Cultural hegemony refers to maintaining domination through ideological, cultural, and legal means. Social institutions serve as fertile ground for dominance, which allows those in power to influence the rest of society's values, norms, ideas, expectations, worldviews, and behavior. This kind of power is entirely different from controlling people through force (such as in a military-style

autocracy). It allows those in the dominant group to exercise control by employing peaceful means, such as court rulings and legislative policies, to wield power over beliefs and values. Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1972) significantly contributes to understanding the taken-for-granted assumptions of unequal school funding. Gramsci's thoughts provide a theoretical framework to analyze how court rulings, laws, and policies regarding education funding were and continue to deliberately construct a means of maintaining the dominance of one group over another along the lines of race and class.

Unequal School Funding and Teacher Experience

Ample research demonstrates the pivotal role of teachers in students' success regarding academic performance and overall learning (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Research shows that the degree of teacher quality correlates directly to students' academic performance (Rowan et al., 2002). A substantial body of research demonstrates the significant value that quality teachers have on students' lives during their time in school and long after the completion of formal education.

Susan Moore Johnson (2006) sheds light on the centrality of the teacher experience in the quality of education students receive. The primary focus of Johnson's work concerning this study is that it reveals the salient point that recruiting quality teachers is insufficient for prolonged and sustained student success. Johnson's work posited that retaining quality teachers within schools is the most significant factor in maintaining and preserving student success. Therefore, according to Johnson (2006), the "context in which teachers work contributes to their willingness to enter and remain in teaching and to their success or failure in the classroom" (p.15). The basic premise of Johnson's theoretical approach is that the "workplace can enable or constrain good teaching" (Johnson, 2006, p.1).

Johnson posited 11 benchmarks for school workplace conditions directly related to teacher retention. The benchmarks identified by Johnson are:

- Teaching assignments
- Working relationships among teachers
- Support for new teachers
- Support for students
- Curricular support resources and materials
- Assessment
- Professional development
- Professional influence
- Career growth
- Facilities
- Principal's leadership.

The significance of teacher workplace conditions in the context of retention and student success is directly connected to unequal school funding precisely because poor students and students of color are much more likely than other students to have inexperienced poorly educated teachers who underperform in their work. Equal access to quality teachers is simply something that not all students experience. Some teachers cannot meet with success in bringing quality education to students, further exacerbating the problem, given the context and structures they find themselves in at the schools where they teach. The inaccessibility to quality teachers cuts along racial and class lines as students living in poorly-funded districts and students of color bear the brunt of the inequality. Students of color and students from high-poverty districts tend to attend "hard-to-staff schools" that encounter tremendous difficulty in attracting and retaining

quality teachers.

Furthermore, according to Johnson (2006), schools in low-income and predominantly non-White communities experience far more teacher turnover than those in moderate-income or high-income districts, which tend to be mainly White and Asian. This gap places administrators in low-funded and predominantly minority schools in a situation where they are "perpetually recruiting and hiring new staff, which creates an enormous drain on resources"(Johnson, 2006, p.13). This study focused on the teacher experience regarding unequal school funding using Johnson's theoretical work and contribution. The workplace conditions of teachers broadly, and the 11 benchmarks identified by Johnson specifically, have clear connections to the issue of school funding as low-funded and predominantly nonwhite schools encounter great difficulty retaining quality teachers. This dynamic exposes inequality in the context of race and class as both undergird the practice of unequal school funding from the perspective of teacher work experience across low-funded and high-funded schools.

Education Spending in the Context of Race and Class

Unequal school funding is a multi-layered and long-debated issue with diverse perspectives. Data and research bring divergent views on the issue, demonstrating that unequal school funding is complex, with many different sides to consider. For example, numerous voices champion school choice as a way to address education quality and the funding of that education (Nelson et al., p.51-52). Various school choice initiatives enable parents to select private schools for their children. These initiatives include school vouchers, education savings accounts (ESAS), tax-credit education savings accounts, tax-credit scholarships, and individual tax credits and deductions.

Other types of school choice pathways are geared toward public school options. These

include charter schools, magnet schools, and inter/intra district public school choices. The basic premise of the various school choice initiatives is that students can use public education funds and parents decide what best fits their children's educational needs (Nelson et al., p. 53).

Other perspectives from conservative voices staunchly support notions of local liberty and individual communities' right to control education budgets and resources, arguing against any attempts at increased spending or efforts to fill disparity gaps between districts. Views from more progressive perspectives steadfastly champion the principle of equality in public education, advocating for increased funding of poorer districts to close existing gaps, perceiving inequities as forms of racism and classism.

Analysis of the literature from conservative sources reveals a consistent two-fold argument against increased spending and attempts to equalize funding of school districts. Conservatives reject calls for increased funding of poorer districts because more school spending does not necessarily correlate to improved education quality and student outcomes. The position contrasts sharply with legislative and judicial attempts to increase and equalize school spending because such efforts do not affect positive education outcomes. The literature reflecting this position reveals that test scores have consistently declined despite more state spending on education from year to year. "States that are spending more haven't shown improvement. In California, K-12 spending has increased by more than half since 2013 to \$102 billion. Yet student scores have been flat since 2013" (Wall Street Journal, 2019, p. 38). Eric Hanushek and Jonathon Butcher echoed the sentiments of the Wall Street Journal editorial board. According to Hanushek:

...the outcomes observed over the past half-century – no matter how massaged – do not suggest that just throwing money at schools is likely to be a policy that solves the

significant U.S. school problems seen in the levels of distribution of outcomes.

(Hanushek, n.d.).

The position put forth by Heritage Foundation analyst Jonathan Butcher builds upon Hanushek's perspective, arguing that annual education spending is already at an all-time high and has been increasing steadily each year for the past 23 years. According to conservative perspectives, demands for more significant increases in education funding will have economic consequences for the nation's economic health (The Heritage Foundation, n.d.).

Secondly, the literature from conservative views on school spending holds that family and community background represent the primary determining factors of academic achievement and positive student outcomes. This point of view stems from a famous study commissioned by the federal government conducted by sociologist James Coleman in 1966. The study concluded that material resources (namely funding) that schools receive had little to no impact on student performance and academic achievement. The study revealed that "family background differences account for much more variance in achievements than do school (resource) differences" (Coleman, 1966, p. 73). The Coleman study's findings have influenced both conservative and progressive calls for increases in community spending and for more resources to be diverted to low-income and poverty-stricken areas for a generation now. The difference between the two interpretations of the Coleman report is that progressive voices favor direct increased spending on schools. Conservative voices support spending more narrowly to limit funding to social services in impoverished neighborhoods to address deeper poverty concerns, arguing that such spending would represent a better use of public monies than increasing funds to public schools themselves (Waterford.org, 2019). Hanushek's studies on the topic conclude that no concrete evidence demonstrates any solid or consistent relationship or correlation

between spending on education resources and student achievement and academic performance (Hanushek, 1996).

Greenwald et al., (1996) conducted a quantitative study examining the relationship between school inputs and student outcomes. *School inputs* refer to education resources generally and expenditures (i.e., money) more specifically. *Student outcomes* refer to student achievement and academic success as these pertain primarily to evaluating standardized test scores and graduation rates. The article and study conducted a reanalysis of existing data and a meta-analysis of newly collected data. The findings revealed that a wide array of education resources positively related to student outcomes and that increases in spending are associated with significant gains in achievement.

The general conclusions of the meta-analysis are that school resources are "systematically related to student achievement and that these relations are large enough to be educationally important" (Greenwald, 1996, p.384). The study's quantitative analysis provides a clear direction for those in policymaking positions that "money is positively related to student achievement" (Greenwald, 1996, p. 385).

The study is relevant to the topic because it provides insight into understanding why students from property-rich districts might have increased outcomes and higher achievements. In contrast, students from property-poor districts might demonstrate decreased outcomes and lower achievements. Findings and results from this study shed light, from a quantitative perspective, on the discriminatory nature of the practice of unequal school funding, as the analyzed data reveals that students who have more money spent on their education will have a higher likelihood of better achievement. The root of the injustice regarding unequal school funding is that it fosters a "two-tiered" system of education, with those on the top tier receiving more

substantial amounts of funding/expenditures and, thereby, better academic outcomes. In contrast, the opposite holds for those on the bottom tier.

Verstegen (2013) studied a critical justice issue in education funding. Specifically, Verstegen conducted a comprehensive quantitative analysis of Nevada's public education funding system as it concerns the issue of equity. The article's basic thesis is that there is a toxic relationship between gaps in educational funding and opportunity gaps for students in the state of Nevada. These dual gaps "have real and important impacts on student outcomes" (Verstegen, 2013, p. 1). The disparities in educational funding between rich and poor school districts in Nevada are caused by unequal local wealth, as schools are funded primarily through local property taxes. Verstegen gave two reasons for conducting the study. First, the state did not complete a comprehensive quantitative equity analysis. Second, Verstegen conducted the study because equity represents the guiding principle of Nevada's educational system. The state constitution considers education a fundamental right.

Verstegen's findings revealed the existence of enormous gaps in education funding among school districts and that these gaps directly connect to local wealth. Moreover, the findings demonstrated a causal relationship between funding gaps and the quality of education. Verstegen concluded that the quality of education in Nevada relates to local wealth, which curtails equal opportunities for youth in the state to learn and be successful in their schools and classrooms.

The study aligns with this research topic because it presents valuable information on the effects of unequal school funding on non-White students and students living in poverty, demonstrating in precise quantitative terms, the structural discrimination of students inhabiting property-poor districts. The study was limited to the scope of one state, providing a deeper probe

into the issues of poverty and equity within an education system that might not have been possible in a study conducted nationally. The literature reflects the view that the zip codes that students inhabit determine the quality of public education across much of the country (Hildebrand, 2020). Other dimensions of the literature reflect the position that unequal school funding directly impacts communities of color and communities struggling with poverty, exposing systemic racism and classism within education. The long-established and persistent reliance on local taxes as the primary source of school funding, coupled with the sacrosanct nature of local school district boundaries, has created a political mechanism for unequal school funding to exist and persist (Kozol, 1991).

EdBuild (2019) conducted a national research study that powerfully exposes the racist and classist underpinnings of the discriminatory practice of unequal school funding. The study aimed to evaluate school district revenues based on racial and socioeconomic characteristics at the national and state levels. The study excluded federal monies from the analysis because those funds, which account for about 9% of total expenditures, are intended merely to supplement state and local community dollars. The study's major finding reveals that the majority of White school districts across the nation receive a total of 23 billion dollars a year more in education funding than school districts that are predominantly non-White. According to the study, a national average of \$11,682 was spent in school districts that are predominantly non-White compared to an average of \$13,908 spent in communities mainly comprised of White students in 2016. The study concluded that the funding gap of approximately \$2,226 per student stems from the primary mode Americans pay for education through local property taxes. EdBuild (2019) reported:

On the whole, non-White districts receive significantly less funding than white districts.

Because our system relies so heavily on community wealth, this gap reflects the prosperity divide in our country and the fragmented nature of school district borders, designed to exclude outside students and protect internal advantage (p. 3).

The issue of the size of gerrymandered school districts further compounds the structural inequity embedded in the practice of unequal school funding. According to the study, predominantly White school districts enroll an average of 1500 students, which is half the national average size. In contrast, non-White districts serve an average of over 10,000 students, more than three times the national average. This matters and has direct pertinence to the research topic because "small districts can have the effects of concentrating resources and amplifying political power" (EdBuild, 2019, p. 4). Moreover, according to the study, "drawing borders around small, wealthy communities benefits the few at the detriment of the many" (EdBuild, 2019, p. 4). On the surface, one could argue that larger school districts situated in urban areas would be in a sounder financial position because such larger districts would have larger amounts of money overall to spend on education. However, the data suggest that even considering the size of school districts, smaller, more affluent, and predominantly White communities still tend to have more money to spend on education per pupil. Small and predominantly White districts with wealthier residents have the effect of concentrating resources and solidifying local political power to ensure that the district spends larger amounts of funds on the education of their children.

Another related and significant finding of the study, which bears direct relevance to the topic of this paper, expresses that housing/residential segregation lies at the root of unequal school funding, as a majority of White communities tend to have more money to spend on education than do non-White communities. The study contended that:

even after *Brown v Board*, even after decades of school finance litigation meant to equalize the playing field, and even after accounting for wealth disparities, the wrenching reality endures – the United States still invests significantly more money to educate children in white communities (EdBuild, 2019, p. 5).

The Long Island-based organization known as ERASE-Racism has been at the forefront of studying unequal school funding on Long Island. The organization's findings echoed the findings in the EdBuild study. They painted an even grimmer picture of the racial and socioeconomic inequity in both Nassau and Suffolk counties in the context of education funding. According to the findings of the group, more affluent districts on Long Island spent an average of \$6,000.00 more per student than low socioeconomic districts in a 2020 analysis. This lower expenditure per pupil results in many educational disadvantages for more impoverished schools and communities of color in both counties. As a result of Long Island's history of housing discrimination and residential segregation, well-funded districts tend to have higher percentages of White residents and students and low percentages of residents and students of color. The acute segregation leads to fewer resources, less access to high-quality teachers, and less opportunity for students to be exposed to challenging curriculum, thus exacerbating the inequality. School funding primarily provides for building facilities and maintenance, textbooks, supplies, and teachers' and staff's salaries. According to the data compiled by ERASE Racism, unequal school funding directly affects the quality of education students receive regarding academic opportunities. Specifically, the group's data demonstrates that "this disparity in funding explains why, for the 2019-2020 school year, schools classified as Majority White offered, on average, 35 AP/IB courses, while schools classified as MBH offered 22 AP/IB courses" (ERASE Racism 2019, p. 13).

The group contends that when structural impediments prevent students from engaging in challenging curriculum and other educational resources, they will encounter greater challenges in pursuing higher education goals relative to their peers who benefited from attending schools with better funding.

Unequal School Funding and Effects on Teacher Experience Across Low and Well-Funded School

A solid empirical research base supports the position that teachers are central to advancing children's learning (Johnson, 2006). Research demonstrates that highly qualified teachers are instrumental in raising student achievement and improving student outcomes and academic performance (Ingersoll, 2004). There is general agreement among researchers and scholars that vibrant, committed, and skilled teachers play a pivotal role in educating children and helping them be successful in learning (Johnson, 2006). As pointed out earlier, Susan Moore Johnson's work and research focus intently on the need of school principals, administrators, and policymakers on the local level to foster working conditions for teachers that would improve the teaching experience in the classroom. Johnson's research reveals that improving teacher working conditions correlates to school retention. According to Johnson's research, teacher retention is crucial to improving students' learning experience and academic performance. The overall quality of education students receive is significantly improved in schools where teachers are satisfied and choose to continue teaching where they begin their careers. Johnson's findings clearly show that schools that serve large proportions of low-income and nonwhite students fail to adequately support teachers with working conditions that would enhance their teaching experience and better serve the students in those schools.

A significant study conducted by Johnson (2006) reveals an existing support gap that new

teachers in low-funded schools experience in the hiring process and first years of teaching. The study was based on surveys administered in several states and focused on hiring practices, relationships with colleagues, mentoring, and curriculum in the context of the satisfaction and support experienced by newly hired teachers. The study's key findings express that newly hired teachers in low-income schools are much less likely than teachers in high-income schools to "experience timely and information-rich hiring, to benefit from mentoring and support by experienced colleagues, and to have a curriculum that is complete and aligned with state standards" (Johnson, 2006, p.2). According to the study, the persistent differences between the support teachers receive in low-income versus teachers' support in high-income schools reflect broad inequity patterns that directly affect the ability of low-income schools to retain new teachers. As compared to new teachers in high-income schools, new teachers in low-income schools are typically less likely "to experience a hiring process that gives them a good preview of their job, less likely to have a good match with their mentor and to have frequent and substantive interactions with them, and less likely to feel that they receive appropriate curricular guidance" (Johnson, 2004, p.2). The inequity experienced by teachers in low-funded schools has dramatic implications and consequences for students in those schools.

Adamson and Darling-Hammond (2012) echoed the findings presented in Johnson's work. Adamson and Darling-Hammond examined the inequitable distribution of teacher quality that cuts across race and class. The study reviewed data from California and New York states, which have strikingly similar demographic diversity and educational challenges. Specifically, the study analyzed school funding, salaries, and teacher qualifications, revealing that overall education funding and teacher salary levels are acutely inequitable across and within the two states. The heart of the inequity unveiled in the study is that low-salary and low-funded districts

end up serving students "with higher needs, offer poorer working conditions, and hire teachers with significantly lower qualifications, who typically exhibit higher turnover" (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012, p. 35). Moreover, according to the study, schools tasked to serve students with high percentages of minority and low-income students contain approximately twice as many "uncredentialed and inexperienced teachers as do those serving the fewest in those categories" (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012, p. 31).

Adamson and Darling's most critical and relevant contribution to this dissertation's research topic is the role of working conditions in teacher recruitment and retention. The study showed that working conditions, including teacher salaries, facilities, problems with available space, technology, multi-track schools, and classroom resources, represent the driving forces of teacher flight from schools serving high concentrations of low-income and minority students. These factors directly align with this study because they demonstrate the vital link between unequal school funding and teacher experience and satisfaction in the classroom. Teachers' acutely high attrition rates in predominantly low-income and minority districts clearly exemplify their poor experiences in those schools. High teacher attrition rates affect minority students and low-income students to a far greater degree than students in predominantly White schools, typically situated in higher-income communities. This reflects the racist and classist underpinnings of the practice of unequal school funding in the context of the teacher experience.

In a related study, Earthman and Lemasters (2009) reveal the impact of classroom conditions on teacher attitudes, morale, and job satisfaction. The findings reveal that significant differences in attitudes exist between teachers who work in classrooms considered satisfactory and those who deem their classroom conditions unsatisfactory. The findings indicate that the physical work environment of teachers, namely their classrooms, directly influences their morale

and level of job satisfaction, affecting their productivity. Earthman and Lemasters (2009) matched 11 high schools where the administration expressed that the buildings were unsatisfactory, with 11 other high schools with classroom teachers describing their buildings as satisfactory. Teachers in the selected schools voluntarily completed online survey questions submitted digitally through the My Classroom Appraisal (MCAP) platform. The findings showed that classroom conditions can cause morale problems with teachers and that such feelings may ultimately influence students' academic performance. The study matters to the research topic because the physical conditions of classrooms are directly related to funding and school expenditures. The study indirectly exposes funding inequality as it pertains to teachers' work experiences. Low-funded schools with unsatisfactory classrooms affect teacher morale and job satisfaction, thus negatively impacting the quality of education for minorities and students living in poverty.

Conclusion

While there is significant educational research related to unequal school funding in the context of race and class, research does not examine the effects that unequal school funding has on teachers. There is limited research about the impact of a system of educational funding that negatively affects the poor and communities of color on teachers who work in poorly funded schools. Also, not enough about teachers' experiences working in well-funded schools is known. More research is necessary to understand better the impact of the discriminatory practice of unequal school funding on teachers' work experience. My study aimed to understand teachers' lived work experience across both underfunded and well-funded districts. Exploration of the teacher experience matters to the topic of this paper specifically and education more broadly because research strongly suggests that providing quality teachers in schools represents the single

most substantial factor contributing to students' academic success (Johnson, 2006). The work experience, conditions, and levels of satisfaction of teachers in schools directly influence their ability to provide a sound and quality-based education to their students. Understanding teachers' experiences, work conditions, and levels of satisfaction across low-funded and high-funded schools provided invaluable insight into the effects of unequal school funding.

The literature exploring the racist and classist underpinnings of unequal school funding in the context of teacher experiences across both well-funded and low-funded districts thus far reveals a heavily quantitative research body. Critical research on the topic presented herein has focused on comprehensive longitudinal studies using multiple quantitative methodologies that provide valuable insight into the issue. The great strength of this quantitative-based research is that the results present objective and generalizable data, which gives a clear, measurable picture of the topic. However, the lack of substantive qualitative-based research on the topic reveals a gap in the literature. While the existing quantitative-based research offers tremendous insight, a more holistic description of the teacher experience within the discriminatory practice of unequal school funding is missing and, therefore, necessary to address. The gap in the literature demonstrates that more research is necessary to determine specifically *how* and *why* unequal school funding affects the lived work experience of teachers who are on the front lines of the endeavor to provide quality education to students. The qualitative research conducted in this study served to fill the existing literature gap by painting a picture of the teacher experience from the teachers' perspectives, focusing on their day-to-day work experiences from within the broader context of unequal school funding. The work experience, conditions, and satisfaction levels of teachers in schools directly influence their ability to provide a sound and quality-based education to their students. Understanding these personal experiences, daily work conditions,

and teachers' satisfaction levels across low-funded and high-funded schools can provide invaluable insight into the effects of unequal school funding. The focus on teachers' personal and professional experiences of unequal school funding provided a person-centered perspective. It helped me better understand how systemic racism and classism affect students' quality of education.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

In my study, I sought to understand unequal school funding by exploring how teachers in under and well-funded school districts in New York State describe their job satisfaction. The practice of unequal school funding engenders an educational structure where certain schools receive higher financial support and resources while others receive lower levels. Reliance on local property taxes as the primary source of school funding coupled with gerrymandered school district boundaries both expresses and exposes the gross inequality inherent in the practice (Wesche, 2016). I examined the phenomenon related to teacher job satisfaction by employing a qualitative methodology to understand the feelings and perspectives of high school teachers in two Long Island school districts. I wanted to understand the phenomenon by exploring how under and well-funded teachers make sense of their work experience and how satisfied they feel with how their schools are funded and supported. Specifically, I used a qualitative phenomenological approach to understand the essence of the practice of unequal school funding from the point of view of how teachers perceive their job satisfaction and morale in both under and over-funded schools.

A qualitative/phenomenological approach was chosen as the research design because existing literature on the topic thus far reveals a body of research that is heavily quantitative. Key research has focused on critical longitudinal studies using multiple quantitative methodologies that provide valuable insight into the issue. However, the lack of substantive qualitative research on the topic reveals a gap in the literature. A more holistic description of the teachers' experience within the phenomenon of unequal school funding is missing and, therefore, necessary to address. I interviewed teachers to put a human face on the discriminatory practice in the context

of how teachers describe their work and satisfaction. The focus on teachers' personal and professional experiences provides a person-centered perspective on the phenomenon. Understanding how teachers across under-funded and over-funded schools describe their job satisfaction and morale within their own work experience provided invaluable insight into the essence of the practice of unequal school funding. The day-to-day working conditions of teachers in the form of educational resources, high-quality learning environments, classroom materials, and the availability of student support services are shaped directly by the school's funding level. Teacher work conditions also affect teacher job satisfaction and morale. The level of school funding, thus, significantly influences teacher job satisfaction and morale. Exploring how teachers across both low-funded and well-funded schools describe their levels of job satisfaction will help shed light on the lasting effects of the practice of unequal school funding from the personal perspective and lived experience of teachers.

Susan Moore Johnson's(2006) work focuses intently on the need of school principals, administrators, and policymakers on the local level to foster working conditions for teachers that would improve the teaching experience in the classroom. Johnson's research reveals that enhancing teacher working conditions correlates directly to retaining teachers at a school.

According to Johnson's research, teacher retention is critical in improving students' learning experience and academic performance. Johnson's work serves as the theoretical framework for this study. Her insight represents the lens through which to analyze how teachers perceive their job satisfaction in the context of how well their schools are funded and supported. The basic premise of Johnson's theoretical approach is that the "workplace can enable or constrain good teaching" (Johnson, 2006, p. 1). Johnson posits 11 benchmarks for school workplace conditions directly related to teacher retention. The relationship between teacher work

conditions, funding, and job satisfaction occupies a central place in my exploration of the topic, giving rise to several key questions. Johnson's benchmarks serve as the framework to explore how teachers describe their job satisfaction in under and over-funded school districts. Adamson and Darling-Hammond (2012) echoed the findings presented in Johnson's work, demonstrating the role of working conditions in teacher recruitment and retention. Adamson and Darling-Hammond's work relates to this study because it demonstrates the link between unequal school funding and teachers' job satisfaction. In a related study, Earthman and Lemasters (2009) revealed the impact of classroom conditions on teacher attitudes, morale, and job satisfaction. The research questions that guided this study are as follows.

Overarching Question

How do teachers in underfunded and well-funded schools describe their job satisfaction?

Sub-Questions/Associated Questions

1. In what negative and positive ways do Johnson's (2006) benchmarks manifest themselves in the experience of teachers' job satisfaction?
2. What similarities and differences are evident in teachers' job satisfaction in underfunded and overfunded schools?

Role of Researcher

The phenomenon of unequal school funding in the state where the study took place represents an educational injustice that cuts along the lines of race and class. The injustice creates conditions for students to experience disadvantages in their education based on their racial and economic background. As a scholar of education, I subscribe to a transformative worldview because I believe, as Paulo Freire stated, "the educator has the duty of not being neutral" (Freire, 1970, p. 16). The transformative worldview informs my general advocacy and

pursuit of social justice, which seeks to challenge the systemic nature of educational injustices such as unequal school funding. The transformative worldview fuels my passion as both an educator and researcher to work for changes in laws, policies, and ideological discourses. This worldview leads me to see my teaching and role as a researcher as conduits to raise the consciousness of social injustices in general and educational ones in particular.

Critical theory animates my transformative worldview and provides a general philosophical backdrop for how I perceive society and my role in it, a role that reflects a desire to foster and bring about greater equity. The transformative worldview and accompanying Critical Theory offer me a clear lens to explore the exercise of power in society and how the exercise of that power affects the marginalization of people across multiple contexts, such as the contexts of race and class. A transformative worldview broadly and critical theory, more specifically, propels me to take political action to confront issues of inequality. Specifically, a transformative worldview along with critical theory helps me take agency and political action to do something about the injustice of a funding and resource allocation system that reflects deep-seated classism and racism within the broader American education system.

In her inspirational essay entitled, *Reflections on Liberation*, Suzanne Pharr (2018) made essential connections between the work of social justice and the concept of liberation, both of which, in my view, undergird a transformative worldview. At its heart, my adoption of a transformative worldview intertwines with my passionate pursuit of social justice and my role as a social justice leader in education. My conception of the transformative worldview contains the social justice principle of liberation. The principle lies at the root of how the worldview speaks to me. Pharr uses the term "liberation politics" (Pharr, 2018, p. 604) to explain the work of social justice leaders as work to free oppressed people by striving to remove the

structural shackles of oppression that keep them locked into situations where entrenched institutions deny access to fair treatment and human rights. Pharr (2018) stated that "Liberation politics requires placing a broad definition of human rights at the center of our values: ensuring that every person has food, shelter, clothing, safety, education, health care, and livable income" (p. 604). A moral vision that sees each human being possessing intrinsic worth undergirds Pharr's connection between social justice and the principle of liberation. The conviction that every person has human dignity bonds the relationship between social justice and liberation. As Pharr (2018) expressed, social justice work occurs "because we believe every person counts, has human dignity, and deserves respect, equality, and justice" (p. 605). The core principle of liberation and its connection to social justice is the nucleus of the transformative worldview. This principle has formed me and continues to influence me as an educator, researcher, and global citizen.

My professional and educational identity as a teacher on both the high school and college levels directly relates to the subject matter of the study. I am a full-time teacher at Holy Trinity High School, a private Catholic school in Hicksville, New York. I teach courses in both scripture and morality in the school's Religion Department. In addition, as a teacher at Holy Trinity, I served as a union leader, wherein I was responsible for representing the rights of approximately 100 teachers for a tenure of about 20 years. Also, I am an adjunct professor at Molloy University in New York, teaching a course entitled "Spirituality and Social Justice." The Church's Social Teaching tradition lies at the root of all my teaching and union work. This tradition informs my teaching and leadership in the union. The tradition teaches and expresses that all people are made in God's image and likeness and have inherent worth and dignity. From the perspective of Catholic Social Teaching, it is incumbent to practice justice for those in

vulnerable positions either politically, economically, or socially. The issues of social marginalization and economic injustice in education are valuable to me personally and professionally. My professional and personal identity influences how I perceive the problem of unequal school funding. My identity may present obstacles to my research endeavors because of the potential for bias. I exercised caution in allowing the teachers I interviewed to speak for themselves, allowing their voices to serve as the driving force of how they describe their job satisfaction regarding the phenomenon of unequal school funding.

Methods

While significant research reveals the impact of unequal school funding on students' lives in the context of race and class, existing research does not adequately examine the discriminatory practice from teachers' perspectives. There is a lack of research on how teachers describe their work experience and job satisfaction in the context of funding and allocation of school resources. Not enough is known about the impact of an education funding system that negatively affects the poor and communities of color on teachers who work in low-funded schools. Also, there is little known about the experience of teachers who work in over-funded schools. Exploring teachers' personal experiences and feelings related to this study specifically and education more broadly because research strongly suggests that teachers represent the primary driving force in achieving academic success in students' lives (Johnson, 2006). Understanding how teachers describe their work experiences and job satisfaction across under-funded and over-funded schools can provide invaluable insight into the practice of unequal school funding. A qualitative research design represents the overarching approach to the study. It represents the most effective way to learn about how teachers describe their feelings of job satisfaction related to school building resources and support from administration and staff. A qualitative design best enabled me to explore how

teachers describe how access to educational resources shapes their feelings of job satisfaction on a personal and daily work experience level. Specifically, I employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to deepen understanding of the essence of the practice of unequal school funding from the perspective of how teachers perceive their job satisfaction and morale in both under and over-funded school districts on Long Island. A qualitative phenomenological approach best suited the purpose of the study primarily because existing literature on the topic revealed a body of research that is heavily quantitative. The lack of substantive qualitative-based research on the topic based on teacher experiences of job satisfaction revealed a gap in the literature. Specifically, I used a descriptive or hermeneutical phenomenology as part of the overall qualitative design. Such an approach centers on studying participants' personal experiences (i.e., how teachers describe their feelings of satisfaction) in the context of a phenomenon (i.e., unequal school funding). The approach placed the teachers of my sample at the core of the analysis, allowing them to describe their feelings of job satisfaction based on their work experience. A hermeneutical phenomenological approach allowed the teachers' voices to take center stage and opened doors of understanding about the broader phenomenon of unequal school funding (Padilla-Diaz, 2015).

Population, Sample, and Sampling

On Long Island, there are 137 school districts across Nassau and Suffolk counties, comprising the overall sample of the study. The terms and categories of *underfunded* and *well-funded* emanated from school districts' annual per-pupil spending. Annual per-pupil spending on Long Island ranges from \$17,000 to \$77,000. My study classified school districts with an annual per-pupil spending of \$25,000 or less as *underfunded* and those with an annual per-pupil spending of \$35,000 or more as *well-funded*. Of the 137 school districts that comprised the

overall sample, 26 districts had an annual per-pupil spending of \$25,000 or less, while 34 districts had an annual per-pupil spending of \$35,000 or more. Teachers working in these two categories made up the more specific part of my study's sample. Teachers working in the remaining 76 school districts fell between \$25,000 and \$35,000 annual per-pupil spending and were not included in the study.

I emailed school administrators in both categories (underfunded and well-funded districts) to request permission and access to meet teachers who worked in those schools. I also visited approximately half a dozen schools in both categories as a more direct way to meet with administrators to access teachers working in those schools and set up interviews with them. After not receiving responses from any of the school administrators, I relied on and worked through professional contacts and networks to find teachers who worked in the underfunded and well-funded school districts so that I could set up interviews with them. Ultimately, snowball sampling formed the way that I achieved my selection of nine teachers from six school districts across Long Island. Because I was unable to meet teachers through standard administrative channels, in the end, I achieved my selection through convenience sampling. Once I could contact teachers through my professional contacts and education-based networks, I set up interviews with those teachers. At that point, as long as the teachers fell into one of the two categories, either underfunded or well-funded, I proceeded to schedule and conduct the interviews, forming the basis of my data collection. There were no exclusion criteria at that point, again making my entire selection process one of convenience sampling.

Nine teachers from six school districts located on Long Island comprised the research selection of the study. My study contained a bifurcation of the selection. The teachers in Group A worked in an underfunded school district, while the other teachers in Group B worked in a

well-funded school district. The population of teachers in each of the two groups sit on opposite ends of the yearly per-pupil spending spectrum in the region.

Teachers from the underfunded school districts work in schools that rank among the lowest in per-pupil spending in the county. The schools in which the Group A teachers work received an average of approximately \$23,000 per pupil for the 2020-2021 school year. Teachers in Group B worked in well-funded school districts wherein annual per-pupil spending ranks among the highest in the county. The school in which the Group B teachers worked received an average of approximately \$38,000 per pupil in the same academic year. The difference of about \$14,000 in per-pupil spending between the two categories for the 2020-2021 academic year represents the widest margin of disparity in education funding within New York State. These spending figures represent a staggering 30% disparity between the school districts. Furthermore, the disparity also cuts along racial and class lines. Group A teachers worked in a school that serves a population made up of 92% African-American and Hispanic students and had a 28% poverty rate. In comparison, the Group B teachers worked in a school with a population of 88% White and Asian with a 4% poverty rate. (Garcia, 2019).

Data Collection Procedures

The profound interview described by Padilla-Diaz (2015) is the primary procedure I used to collect data for the study. The profound interview was the best fit for phenomenological research, which lies at the heart of the study. The objective of employing the phenomenological interview as the dominant data collection procedure was to understand how the teachers described their feelings about their workplace experiences. The interviews created the conditions for the teachers to express how the funding of their schools impacted their feelings of job satisfaction. Interviewing the teachers provided a pathway to put a human face on the practice of

unequal school funding as the questions focused on teachers' personal and professional experiences providing a person-centered perspective on the phenomenon. I used several techniques and platforms to provide the teachers with the flexibility to conduct the interviews. I conducted interviews remotely utilizing the medium of Zoom, and I informed teachers that I would be recording them. I used the Rev platform to record the conversations and then purchased the service's transcripts.

The questions for the interviews emanated from Susan Moore Johnson's (2006) work, representing the study's theoretical framework. The basic premise of Johnson's framework is that the "workplace can enable or constrain good teaching" (Johnson, 2006, p. 1). Johnson's thoughts served as the lens to understand how teachers felt about their job satisfaction and how they described their morale in the schools they teach. Questions for the interviews for data collection emanated from the 11 benchmarks established by Johnson that pertained to school workplace conditions. The 11 benchmarks, while initially created to evaluate the issue of teacher retention, were adapted and applied to the phenomenological research on unequal school funding and teacher job satisfaction. I based the questions comprising the interviews conducted for data collection on these benchmarks. The benchmarks created an aperture for teachers to describe their feelings of satisfaction regarding the funding and allocation of resources in their schools.

Data Analysis Procedures

Teacher responses from the interviews and focus groups serve as the basis of the data analysis. According to Moustakas (1994), it is essential to identify common meanings and derive essences from the texts of the interviews and focus groups. The phenomenological nature of the study made it necessary for data analysis to incorporate the following procedures. First, I engaged in the "horizontalization" of the data by organizing the 11 benchmarks posited by

Johnson, giving equal value to each one. Then, I analyzed how the teachers in my sample described their job satisfaction vis-à-vis each benchmark. I placed quotes from the interviews beneath each corresponding benchmark and then pulled out central themes from the quotes for analysis and interpretation. Next, I conducted textual and structural analyses of the themes and associated benchmarks. The textual analysis described *what* the teachers expressed in their responses regarding job satisfaction. The structural analysis investigated *how* the teachers expressed their feelings and experiences regarding the benchmarks. To implement this type of analysis, I created a detailed scaffolding plan organizing the quotes, key themes, benchmarks, and two types of analyses, structural and textual. The data analysis also entailed a coding system with associated categories based on words, phrases, and teachers' ways of thinking harnessed from the interviews and the memos of my fieldnotes and accompanying observer comments (OC's). I used the digital platform Dedoose to code the data for analysis. This platform enabled me to organize the data efficiently and clearly. Transcripts obtained from the Rev app and the recorded interviews from the Zoom sessions made up the data sources for analysis. I describe the data analysis further in chapter four.

Trustworthiness

I took two specific steps and strategies to ensure my data's validity and reliability. First, I employed a "rich, thick description" (Creswell, 2018, p.77) to express the findings from my data analysis. I provided a vivid and detail-laden description of critical aspects of the teacher participants in my sample. According to Creswell (2018), describing the subjects in detail makes the results more "realistic and richer," thus contributing to the overall validity of the findings.

Second, member-checking (Creswell, 2018) is another step to ensure validity and reliability. Upon completing the study, I presented the qualitative findings to each of the nine

teachers of the study's sample, requesting them to read the relevant portions (i.e., data collection, analysis, and findings) to ascertain whether they felt the results were accurate. I requested that the participating teachers evaluate how accurately they believed that the findings from the interview-based data reflected their experiences and reality.

Ethical Concerns

Potential ethical concerns for the study stem from two general research areas. The first deals with my positionality as a researcher for this study. I am a teacher on both the high school and college levels and a union leader representing fellow teachers in contractual issues such as salaries, working conditions, and benefits such as pension and health care. My professional identity as a teacher and union leader situates itself within a Catholic context as I teach in Catholic institutions. My particular brand of Catholicism had always embraced the Church's rich tradition of social teaching accompanied by a focus on the principles of economic justice and the dignity of work. Pope Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum specifically, and the Church's Social teaching in general, with its solid endorsement of unionism and the right of employees to be guaranteed fair working conditions, lies at the root of all my teaching and union work. This tradition informs my teaching and leadership in the union. My professional and personal identity influences how I perceive the problem of unequal school funding. The primary ethical concern emanating from my professional identity and deeply held personal socio-political beliefs regarding economic justice and dignity of work is the potential for bias to surface while interviewing teachers in the sample. Striving for and maintaining objectivity in how I asked questions and participated in conversations with the teachers of the sample in my data collection is of the utmost necessity to avoid bias from surfacing and skewing the data in a specific direction.

I vigilantly monitored my interactions with the participating teachers, making sure to allow

them to speak in their own voice and from their perspectives and experiences, being careful not to lead them to answer questions in a way that would suggest that I was seeking to have responses fit my transformative worldview or serve my socio-political agenda.

The second ethical concern involves maintaining the confidentiality of the sample of teachers selected for data collection and the schools in which they teach. In describing the two schools chosen for the study, I withheld exact dollar figures for per-pupil spending to protect the confidentiality of the school. I also withheld participating teachers' names for the same ethical reasons.

Limitations

Limitations of the study derive from the theoretical and conceptual framework expressed earlier in the chapter. Susan Moore Johnson's(2006) work represents the theoretical framework for this study. Her insight served as the optics to analyze how teachers of the sample describe their job satisfaction from how well their schools are funded and supported. Specifically, the 11 benchmarks delineated by Johnson were employed to explore how teachers describe their job satisfaction in under and over-funded school districts. As Marshall (2022) expressed, "Framing the study in specific research and scholarly traditions places limits on the research"(p. 57).

A limitation of the study is that the generalizability of the findings proves difficult to establish because of the boundaries of the framework. Johnson designed her 11 benchmarks to focus on working conditions and support systems in schools to explore teacher retention within the context of improving the quality of education for students. I used her benchmarks to gain insight from teachers about how they describe their feelings regarding their job satisfaction within the broader phenomenon of school funding, thus narrowing my study's focus to that one area of teacher work experience. My study does not examine other factors influencing teacher

job satisfaction, such as salaries and work setting. Also, a limitation of the study might present itself from within the transformative worldview that I hold that leads me to hold the position that the funding of education directly impacts the quality of education students receive. A limitation of the study is that I focused on just one of many potential factors contributing to the quality of education students receive.

Another limitation of the study is the small sample size. My study consisted of nine teachers from one geographical region in New York. In addition, some of the teachers in the sample are from the same schools, somewhat limiting the claims I could make about under and well-funded schools more generally.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the phenomenon of unequal school funding by critically examining the effects of unequal school funding on teacher job satisfaction. The long-established and persistent reliance on local property taxes as the primary source of school funding, coupled with the sacrosanct nature of gerrymandered school district boundaries in New York State, defined the problem of the phenomenon. My specific focus on teachers' experiences represents the study's unique significance and innovative component. While significant educational research is related to unequal school funding in the context of race and class, not enough research examines the effects of the phenomenon and practice on teachers. Not enough is known about the impact of an education funding system that negatively affects people with low incomes and communities of color on teachers who work in poorly funded schools. Also, not enough is known about teachers' experience working in overfunded schools. My study sought to fill in this glaring research gap by better understanding the impact that the practice of unequal school funding has on how teachers describe their job satisfaction in the context of their work

experience. The chosen qualitative/phenomenological research design aligned with the purpose and significance of the study as existing literature on the topic thus far reveals a heavily quantitative research body.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

As previously stated, this qualitative phenomenological study aimed to better understand unequal school funding by examining the practice's effects on teacher job satisfaction across under and well-funded schools. The purpose was to explore school funding through its impact on teachers' job satisfaction. While ample research exists on how unequal school funding relates to race and class, there remains insufficient research that sheds light on the phenomenon's effects on the main driving force of education and learning - teachers.

Employing a two-tiered theoretical and conceptual framework consisting of a macro-leveled Gramscian critical theory and Johnson's (2006) micro-leveled framework, I addressed the gap in the literature by shedding light on the lived work experiences of nine high school teachers. One overarching research question and two important associated questions guided this study:

- How do teachers in underfunded and well-funded schools describe their job satisfaction?
- In what negative and positive ways do Johnson's (2006) benchmarks manifest themselves in the experience of teachers' job satisfaction?
- What similarities and differences are evident in teachers' job satisfaction in underfunded and overfunded schools?

In this chapter, I describe the teacher participants and the procedural steps I used for the gathering my selection. In addition, I describe my role as the researcher and also explain the strengths and weaknesses of my own insider/outsider status in regard to the research. It was necessary to describe the rationale behind the bifurcation of the data collection and process of analysis used in this qualitative study between teachers in the underfunded category and those

teachers in the well-funded category. Finally, I elaborate on a summary of the findings of this study is elaborated upon with evidence to support my claims emanating from the interview data.

Participants

To compile the selection of teacher participants for the study, I recruited through my network of professionals consisting of fellow teachers, professors, and doctoral cohort members. The process of assembling this selection began in March 2023 and ended in June 2023. Nine public high school teachers from Long Island, New York agreed to participate in this study. Five participants teach in schools that this study has categorized as underfunded. The remaining four sample participants teach in schools defined as well-funded. As detailed previously, the categorization of "underfunded" and "well-funded" is based on the school's annual per-pupil spending. Underfunded schools have an annual per pupil spending of \$25,000.00 (or less) and well-funded schools have an annual per pupil spending of \$35,000.00 or more. For this study, teachers falling into the underfunded category will be designated as Category A, while teachers in the well-funded Category as Category B. Tables 1 and 2 show more information about the participants. To ensure confidentiality, the participants and the schools they teach in are referred to by pseudonyms. A brief description of each teacher in the sample follows the tables below.

Table 1: Category A (Underfunded)

TEACHER	SUBJECT	SCHOOL
Loretta	Special Education	Blue
Megan	English	Red
Edward	Special Education	Red
Gabriella	Special Education	Red
Joy	Mathematics	Green

Table 2: Category B (Well-Funded)

TEACHER	SUBJECT	SCHOOL
Charlie	Music/Band	Yellow
Solomon	Music	Yellow
Thomas	Mathematics	Orange
Yolanda	Mathematics	Orange

Loretta

Loretta is a special education teacher in one of the Category A schools (underfunded) and teaches mostly junior and senior-level students in courses ranging from reading and writing to life-skills instruction. After working in the business world for several years, she returned to complete graduate studies in special education and landed a job at her current high school. Loretta was dissatisfied working in corporate America and switched to teaching. She reflected upon the reason for this change, stating, "sitting behind a desk and performing rote activities all day was not what I had in mind." She stated that she "preferred working directly with people" and always thought about working with children and younger students. Having had great teachers when she was in high school is a significant reason for deciding to become a teacher.

Loretta expressed being "happy" with her job but at the same time also expressed frustration and dissatisfaction with crucial workplace factors such as resources and curricular support as well as building facilities.

Joy

Joy is a mathematics teacher in a Category A school, mainly teaching Calculus classes. She expressed that becoming a teacher "was a calling I had from childhood, and I just always wanted to be a teacher." She also always excelled in math at both elementary and secondary levels of schooling, lighting up the pathway toward eventually becoming a math teacher. Joy

claims to be "pretty satisfied" as a teacher but adds that this feeling waxes and wanes depending on work issues arising during an academic year. She believes teacher job satisfaction is "probably the most important thing," explaining that if a teacher is not satisfied with their work environment, it can become detrimental to the learning experience for a teacher to project that dissatisfaction onto their students, who must buy into what is being taught to them.

Edward

Edward is a special education teacher in a Category A school. His decision to become a teacher of students with special needs was largely influenced by the fact that he was himself a student with special needs as a child. He explained, "I was the special education kid, and so as I thought about it later in my life, what better person to teach such students than somebody who's been there before." He believes his ability to relate to his students personally brings about the most significant degree of satisfaction as a teacher. At the same time, several issues of resources and curricular support stir up dissatisfaction.

Megan

As a veteran teacher in a Category A school, Megan initially aspired to be a writer. A college professor influenced her to consider teaching the art of writing, which set her on a path to becoming a high school teacher. She reflected, "I took some education courses as an undergraduate, and then I just fell in love." Fostering positive relationships with students represents a primary source of satisfaction for Megan. She expressed that it is always encouraging when she can create the conditions to establish those positive relationships. She also said that particular issues with the administration at the school are sources of dissatisfaction and frustration because the nature of those issues impedes the year-to-year continuity needed for teachers to be effective and thrive.

Gabriella

As an ESL teacher in a Category A school, Gabriella's trajectory toward choosing a career as a teacher was a mix between practical family considerations and personal immigration history. She explained how she always believed that the work schedule of a teacher was conducive to raising children and having a family. As a first-generation American whose non-English speaking parents immigrated to the U.S., Gabriella expressed how she could relate well to ESL students in the classroom. She expressed general satisfaction with being a teacher but feels frustrated and demoralized by the ongoing school administration issues at her school.

Thomas

Thomas is a mathematics teacher in a Category B school (well-funded). After working in law and accounting, he decided on a career in education because he was "really interested in showing people, especially young people, how to be successful in math in both traditional and non-traditional ways." Thomas's passion for teaching was spurred by his excitement and enjoyment when he could effectively give students the tools necessary to succeed in math and the learning experience in school more broadly. He was deeply satisfied as a teacher at the school and believed that the school was very well- allocated financially. The perception of being well-funded represents a source of job satisfaction for Thomas who always has whatever he feels he needs in terms of teaching resources and curricular support. He stated, "It becomes one less thing I have to worry about, so then I can focus better and more on teaching."

Yolanda

Yolanda teaches mathematics at a Category B school and expresses that the sheer "love of teaching others" was her primary influence for becoming a teacher. Her great source of inspiration continued to be inspirational teachers she had in the past that were able "to make you

feel good about learning." Yolanda explained that she felt great satisfaction being a teacher at the school, claiming, "I have the best job because you go to work, and you just get to be you." She believed job satisfaction is critical for teachers and that it serves as the energy needed to teach effectively.

Solomon

As a music teacher in a Category B school, Solomon expressed that he experienced a "very deep satisfaction" being a teacher at the school. His journey to becoming a high school teacher began as a college instructor of music education. He found himself "envious" of his music education students who were putting into practice the dynamic ideas taught in the college courses in high school classrooms.

Looking back at the experience he had teaching music education, Solomon described how, as he observed his former students who went on to teach in high school, it gradually dawned on him, stating, "that's exactly what I should be doing, so it was then and there that I decided to take my turn and switched from teaching college to teaching high school." His deep satisfaction from teaching at the school combines the "closeness and impact on students" he believes he has had as a teacher coupled with the uplifting working conditions experienced daily.

Charlie

Charlie is a veteran music teacher in one of the Category B schools. After considering law school and a potential career as a political scientist, he decided to become a teacher of his true passion, which had always been music. He reported being generally happy teaching at the school. He believed job satisfaction is critically important to the teaching profession, saying, "I think if a teacher is not happy, it's seen in their teaching, and more importantly, the kids can see it." Charlie attributed his general satisfaction at the school to the positive working conditions,

wherein he expresses that the school "never denied me anything I needed" regarding resources and curricular support. The positive working conditions allow Charlie to focus more intently on his students, whom he described as "really wonderful, and if it weren't for those relationships with them, I probably would've chosen another career."

Analysis

The data analysis process was ongoing and coincided with general data collection for this study. As expressed in Chapter Three, semi-structured interviews represented the most appropriate option for this study because of their inherently flexible nature, which created the conditions that allowed me to apply my pre-established interview protocol. The flexible nature of the interview also enabled me to develop new prompts during the data collection and analysis process. Each interview lasted 45-60 minutes and was conducted and recorded on the Zoom platform. Afterward, I transcribed the audio from these interviews using Rev.com.

I coded the first transcripts by hand developing codes for each of the nine interviews based on the framework and interview protocol. I first wrote these initial codes in the margins of the transcript and then typed and organized them in a separate Word document. The nature of the study required a bifurcation of the sample so that there were two categories of teachers (five underfunded and four well-funded) and two different analyses, which I later merged. The next step involved establishing codes reflecting each of the two categories (underfunded and well-funded). In the end, 11 codes for each category were created and written out on a separate Word document. Tables 3 and 4, respectively, show the codes for each category. The codes emanated from the established protocols and reflected the responses given in the interviews conducted between April and July of 2023. The 11 codes for each category (i.e., underfunded and well-funded) situated themselves within five general areas based on the interview protocols.

Table 3: Coding for Underfunded Category

TOPIC (derived from interview data)	CODE
General feeling of satisfaction as a teacher	<i>Generally satisfied</i>
Importance of job satisfaction	<i>Extremely important</i>
Perception of how well school is funded	<i>Fairly well-funded</i> Sub Code: <i>Feel more is needed to meet teaching needs</i>
Effect of funding on teaching	<i>Mostly positive effect</i> Sub Code: <i>Feel more could improve satisfaction</i>
Effect of funding on overall job satisfaction	<i>Mainly frustrating, adversely effects job satisfaction</i>
Perception of school building, physical plant, and facilities.	<i>Great building and working environment.</i> Sub Code: <i>Could be better</i>
Effect of school building, physical plant, and facilities on sense of job satisfaction	<i>Greatly enhances job satisfaction</i> Sub Code: <i>Quite disappointing</i>
Allocation and availability of resources and materials for curricular support	<i>Largely inadequate bc poorly administered</i>
Impact of allocation and availability of resources for	<i>Source of dissatisfaction</i>

Table 4: Coding for Well-Funded Category

TOPIC (derived from interview data)	CODE
General feeling of satisfaction as a teacher	<i>Deeply satisfied</i>
Importance of job satisfaction	<i>Requirement on deepest level</i>
Perception of how well school is funded	<i>Excellently funded</i>
Effect of funding on teaching	<i>Very positive, never want for anything</i>
Effect of funding on overall job satisfaction	<i>Insanely great</i>
Perception of school building, physical plant, and facilities.	<i>Superb and well maintained</i>
Effect of school building, physical plant, and facilities on sense of job satisfaction	<i>Feels great on a daily basis</i>
Allocation and availability of resources and materials for curricular support	<i>Great feeling, always get whatever we want</i>
Impact of allocation and availability of resources for curricular support on job satisfaction	<i>Great satisfaction, creates homeostasis in classroom</i>
Perception of availability of professional development and career growth opportunities at school	<i>Generally adequate</i>
Effect of school's availability of professional development and career growth opportunities on job satisfaction	<i>Moderately affects satisfaction</i>

General Satisfaction

Codes stemming from this area involved teachers expressing their feelings of how satisfied they were working in their current school and how happy they were in having chosen a career in education more generally. The codes from this area also entailed teachers sharing their views on how important job satisfaction is in teaching and the degree to which the element of job satisfaction is to teach effectively.

Perceptions of School Funding and its Effects

Codes associated with this area deal with the perceptions teachers in both categories (underfunded and well-funded) had of the financing of the school in which they teach. Teachers expressed thoughts on the funding adequacy of their schools. This area also involved teachers' perspectives on how their school's funding affected their day-to-day teaching and how the funding influenced their sense of job satisfaction.

School Building, Physical Plant, and Facilities

Codes grounded in this area reflect teachers' perceptions of their physical work environment. Specifically, teachers in both categories shared their views on the nature of the physical plant and facilities of the school building in which they teach, describing how these affect their level of job satisfaction.

Resources and Curricular Support

Codes from this area address teachers' feelings on how well the school where they teach provides them with resources and curricular support. Teachers expressed their perceptions of how well the school provided them with access to classroom resources to teach their subject. The codes linked with this area shed light on the effect that the allocation of school resources and curricular support has on job satisfaction.

Professional Development and Opportunities for Career Growth

Codes derived from this area reflect teachers' views on how well the school in which they teach makes professional development and opportunities for career growth available. Teachers described their feelings on the school's availability and effectiveness of options presented to them at the school where they currently teach. Teachers also revealed how they believed the possibilities and opportunities for professional development and career growth affect their job

satisfaction.

Table 5 on the next page represents the frequency of all the codes and subcodes that emerged from the interview data. The Dedoose-generated table grouped all nine study participants. The table shows the number of times a particular code or subcode arose in the interviews, citing the frequency of each code and subcode mentioned and alluded to by each teacher participant. Table 5 provides a big-picture analysis of the interview data.

Table 5: Frequency for All Codes and Sub-Codes in Interview Data

Table 5

TEACHERS	CODES																Totals										
	Ample availability and opportunity	Deeply satisfied	Excellentlly funded	Extremely important	Fairly well-funded	Feel more is needed to meet teaching needs	Feel great on daily basis	Generally adequate	Generally satisfied	Great building, facilities, and working environment	Could be better	Great feeling, always get whatever we want	Great satisfaction, creates homeostasis in classroom	Greatly enhances satisfaction	Quite disappointing	Insanely great		Largely inadequate bc poorly administered	Little to no effect on job satisfaction	Mainly frustrating, adversely effects	Moderately affects satisfaction	Mostly positive affects job satisfaction	Feel more could improve satisfaction	Requirement on the deepest level	Source of dissatisfaction	Superb and very well maintained	Very positive, never want for anything
Edward				1		1			1	1				1		1						1		1			8
Charlie		1					1	1				1	1			1							2		1	1	10
Megan	2			1	1				1	1				1			1	1	2		1			1			13
Solomon		2	2				1	1				1	1			1				1			1		2	1	14
Yolanda		3	2	1			1	1				1	1			1				1			1		1	1	15
Loretta				1		3			1		1				1				2			1					10
Joy	1			2	2				1		1				1		1	1			2			1			13
Thomas		1	2				1	1					1							1					1	1	10
Gabriella	1				2				2	2				2			3	1	2		1			3			19
Totals	4	7	6	6	5	4	4	4	6	4	2	3	4	4	2	3	6	3	6	3	4	2	5	6	5	4	

These codes were uploaded into Dedoose and implemented to code the interview transcripts. Upon completion of coding using Dedoose, I exported the codes, then reviewed the excerpts and combined the codes into themes that cut across the collected data.

Themes emanating from the codes fell into three general sub-sets. The first set of themes fall within the category of teachers working in the underfunded schools. The next set of themes occupy the category of teachers working in well-funded schools. Finally, the last set of themes represents the intersectionality of the two categories of teachers and were classified in this study as "shared themes."

The next step of the data analysis involved the creation of Tables 6 and 7. The two tables separate the findings from Table 5, which included the entire sample, and bifurcates the teacher participants into the two categories of well-funded and under-funded, showing how interview responses express some of the teachers' different experiences based on school funding and funding-related issues. The tables show the contrast in code application between the two categories of schools as they express the divergent experiences and perceptions regarding funding issues from the teachers who work in them. The tables also show the themes that emerged from the codes. Table 6 on the next page reveals the codes and sub-codes of teachers in the underfunded category, showing how they came to form the themes associated with the category.

Table 6: Codes and Sub-Codes for Teachers in Under Funded Schools

UNDER FUNDED SCHOOLS												
Table 6	THEME #1	THEME #2	THEME #3								THEME #4	
THEMES	Feeling generally satisfied with being a teacher broadly & with teaching in current school specifically	High level of importance placed on job satisfaction & learning experience	Teacher dissatisfaction with administration's lack of consistency and follow through thus affecting perceptions of funding, resource and curricular support as well as effectiveness of professional development and perceptions of opportunities for career growth.								Mixed perceptions on bldg. facilities. Some expressing great satisfaction and other expressing dissatisfaction.	
CODES		Extremely important	Fairly well funded	Mostly Positive effect	Mainly frustrating adversely effects job satisfaction	Largely inadequate bc poorly administered	Source of dissatisfaction	Ample availability but poorly administered	Little to no effect on job satisfaction	Great bldg. and working environment	Greatly enhances job satisfaction	
CODES	Generally satisfied		Feel more is needed to meet teaching needs	Feel more could improve satisfaction						SUBCODE could be better	SUBCODE Quite Disappointing	
SCHOOL	TEACHER	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
BLUE	Loretta	1	1	3 SUBCODE	1	2					1 SUBCODE	1 SUBCODE
RED	Megan	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1
RED	Edward	1	1	1	1 SUBCODE		1	1			1	1
RED	Gabriella	2		2	1	2	3	3	1	1	2	2
GREEN	Joy	1	2	2	2		1	1	1	1	1 SUBCODE	1 SUBCODE
TOTAL		6	5	9	6	6	6	6	4	3	6	6

Underfunded Themes

The Red School situates itself in a small working-class neighborhood classified as a hamlet on Long Island and is approximately one and a half square miles in size. The community once had a predominantly White population in the decades before World War II. However, White-flight and real estate blockbusting became significant issues in the post-WWII suburban housing boom in the 1950s and 1960s, when the community saw an influx of African-American

residents. The community's roots stem from the business practice of blockbusting, which refers to how real estate agents and property developers persuaded residents in a particular area to sell their property at below-market rates by fearmongering the homeowners by telling them that racial minorities would soon move into their communities. Those engaging in the practice would then proceed to sell those same homes and properties at inflated prices to African-American families seeking upward mobility. Blockbusting proliferated after post-WWII prohibitions on explicitly segregationist real estate practices took effect. The community where the Red School is situated contains an African-American population of approximately 70% and a Latinx population of about 24%. The school's racial demographics mirror the figures of the community. Over the last decade, the high school has undergone several structural updates, making the building, classrooms, and overall physical plant attractive and comfortable for teachers working in the school and the attending students. It resembles a typical American suburban high school. While the physical building facilities have seen marked improvements, administration attrition rates have plagued the high school and represent a primary source of frustration for teachers at the school, causing a persistent and acute feeling of disruption to the flow of the academic year. Over the last several years, different principals and assistant principals have left their positions at the school numerous times. In two instances, principals vacated their posts in the middle of an academic year. Teachers at the school are left to scramble due to the disruption caused by the departure of administrators and the need to adjust suddenly to a new incoming set of administrators.

As shown in Table 6 above, four themes emerged from coding the interview data with teachers from Category A. The first theme expressed the view that teachers felt generally satisfied with having made the career choice of teaching and, more specifically, felt generally

satisfied working in the current school. The theme emerged from the first code of the data interview entitled, "*General feeling of satisfaction as a teacher.*" Teachers in this category shared feelings that the daily interactions and relationships with their students resided at the source of their general satisfaction. Gabriella from the Red school stated, "I love the kids. It makes me feel young even though I know I'm not." Joy from the Green school expressed that she experienced a relatively high level of satisfaction, stating, "I would say right now I'm still pretty satisfied with my job. I would say if I had to rank it on a scale from one to 10, I'm probably like a seven and a half or eight."

The second theme addressed the importance of job satisfaction in the learning experience and dealt with how critical teachers believed the element was in its influence on teaching effectiveness. The second theme revealed that teachers place high importance on job satisfaction and believe it is critical to enhancing students' learning. Moreover, several teachers in the underfunded category described that job satisfaction was also essential to retaining teachers and countering attrition. A substantially large population of millennials characterizes the Red School. Currently, nearly half of the teacher population at the school falls in the millennial age category, and Megan from the Red school raised the issue of how this demographic factor affects work attitudes and the unwillingness to remain in a job that does not satisfy them. Megan, a millennial herself, said, "We are not going to be miserable. So, if we're not happy somewhere, we're going to leave."

The third theme centered on the issue of school administration at the various schools in the underfunded category. The third theme revolved around the topics of "perception of how well school is funded," "effects of funding on teaching," "effects of funding on overall job satisfaction," and "allocation and availability of resources and materials for curricular support,"

and "impact of allocation and availability of resources for curricular support on job satisfaction," "perception of availability of professional development and career growth opportunities," and "effect of school's availability of professional development and career growth opportunities on job satisfaction." The theme of school administration formed from an amalgamation of the following codes: "*fairly well-funded*," "*feel more is needed to meet teaching needs*," "*mainly frustrating*," "*adversely affects job satisfaction*," "*largely inadequate because poorly administered*," "*source of dissatisfaction*," "*ample availability and opportunity but poorly administered*," and "*little to no effect on job satisfaction*." The interview data of teachers in the underfunded category squarely addresses school administration issues in all the schools. These administration issues fuel much of the frustration and dissatisfaction experienced by teachers, forming the crux of the third theme.

The context of the Red School regarding the issue of administration bears tremendous significance to job satisfaction. Over the last five years, the Red School has experienced nine departures of principals and assistant principals. In just the previous two years, the school has seen 3 top leveled administrators vacate their posts in the middle of an academic year. The attrition situation at the school resembles a revolving door, giving rise to a frustrating sense of disruption among teachers. The high attrition rates of administrators in the Red School create a lack of consistency and follow through, affecting resource and curricular support, the effectiveness of professional development, and feelings of existing opportunities for career growth. The constant change in administration at the school is detrimental to teachers and negatively affects how they feel about their job satisfaction. While teachers in the Red School reported relatively positive perceptions of how well-funded their school was and expressed that the level of funding has a mostly positive effect on teaching, job satisfaction was negatively affected because of ongoing

school administration issues. The root of the job dissatisfaction for teachers at the Red School emanates from the frustration that teachers feel regarding the high attrition rates of administration. According to teachers at the Red school, the high turnover rate of administrators creates discontinuity among teachers, affecting their ability to access resources and materials for curricular support on a consistent basis. Megan explains that the issue of funding itself is not the source of the dissatisfaction but an issue of financing accessibility.

Moreover, with the high attrition rate of administration at the Red School, necessary funds for teaching become difficult to access. The hardship wrought by the attrition crisis at the school has made it next to impossible to cultivate a basic level of consistency with the administration. A consistent administration would allow an established curriculum to become normalized and make it possible to make progress. A consistent administration is required to help teachers access the necessary funds, which could increase satisfaction. Megan explained, "I just don't think teachers understand how to access the money because the curriculum keeps changing with a new incoming administration."

The Blue School sits on the eastern section of Long Island's south shore in a community that is home to a substantial population of working-class immigrants from Central and South America. The unassuming appearance of the school building is much like a "tale of two cities" where one section of the building has been graced with recent upgrades in both educational technology and newly renovated classrooms and hallways. In contrast, the other, much older section of the school building continues to experience significant physical deterioration and is beset by outdated technology and classroom resources. Beyond just the poor conditions of the plant, teachers at the school report having to use their own money to purchase necessary school supplies and resources. Loretta, who works in the older and neglected portion of the school,

expressed dissatisfaction regarding the perception of funding and its relationship with job satisfaction. Loretta stated, "I do not feel we have adequate funding." According to Loretta, the issue of funding at the Blue School directly affects her teaching as a Special Education teacher. "*Feel more is needed to meet teaching needs*" and "*Feel more (funding) could improve satisfaction*" are the sub-codes that emanated from her interview addressing the topics of perceptions of funding and the effect that these perceptions have on job satisfaction. Loretta expressed that she often buys necessary and needed resources on her own and pays for these resources out of her pocket. She frustratingly expressed how demoralizing it is to use personal monies to purchase needed materials for her classroom. During one academic year, she described how she went out and purchased chairs for her students, "There was a place that was going out of business, and I bought the chairs for my classroom there because I didn't have enough chairs."

She linked her job dissatisfaction with funding and believed the administration should do more to recognize teachers for their efforts. Loretta expressed her frustration with the administration, revealing her pessimistic outlook about filling out supply and resource forms at the end of a school year because she knows the administration will not respond to or comply with requests, saying, "I don't fill it out anymore 'cause I've been there long enough and I know what the outcome is, and I guess I'm not that optimistic."

The fourth theme that emerged from the coding dealt with the building facilities and the physical work environment of the schools. In this last theme, teachers expressed mixed perceptions of building facilities. Some teachers expressed great satisfaction and positive effects on teaching. In contrast, others expressed a dimmer view of the physical work environment, revealing that the school building and its facilities were a source of dissatisfaction with adverse

teaching effects. "*Great building and working environment*" and "*greatly enhances job satisfaction*" are the codes categorized under the fourth theme. While the Red School remains besieged with severe administration attrition issues, the building and physical plant of the school have undergone significant improvements in all areas recently, from classrooms to technology, eating and athletic facilities, and the library. Landscaping updates and newly paved walkways and parking lots make the school stand out in the working-class neighborhood in which it sits. In addition, the school is also now equipped with central air conditioning. The infrastructure renovations have increased job satisfaction among Red School teachers. Megan stated, "The facilities are gorgeous, and I feel I can use the facilities for anything really (for my teaching)." Gabriella expressed appreciation for how the building facilities and physical work environment contribute to her job satisfaction at the school, expressing gratitude for the air-conditioned school. "It's a new building... the building's air-conditioned. This, to me, is like a luxury. It's a new building. I appreciate it, I don't take it for granted."

On the other hand, the Green School leaves a lot to be desired regarding the condition of the building and physical plant. Upon first approaching the school from the outside, the appearance could be graded as average and acceptable. Once inside the school, however, it becomes apparent that repair and renovation are needed. The school has not been painted since it opened over thirty-five years ago. Walls in specific corridors of the school appear dirty, and the condition of some sections where the walls connect with the ceiling demonstrate an obvious need to refurbish. The flooring of significant portions of the school is worn and needs replacement. Moreover, in certain sections of the school, the stairwells are somewhat unhinged, creating a feeling of instability and calling into question the safety of part of the stairs.

"*Could be better*" and "*quite disappointing*" are the subcodes categorized under the fourth

theme. Joy from the Green School expressed disappointment with the state of the physical work environment of the school building facilities and how this affects her job satisfaction. She believes that the dilapidated school directly links to funding issues, saying, "You're not proud of the school, and it all goes back to the funding as custodial staff was cut, and they kind of stopped doing some things."

The themes that emerged from the underfunded category depicted various levels of dissatisfaction stemming from both difficulties with school administration and factors involving building facilities and the physical work environment. The themes that emerged are financial and demonstrated the negative effects of unequal school funding. The next section explains the results of the codes and themes which emerged from the teachers in the well-funded category.

Table 7 reveals the codes and sub-codes of teachers in the well-funded category. The table reveals both the frequency of the codes and sub-codes and how they came to form the themes associated with the category of teachers in the well-funded category.

Table 7: Codes and Sub-Codes of Teachers on Well Funded Category

WELL FUNDED SCHOOLS

Table 7		THEME #1	THEME #2	THEME #3					THEME #5	THEME #6		
THEMES		All-around highly elevated level of satisfaction teaching in current school & with decision to enter teaching	High level of importance on job satisfaction for teachers & believed to be critical for learning experience	Great satisfaction with overall funding of school, positively affecting teaching experience			Extremely content with condition of building facilities contributing to a fuller feeling of job satisfaction		Abundant resources & consistent curricular support foster job satisfaction as teachers can focus better on teaching	Professional development and career growth opportunities are adequate & somewhat effective but little to no effect on job satisfaction		
CODES				Excellently funded	Very positive, never want for anything		Superb & well maintained		Great feeling always get whatever we want		Generally adequate	
CODES		Deeply satisfied	Requirement on deepest level			Insanely great		Feels great on a daily basis	Great satisfaction creates homeostasis in classroom			Moderately affects job satisfaction
SCHOOL	TEACHER	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Yellow	Charlie	1	2		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Yellow	Solomon	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1		1
Orange	Thomas	1	1	2	1		1	1		1	1	1
Orange	Yolanda	3	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
TOTAL		7	5	6	4	3	5	4	3	4	3	3

Well-Funded Themes

At the Yellow School, state-of-the-art classrooms are fully equipped with sophisticated educational technology and abundant classroom resources, providing teachers with a full range of options to optimize the learning experience for students. Situated in an affluent community on the north shore of Long Island, the fully bricked Yellow school sits handsomely on a sprawling

10-acre parcel of land with manicured lawns, beautifully landscaped trees, and wrought iron fencing that winds around the front perimeter of the school property, giving the appearance and air of a stately New England college preparatory school. The school has an Olympic-sized swimming pool for the various aquatic teams in the well-endowed athletic program. The hallways of the school are lined with immaculately maintained student lockers, which are preserved daily by a specifically hired painter who spends his evenings touching up the lockers to look perfect for the students upon their return in the morning. Teachers at the school feel tremendous pride arriving at work each morning. The racial and socio-economic breakdown of the school's demographics reflect the community in which the school is located, wherein about 80% of the population is White, and approximately 10% are of Asian descent.

The Orange school resembles the Yellow school in its socio-economic and racial composition, abundance of school resources, and the well-funded nature of the school itself. Nestled in another affluent community on the North Shore, in an area once referred to as the Gold Coast, the Orange School is among the most well-funded schools in the county. Teachers at the school expressed in multiple ways how satisfied they are working there and how their satisfaction contributes to their feelings that students' learning experience benefits from teachers being solidly comfortable and persistently happy.

As shown in Table 7 above, six themes emerged from coding the interview data with teachers working in well-funded schools. The first theme revealed that teachers in the category experienced an all-around highly elevated satisfaction with teaching in their current school and the decision to enter into the teaching profession more broadly. Solomon from the Yellow school stated, "I think in retrospect, when looking back on a year or looking back on a few years of teaching, for me it's almost two decades of private teaching, that's deeply satisfying...I am deeply

satisfied." Similarly, Yolanda from the Orange school described her level of satisfaction: "I always tell people I have the best job because it's just like, you go into work and you just get to be you." She continued by expressing, "I find it extremely rewarding. One of the best parts of teaching is that every day's a new day, and every year you get a new set of kids, and it's just exciting."

The second theme dealt with the importance of job satisfaction. Teachers in the well-funded category placed great importance on the factor of job satisfaction as the data demonstrated that they believed it to be critical to enhancing the learning experience for students as well as being able to teach effectively. The second theme stems from the code entitled, *requirement on deepest level* as the interview data reflects these sentiments. The upbeat tone among teachers in the Yellow and Orange Schools is palpable as it reflects a particular joy about teaching that sees the work of a teacher as a profession in and of itself. Teachers at the school express that the deep sense of happiness that they experience daily revolves around the craft of teaching itself. The positive daily outlook expressed by teachers in well-funded schools demonstrates a type of happiness that revels in teaching as a profession and leads to convictions that they are engaged in genuinely meaningful work. The deep levels of satisfaction experienced by teachers in both the Orange and Yellow Schools become necessary for teaching to be done effectively. Solomon expressed from this perspective that "satisfaction is a requirement on that deepest level." Charlie from the Yellow school highlighted the importance of job satisfaction and its effects on students, saying, "I think if a teacher's not happy, it's seen in their teaching, and the kids can see it."

The third theme from the coding stems from teacher's perceptions of how well their school is funded and how this affects the overall teaching experience. The three codes that form the theme are *excellently funded*, *very positive*, *never want for anything*, and *insanely great*.

The Orange School represents one of the county's highest and most well-funded schools. The financially well-endowed school provides teachers and students with a wide range of highly advanced resources and curricular support. From state-of-the-art classroom technology to updated athletic facilities and a steady and consistent stream of educational field trips to enhance learning, the Orange School rates among the highest academic achieving schools in the State. The affluent look and feel of the Orange School and the well-funded financial reality positively influence the work experience of teachers in the school as they feel genuine satisfaction and contentment with all that is made available for teaching. Teachers at the school regularly feel that there are always plenty of options available to obtain upgrades in technology tools and other resources for curricular support and that as long as they are within reason and can be rationalized, the school administration will procure them and make it available for them and their classroom. Teachers at the Orange School do not ever worry about not being able to have what they feel they need for their students. Yolanda explained, "I can't say that we ever want for anything. I never feel like I couldn't get that for my kids [students]." In the interview, she continued expressing her positive perceptions of how her school is funded and how that affects both job satisfaction and the teaching itself, saying, "As far as my classroom, when I need something, I usually get it." Thomas from the Orange school echoed the funding perceptions of the teachers in the other schools, stating, "I think they (the school) are very well allocated financially." Thomas continued to express his job satisfaction and positive effect on his teaching in the context of school funding. Thomas also expressed how the adequate funding of the school makes his teaching more effective. He explained, "There's one less thing to worry about procuring for my classroom and students and I can focus on teaching itself."

The fourth theme from the coding emanates from the topic of the state of the school

building, physical plant, and overall conditions of the teaching facilities. Specifically, the theme centered on teachers' perception of the school building, physical plant, and facilities and how this affects their level of job satisfaction. *Superb and well-maintained* and *Feels great on a daily basis* are the two codes representing the theme's cornerstones. The interview data of the theme reflects that teachers in the well-funded category are highly content with the condition of building facilities, which contributes to a fuller feeling of job satisfaction. The Yellow School, in particular, reflects the greatest degree of satisfaction in this area. Teachers at the school walk through the halls daily and see the immaculate state of the waxed floors. A full-time painter named George does touch-up work by repainting the lockers and just going around the building to make sure that things look fresh, and when anything such as lockers, railings, and walls get scuffed up, repaints them.

The fifth theme developed from codes that addressed the topic of the availability and allocation of teaching resources and curricular support. The theme reflects the view that teachers in the well-funded category perceive that abundant resources and curricular support are provided at the school, which fosters enhanced job satisfaction as teachers can focus better on teaching. *Great feeling, always get whatever we want*, and *Great satisfaction, creates homeostasis in classroom* are the two codes that form the theme's basis. Teachers in both the Orange and Yellow Schools never feel they will be unable to receive what they believe they need for their classroom and what would benefit their students. The schools' well-funded nature and past precedence make it a given that they will receive whatever they request regarding teaching resources and curricular support. The state of affairs at both well-funded schools creates the conditions for teachers to focus entirely on their teaching instead of dividing their attention between the task of teaching and procuring resources to teach.

Thomas expressed how the abundant allocation and availability of resources and curricular support contribute to his ability to teach effectively and elevate his job satisfaction to heights that he could never experience at a previous school he taught, which qualified as an underfunded school. Thomas explained how it became necessary to hoard materials and resources to save them at the underfunded school because of not knowing if they would be available in the future. He explained that,

At my other job, I would hoard stuff because I was not sure when we would get to request more... But here, I already have this stuff; everything is always available, so now I can just go straight into focusing on how I can improve my teaching instead of focusing on how I can financially budget for pencils or other supplies and resources.

Charlie from the Yellow School expressed, "I don't think they've ever denied me anything in terms of books, method books, and resource materials." Solomon added to the theme's substance, saying, "We tend to get what we want and need."

The sixth theme evolved from codes addressing teacher perception of professional development, the availability of career growth opportunities, and the effects on job satisfaction. The theme revealed that professional development and availability of career growth opportunities are adequate at the schools in the well-funded category and that they are somewhat effective but have little to no effect on job satisfaction. *Generally adequate* and *Moderately affects satisfaction* are the two codes that form the basis for the theme. Charlie expressed, "When it comes to professional development, I would say it's okay but probably not great all the time. It's been too general and not specific or relevant to our future situation." Thomas stated the following about the Orange school: "We do have some professional development, and it's okay." He added, "In terms of the school going out of its way to say, `here are PDs that you should go

to'... That didn't happen too much, but what they offered was okay and somewhat useful. Solomon expressed, "I found that for certain topics, I would like more, but the administrations for both the middle and high school have been somewhat responsive to responding to teacher's input, and overall, it's okay."

The themes that emerged from the well-funded category depicted various levels of satisfaction. The themes that emerged are financial and demonstrated how the effects of funding can positively influence feelings of satisfaction on the part of teachers who work in those schools. The next section explains the result from the codes and themes that situated themselves in both categories of teachers, referred to in this study as Shared Themes.

Table 8 found below, reveals the codes and sub-codes that emerged from the interview data and how they came to form a set of Shared Themes between the underfunded and well-funded categories.

Table 8: Shared Themes for Under-Funded and Well-Funded Schools

Table 8	THEME #1 FROM UNDER-FUNDED	THEME #1 FROM WELL-FUNDED		THEME #2 UNDER-FUNDED & WELL FUNDED
THEMES	Feeling generally satisfied with being a teacher broadly and with teaching in current school	All-around highly elevated level of satisfaction teaching in current school & with decision to enter teaching		High level of importance placed on job satisfaction for teachers and important for learning experience
CODES	Generally satisfied	Deeply satisfied		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extremely important (under-funded) • Requirement on deepest level (well-funded)

Shared Themes

Table 8 shows two shared themes from coding the interview data between the underfunded and well-funded categories. The first shared theme dealt with the general satisfaction experienced by teachers in the two categories. The theme stemmed from

the area wherein teachers expressed their feelings of how satisfied they were working in their current school and how happy they were having chosen a career in education more generally. The interview data demonstrated that teachers in both categories reported feeling satisfaction in the current school where they teach and feeling satisfied in having chosen a career in education more broadly. *Generally satisfied* is the code that established the theme for teachers in the underfunded category. As described earlier, the interview data revealed that the underfunded teachers experienced general levels of satisfaction in both their work in their current school and their chosen careers in education. Similarly, teachers in the well-funded category also expressed satisfaction in their current schools and with their chosen teaching profession. *Deeply satisfied* is the code that established the theme for teachers in the well-funded category. Interview data revealed that the well-funded teachers experienced satisfaction in both their work in their current school and with having chosen teaching as a profession. The codes associated with the shared theme do suggest a difference in degree. While teachers in both categories expressed overall job satisfaction, interview data revealed that teachers in the well-funded category experienced a deeper sense of satisfaction in their current school than did teachers in the underfunded ones. The coding for the two categories reflects the difference in degree. The difference in qualitative degree reflects itself in the coding of the topic as I categorized teachers in the underfunded category as *Generally satisfied*, and I coded job satisfaction with teachers in the well-funded as *Deeply satisfied*.

The second shared theme between the two categories involved the importance of job satisfaction in teachers' work experience. Teachers in both categories expressed

that job satisfaction was not only critical but highly important, and both sets of teachers placed a high level of importance on the factor, believing it to be critical to enhancing the learning experience for students. I coded the interview data for teachers in the well-funded category as *Requirement on deepest level*. Additionally, I coded the interview data for teachers in the underfunded category as *Extremely important*.

An important divergent theme emerged from the set of shared themes described above, which serves to answer one of the associated research questions of the study regarding the differences in teacher job satisfaction in underfunded and well-funded schools. As stated, while teachers in both categories expressed overall job satisfaction, the well-funded category experienced a more profound sense of satisfaction than those in the underfunded ones. Beyond just this difference in degree or depth of job satisfaction, the findings also revealed a very different kind of satisfaction that directly accounts for the differences in degrees of job satisfaction between teachers of the two categories. The divergent theme is that the root of job satisfaction for teachers in the underfunded grounds itself in perceiving and feeling that the endeavor to teach reflects a *mission to teach* and to make a positive difference in students' lives. *Teaching as mission* embodies an approach towards teaching guided by a teacher's desire to be there for their student and to enhance the learning experience for them in a supportive way. *Teaching as mission* represents the soil in which the flowers of job satisfaction experienced by teachers in the underfunded category took root and blossomed. Teachers in the underfunded category experience job satisfaction primarily because they derive contentment from believing they are fulfilling their *mission* as teachers.

On the other hand, the satisfaction experienced by teachers in the well-funded category comes from the simple sense of joy they experience in the profession. Job satisfaction for

teachers in the well-funded category comes from the joy of being in the teaching profession in and of itself. *Teaching as a profession* and deriving joy in being members of the profession encapsulates the job satisfaction experienced by teachers in the well-funded category. While teachers in both categories reported being happy and satisfied with their work, the underlying reason for the satisfaction diverged. Teachers in the underfunded category derive their satisfaction from fulfilling the mission to teach, while teachers in the well-funded category experience job satisfaction because of the simple joy they experience in being members of the teaching profession in and of itself.

Conclusion

The analysis of the data revealed that in several key areas, school funding perceptions influence teacher job satisfaction. The codes that formed Theme# 3 with teachers in the underfunded schools are grounded in financial issues such as the general perception of how adequately the school is funded, the availability of teaching resources and curricular support, and the condition of the school building and physical plant. Each of these issues contributed to the overall dissatisfaction experienced by teachers in the underfunded schools. Conversely, the data revealed that teachers in well-funded schools experienced relatively high levels of job satisfaction, as reflected in the codes from the interview data. The data revealed that funding-related issues and perceptions directly affect the satisfaction teachers in the well-funded category experience in their schools.

The next chapter addresses the main research question and associated questions posed at the beginning of the study in light of the findings that emerged from the study. The final chapter also addresses policy implications and recommendations, practical implications for education, and the role of school administration in relationship to teachers.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Unequal school funding is a phenomenon that promotes an unjust educational structure where certain public schools receive higher levels of financial support and resources while other schools receive lower levels. Education funding in New York and across the country relies heavily on local property taxes as the primary funding source. Furthermore, gerrymandered school district boundaries in New York State express and expose the inequality inherent in the practice as they cut sharply along race and class. Thus, communities of color and less affluent communities are at a disadvantage because they receive less funding than more affluent and predominantly White communities. According to the in-depth 2017 EdBuild study on school funding, "non-White school districts get \$23 billion less than White districts despite serving the same number of students." A much-overlooked component of unequal school funding is its effect on teacher job satisfaction in underfunded and well-funded schools in New York. As a teacher, this missing component formed the basis of my interest in learning more about the phenomenon as I sought to explore the detrimental effects of unequal school funding on education from within the context of the teacher experience broadly and teacher job satisfaction more specifically. The study aimed to shed light on the phenomenon from the teachers' perspective. I sought to explore how funding and perceptions of funding-related factors affect teachers' workplace satisfaction and morale and how this, in turn, shapes teacher perceptions and feelings regarding the quality of education they believe the students they teach receive.

Discussion of Findings

Upon analyzing the data from the interviews, two significant findings surfaced. The first finding revealed that teachers in well-funded schools experienced considerably greater job

satisfaction than in underfunded ones. The second finding showed a link between teacher job satisfaction and perceptions of school funding as it pertained to their respective schools. Reasons rendered by teachers in well-funded schools describing their high level of job satisfaction directly related to the perceptions they had of how well their school was funded, as the areas from which the job satisfaction dwells are financially related.

Both findings further revealed a difference in degree between teachers in the two categories when they both said they experienced job satisfaction in their current schools and were satisfied with having chosen teaching as a career. The data revealed that teachers in the well-funded category experienced a noticeably more profound sense of satisfaction than those in underfunded districts.

Finding 1: Teachers In Well-funded Schools Experience Greater Satisfaction Than Teachers in Underfunded Schools

The first finding demonstrated that teachers in the well-funded category experienced greater job satisfaction than teachers in the underfunded category. All the teachers in the well-funded category expressed vibrant satisfaction vis-à-vis the five general areas based on the interview protocols and from where I established the data coding. As previously stated, the five areas are:

1) *General Satisfaction*, 2) *Perceptions of school funding and its effects*, 3) *School building, physical plant, and facilities*, 4) *Resource and Curricular Support*, and 5) *Professional Development and Opportunities for Career Growth*.

Across the board and with all the teacher participants from the well-funded category, energetically positive feedback was given when responding to questions about job satisfaction in the context of the areas. In the six themes that emerged from the codes, teachers in the well-

funded category expressed all-around elevated levels of satisfaction with the overall funding of their school as they also described how extremely content they were about the condition of the physical plant and school building and how this enabled them to experience a fuller feeling of job satisfaction which positively affected their teaching experience. Resource and Curricular support was the most pronounced category related to teacher job satisfaction within the well-funded schools. The participants described the great feeling of knowing that they will always get whatever they want regarding resources, how this leads to creating homeostasis in the classroom and generates feelings of satisfaction. Teachers felt satisfaction knowing that they can more readily focus on the task of teaching rather than worrying about how they will go about acquiring the resources needed to teach.

The job dissatisfaction of teachers in the underfunded category stems from two sources, both of which connect to the issue of funding. The issue of administration lies at the root of one source of dissatisfaction. Teacher dissatisfaction with the administration's lack of consistency and follow-through has affected perceptions of funding, classroom resources, and curricular support. The frustration ultimately comes from the consistently high attrition rates of administrators. According to teachers, the high turnover rate of high-level administrators engenders tremendous discontinuity with teachers and their ability to access resources and materials for curricular support. Different perceptions on the part of teachers in the category of building facilities and the school's physical plant condition led some underfunded teachers to express that this contributed to their overall satisfaction as they voiced praise for the state of the school building. In contrast, other teachers of the category expressed their disappointment with the building facilities, describing how this created job dissatisfaction, adversely affecting their teaching experience.

Finding 2: Teacher Job Satisfaction Linked To Perceptions of School Funding

The second finding revealed that teachers' perception of how well they believe their school is funded does have a bearing on the degree of job satisfaction they experience. Data shows that funding is linked to job satisfaction, as well-funded school teachers expressed greater satisfaction than their counterparts in the underfunded category. The finding also revealed that the high degree of satisfaction experienced by teachers in the well-funded schools positively affected their teaching experience and contributed to their beliefs that they effectively enhanced their students' learning experience because of how amply and adequately their school is funded.

Dissatisfaction was more present within the category of underfunded teachers as funding-related factors at those schools contributed to the discontent. Interview data revealed several interrelated reasons teachers in underfunded schools experienced job dissatisfaction. Some of the teachers in the underfunded category felt that their school was underfunded and expressed that more financial support could help to improve satisfaction. Other teachers in the category revealed that administration issues lie at the root of the dissatisfaction and that there could be a financial link to and a possible explanation of those issues.

Research Questions and Findings

Drawing on the theory of Susan Moore Johnson, this study set out to answer several questions.

1. How do teachers in underfunded and well-funded schools describe their job satisfaction?
2. In what negative and positive ways do Johnson's (2006) benchmarks manifest themselves in the experience of teachers' job satisfaction?
3. What similarities and differences are evident in teachers' job satisfaction in underfunded and overfunded schools?

Teachers' descriptions of job satisfaction in underfunded and overfunded schools speak directly to Susan Moore Johnson's (2006) theory, which rests upon the fundamental premise that "the workplace can enable or constrain good teaching" (Johnson, 2006, p. 1). Her theory places teachers and the teacher experience at the center of the quality of education students receive. The primary focus of her work is that it highlights the point that recruiting teachers is not enough for sustained student success. Her work posits that retaining quality teachers within schools represents the most critical factor in student success. According to Johnson, "The context in which teachers work contributes to their willingness to enter and remain in teaching and to their success or failure in the classroom" (Johnson, 2006, p.15). As outlined earlier, Johnson put forth 11 benchmarks for school workplace conditions related directly to teacher retention, which was the basis of her theory. My study incorporated three of those 11 benchmarks. It employed their significance in the context of teacher job satisfaction in underfunded and well-funded schools within the phenomenon of unequal school funding. *Curricular support with resources and materials, facilities, and professional development* represent the three benchmarks employed in this study.

The findings revealed that for the two groups of teachers, unequal school funding does play a role in their job satisfaction. Teachers in the well-funded category experienced greater satisfaction in their work across all the benchmarks. The three benchmarks from Johnson's theory are financial and directly connected to funding concerns. Teachers in the well-funded category reported being more satisfied at their jobs than teachers in the underfunded category, expressing that the benchmarks of *building facilities, curricular support, and resources* represented the areas with the most significant expression of satisfaction. Teachers in the underfunded category explained that their most significant source of dissatisfaction stemmed

from inadequate experiences of curricular support and resources. At the same time, building facilities received mixed responses, as some teachers in the underfunded category described disappointment with the physical state of the building, which had negative effects on their sense of satisfaction. In contrast, other teachers in the category claimed that the building facilities contributed to their sense of satisfaction.

Johnson's benchmarks manifested themselves in both positive and negative ways within the context of teachers' job satisfaction. The benchmarks' positive manifestation occurred mainly with teachers in the well-funded category, as the study's findings revealed those teachers experienced a higher and more consistent degree of workplace satisfaction. Specifically, teachers in the well-funded category expressed satisfaction throughout the three Johnson benchmarks employed in the study. Teachers in the well-funded category unanimously described that they were delighted with the condition of building facilities. They expressed that this contributed to a fuller feeling of satisfaction as teachers working at the school. Furthermore, Johnson's benchmark of curricular support and adequacy of teaching resources met with vibrantly positive feedback from the teachers in this category as they all described how they were truly satisfied with the always available abundant resources and that this consistent curricular support steadily fostered job satisfaction because it enabled them to focus better on teaching. This benchmark had especially positive ramifications for job satisfaction as the teachers in the category expressed a steady feeling of job satisfaction because they always received whatever they wanted in terms of resources and curricular support. This satisfaction created homeostasis in the classroom because, again, it created the condition for teachers to be able to focus more exclusively on the task of teaching rather than being distracted by the need to focus on procuring resources and curricular support. The findings of the study demonstrated that Johnson's benchmark regarding professional

development also met with relatively positive feedback. However, with this particular benchmark, the level of job satisfaction was lower than the other two benchmarks as teachers in the category described that professional development and career growth opportunities were generally adequate and clarified that the opportunities moderately affected their job satisfaction.

The negative ways the benchmarks manifested themselves occurred mainly with teachers in the underfunded category, as the study's findings revealed that teachers in this category experienced more job dissatisfaction than teachers in the well-funded category. Specifically, teachers in the under-funded category expressed varying degrees of frustration within the context of the three benchmarks used in this study, and they described divergent reasons for the source of the frustration. The interview data showed that teachers in the underfunded category felt frustrated about the allocation, and availability of resources and materials for curricular support, and expressed dissatisfaction with their work as teachers in the school in the context of this benchmark posited by Johnson. As noted earlier, some teachers of the sample, particularly those of the Red school, pinpointed the source of the dissatisfaction with resources and materials for curricular support due to the ongoing dysfunction of the school administration. Specifically, due to the ongoing and frequent turnover rates of school administration, a tremendous lack of consistency and follow-through persists and thus negatively affects the availability and allocation of resources and support for curriculum. Administration issues, in turn, feed the teacher's job dissatisfaction at the school. Other teachers in the underfunded category expressed that they believed there was a lack of funding for resources and curricular support, as some had to spend their own monies to purchase what they felt was needed to teach effectively, thus forming another dimension of frustration and dissatisfaction.

Administration issues also negatively contribute to perceptions of Johnson's benchmark of the availability of professional development and opportunities for career growth. Teachers in the underfunded category acknowledged that while there is ample opportunity for professional development and career growth, the school administration does a poor job of making the opportunities available and relevant to teachers, which creates dissatisfaction and frustration for teachers in the underfunded category.

Both similarities and differences were evident in teachers' job satisfaction in underfunded and overfunded schools. The interview data revealed a substantial similarity and parallel between the two categories in that all teachers of the sample placed a high level of importance on the element of job satisfaction itself. All the teachers in the sample expressed that they believed that job satisfaction was critical for teachers to experience at their school because it enhanced the overall learning experience for students. Teachers in both categories similarly described that there existed a crucial connection between the element of teacher job satisfaction and how effectively students can learn in the classroom. Teachers in the underfunded category said they believed job satisfaction was a vital component in teaching effectively. Those in the well-funded category similarly expressed that the aspect was a teaching requirement on the deepest level.

Another fundamental similarity in the interview data showed that all teachers in the sample described feeling generally happy with being a teacher and expressed overall satisfaction teaching in their current school. However, while this similarity manifested itself across both categories of teachers, embedded in the very similarity is also a marked difference. The difference is one of degree. The shared theme emanated from general satisfaction, and the data showed that a parallel between the two categories exists in substance but varies in degree. The teachers in the well-funded category expressed a more enthusiastic and heightened sense of

satisfaction with having chosen a career in teaching and with their job satisfaction at the school itself. Teachers in the well-funded category expressed deep satisfaction in this area. While expressing basic contentment, teachers in the underfunded category described their satisfaction in less exuberant terms, revealing that they felt only generally happy.

Discussion of Findings as Related to the Literature

As discussed in previous chapters, there is a comparative lack of research in two general areas of unequal school funding. First, limited research exists on how the phenomenon affects teachers. While ample research on unequal school funding shows how race and class lie at the heart of the phenomenon, there is not enough research to examine the phenomenon's effects on teachers and the teaching experience. Little is known about how an education funding structure that negatively affects people with low incomes and communities of color affects teachers working in underfunded and well-funded schools. The findings of the study shed some light on how teachers describe their job satisfaction within the context of their work experience and how they believe that this factor influences the learning experience for students, and the role that their satisfaction plays in being able to teach effectively.

The second area where a lack of research exists lies in the current research and data on the phenomenon. Existing data on unequal school funding and teacher experiences shows a body of research that is heavily quantitative. A preponderance of the research on the topic revolves around studies that employed various quantitative methodologies, all of which provided valuable and insightful knowledge on the issue. However, the scarcity of trenchant qualitative-based research demonstrates the gap in research as not enough is known, from a personal perspective, how and why unequal school funding affects the lived work experience of teachers who represent the main driving force tasked with providing a positive learning experience for

students. The qualitative phenomenologically-based findings of the study serve to plug some of the existing holes in existing research by providing a portrait of the teacher experience from the teachers' perspective. The study's findings depict the personal day-to-day feelings and perceptions of teachers' work experience vis-à-vis the funding issue. The qualitative findings of the study stemming from the interview data provided both a necessary and more holistic description of the teacher experience from within the context of unequal school funding as it rendered a person-centered perspective on the issue, helping to understand better how funding across underfunded and well-funded schools affects teachers and how they feel that their satisfaction with funding issues impacts their ability to provide a positive learning experience for students.

In addition to Johnson's (2006) framework, several other significant sources in the literature speak to the impact of the findings, particularly the first finding, which expresses how teachers in well-funded schools experience greater satisfaction than underfunded ones. As previously mentioned, Adamson and Darling-Hammond (2012) conducted a study investigating the inequitable teacher quality distribution that cuts across race and class. Examining data from California and New York, which have similar demographic diversity and educational challenges, the study included research on school funding, salaries, and teacher qualifications, demonstrating that overall education funding and teacher salary levels are acutely inequitable in the two states. The most critical and relevant contribution of Adamson and Darling-Hammond to this study is the role of working conditions in the related areas of teacher recruitment and retention. Their research showed that working conditions, which included teacher salaries and curriculum and resource support, represent the driving forces of teacher flight from schools that teach high numbers of low-income and minority students. Adamson and Darling-Hammond's study speaks

to the findings of this study as it highlights the contention that unequal school funding is directly bound to teacher experience and job satisfaction in the classroom. High teacher attrition rates in predominantly low-income and minority districts show poor teaching experiences in those schools. The high teacher attrition rates affect minority and low-income students much more than students in more affluent and predominantly white schools. In this study, at least one of the teachers in the underfunded category expressed that newly hired teachers will begin working at the school, stay working at the school for three years for the sole purpose of receiving tenure, only to then leave the underfunded school in search of a teaching job at a more well-funded school with the aims of receiving a higher salary and better working conditions in the form of resource and curricular support. As Megan from the Red school mentioned regarding young teachers from the millennial demographic, "We are not going to be miserable, there are way too many job opportunities and avenues for us to make money,...so if we're not happy somewhere we're going to leave." The study's data demonstrates that teachers in the underfunded category are generally satisfied with having chosen teaching as a profession. However, teachers in the sample said that colleagues leaving their underfunded schools are not selecting another career but are seeking to switch to teaching in more well-funded schools.

The revolving door of attrition wherein teachers leave underfunded schools for well-funded ones connects directly with the issue of unequal school funding and teacher job satisfaction. Adamson and Darling-Hammond's work speaks to this study's findings by showing that teachers' job dissatisfaction reflects the racist and classist underpinnings of the phenomenon of unequal school funding as Black and Brown students, as well as students in economically challenged school districts, have a higher probability of not benefitting from seasoned and experienced teachers with longevity at a school. Black and Brown students and students in

poorer communities and the overall learning experience suffer from unequal school funding, as this study's findings show how the phenomenon contributes to teacher dissatisfaction in underfunded schools.

In a related study also mentioned in previous chapters, Earthman and Lemasters (2009) conducted a quantitative study that showed the effects of classroom conditions on teacher attitudes, morale, and job satisfaction. Their study demonstrated substantial differences in attitudes between teachers who work in classrooms deemed satisfactory and those who described their classroom conditions as unsatisfactory. The findings indicate that teachers' physical work environment influences job satisfaction, directly impacting teaching effectiveness. The results reveal that the classroom conditions and the physical work environment can cause morale problems and job satisfaction and that such feelings may ultimately influence students' academic performance. Earthman and Lemasters's (2009) work spoke to the findings of this study because it exposes how funding inequality directly pertains to teachers' work experience, as underfunded schools with unsatisfactory building facilities affect teacher morale and job satisfaction. The physical conditions of classrooms and overall physical plant are funding and financial issues. Earthman and LeMasters (2009) demonstrate that several teachers in underfunded schools experience job dissatisfaction as a result of the conditions of the building facilities as they claimed that this, at times, adversely influences their ability to provide their students with a more complete and positive learning experience. Joy from the Green school expressed disappointment with some of the building facilities at her school and how this factor negatively affects her job satisfaction, claiming that if physical conditions were in better shape, it would enhance the quality of her work as a teacher. Earthman and Lemasters'(2009) contribution helps to understand better the negative impact on the quality of education that African American and

Latinx students, as well as students in poorer districts, receive due to teacher dissatisfaction stemming from building facilities and conditions of the physical plant. The quality of education for students in underfunded schools, which are comprised predominantly of nonwhite and more economically disadvantaged populations, is compromised by the practice of unequal school funding, as the findings demonstrate that teacher dissatisfaction contributes to students in those schools not receiving an optimum learning experience as expressed in the interviews from several of the teachers themselves.

A burgeoning body of research literature reveals that increased spending on education directly contributes to improved student outcomes (Center for American Progress, 2018). The Center for American Progress concluded, "Funding is a central component to providing a high-quality education and often leads to improved outcomes" (p. 4). An essential longitudinal study conducted in 2016 showed that in the decades between 1990 and 2000, states that implemented reforms in their school funding policies by making more money available to high-poverty districts managed to close existing student achievement gaps by an average of twenty percent. Embedded throughout this literature lies the critical point that teachers are the primary driving force for students' academic achievement and performance. Teachers play a pivotal role in helping students achieve. Therefore, how teachers are faring, particularly regarding job satisfaction and workplace morale, matters because it ultimately affects student academic performance and outcomes. Teacher job satisfaction contributes to student academic performance and future educational opportunities. The findings of this study suggest that the inequality of funding negatively impacts teacher job satisfaction in underfunded schools, thus having a direct impact on students of color and those in economically challenged districts.

Implications for Practical Application: Administration

A practical implication of the findings of this study centers on the role that school administration plays in teacher job satisfaction. Specifically, the findings demonstrated negative consequences on teachers' job satisfaction and morale in high school administration attrition rates. The findings revealed that a significant source of the dissatisfaction, especially on the part of teachers in the Red school, rested with teachers' dissatisfaction with their administration's lack of consistency and follow-through with teacher needs, thus affecting perceptions of funding, resource and curricular support as well as the effectiveness of professional development and perceptions of opportunities for career growth. The high attrition rates of administrators in the Red school formed the root of the job dissatisfaction. The high turnover rate of high-level administrators from principals and assistant principals created a sense of discontinuity with teachers and their acquiring access to resources and materials for curricular support. The high attrition rates also negatively colored their perceptions of the overall funding of their school. An implication of the findings of this study leads to the need to examine the impact of the link between administration attrition rates and teacher job satisfaction. The revolving door effect of administration through persistent turnover directly and negatively affects teacher morale and job satisfaction. Schools need to do more to address the instability caused by principals and assistant principals quitting their positions, sometimes after only a year on the job, because of the harmful effects on teachers. According to a study conducted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2020), the attrition rates of high school administration represent an ongoing national problem with consequences on school communities and the teachers at the center of the learning experience. NASSP Executive Director JoAnn Bartoletti stated, "When principals leave, it can disrupt school progress, increase teacher turnover, and stall student achievement." More

poignantly, she added that "...the costs to students and teachers, if effective principals leave, is that schools and districts must (then) devote time and resources to replace the outgoing principals." Working conditions, compensation and financial obligations, and a lack of decision-making authority are among some of the key reasons cited for the high turnover rates of administrators. Other studies demonstrate that the attrition rates of principals and assistant principals disproportionately impact underfunded schools across New York state and the country. In conjunction with state-wide elected officials, local policymakers need to do more to address school administration attrition rates. The findings show that teachers' ability to access resources and obtain curricular support in underfunded schools is hampered by the instability wreaked by high turnover, directly impacting teachers. As Gabriella from the Red school expressed, "The change in administration is like a revolving door, you need more consistency in administration, we keep changing things too much with each new administration...." The problem of high attrition rates of administration prevents teachers in the underfunded schools from focusing simply on teaching because they are in a state of constant flux and adjustment, having to deal with a new incoming administration so frequently, thus affecting morale and overall satisfaction. Teachers in the well-funded category who reported no such issues with their administration can focus more exclusively on their teaching, creating what Thomas from the Orange school called "homeostasis" in the classroom.

In smaller school systems and districts on Long Island, principals, and assistant principals play essential roles in making available and facilitating the necessary funding to enable teachers to access and acquire necessary teaching resources and curricular support. In these smaller school systems, principals are in charge of managing the budget for the entire school, which means that they are responsible for dividing and allocating school expenses, including ordering

supplies and procuring teacher resources. School administrators such as principals and assistant principals seek and make available grants and other funding platforms for teachers to afford additional programs and resources if and when the established budgets fall short of covering additional expenses. School administrators are tasked with developing short-term and long-term financial plans and strategies to enable teachers to attain necessary resources and curricular support for their classrooms and specific subject areas. In mid-size and larger districts, principals work together with other stakeholders of the community, such as board members, school employees, and other administrators whose focus centers on financial matters.

Persistent administration attrition and alarmingly high principal turnover rates damage teachers' ability to attain and access needed resources and curricular support. Every time a top-level administrator vacates their position, all of the mechanisms put in place are either altered or eliminated altogether by the new incoming administrator, who begins anew to establish different plans and approaches that teachers now must adjust to. Constant changes in administration leave teachers in a position where they perpetually scramble to adapt to an incoming administrator who brings in new plans, strategies, and funding allocation processes. Just as they begin to learn about and adapt to, the vicious cycle starts again with the departure of that or other administrators who, in some cases, haven't even been in the position for the length of an academic year, sometimes departing in the middle of a semester.

Implications of my study suggest that leaders and key stakeholders in education need to do much more to address the growing problem of administration attrition as my findings demonstrate that teachers workplace satisfaction is negatively affected as a result.

Implications for Policy

Unequal school funding engenders an educational structure where certain schools receive higher financial support and resources while others receive considerably lower levels. Local property taxes comprise the bulk of the school funding in New York and states nationwide. Gerrymandered school district boundaries, particularly on Long Island, exacerbate matters as the factors of race and class are exposed and lie at the heart of the inequality. Poorer communities and communities of color are disadvantaged because they receive less funding than wealthier and mostly White communities. While advocates for school funding reform and progressive voices for education justice have made valiant attempts to judicially and legislatively help even the playing field between underfunded and well-funded schools, a tremendous gap in annual per-pupil spending persists on Long Island and throughout the state. The findings of this study point out that funding inequality affects teachers and, in turn, affects students' overall learning experience. Higher job satisfaction among teachers in the well-funded category more positively influences students' learning experience, showing a direct connection between higher levels of funding and education outcomes. The policy implications of the findings point toward a need to enable more funding to be made available to underfunded schools and districts. It would be necessary to put in motion a new funding schema that would allow underfunded schools to receive an increase in funds that could improve the workplace satisfaction of teachers and, hence, the overall education experience. Under the current system of school funding allocation in New York, only about 6% of the state's expenditure on education comes from the federal government. To improve the funding situation, policymakers and education advocates from the legislative or judicial sectors need to work to create a funding schema that would make it possible to disperse more significant amounts of federal funding to states for education. In other words, the federal

government's role would need to occupy a greater prominence and influence in funding education. The current model places individual states and local districts at the forefront of how schools are funded and has demonstrated an inability to equalize funding between districts, no matter the valiant efforts made through the years. According to Wesche (2016), unequal school funding exists and persists today primarily because education in the United States is not recognized as a fundamental constitutional right. While individual states have enshrined it in their state constitutions, the Supreme Court in 1973 in the case of *San Antonio v. Rodriguez*, overturned a lower court's decision asserting that education is not a fundamental right guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and that Texas's education funding formula, like so many other state funding formulas such as New York, was not unconstitutional. The Court ruled that the Equal Protection Clause does not require total equality regarding wealth and education. Establishing education as a fundamental constitutional right on the national level, either through overturning *San Antonio v. Rodriguez* or by amending the Constitution itself, would increase the federal government's role in education funding and thus create the conditions to raise the current paucity of federal funding of education to a more respectable level to help equalize the cavernous gap in annual per-pupil spending between underfunded and well-funded schools across the United States.

In addition to challenging current constitutional norms regarding education and considering alternative education funding schemas instead of continuing with the current entrenched models of local community funding, the policy implications of my study also point to the need to consider the broader ideological nature of the issue of school inequality in the context of teacher job satisfaction across underfunded and well-funded schools. Gramsci's Theory of Cultural Hegemony served as my study's macro-theory, which sheds light on the wider

ideological dimension of inequality that currently plagues public education in the United States broadly and the phenomenon of unequal school funding and teacher satisfaction more specifically. Gramsci's theory is based on the ability of those who hold the reigns of political, economic, and social power (in traditional Marxist terminology referred to as the ruling or dominant class) to gain the consent of the majority of the population successfully. Power is based on achieving the consent of the led by the effective diffusion and popularization of the worldview of the ruling class. Power is not achieved or maintained through force or coercion but through successfully persuading the population on the level of ideology. And so, for Gramsci, the shaping of ideology lies at the heart of achieving the consent of the led and thus maintaining power and dominance over them. In this way, Gramsci departs from traditional Marxist thought, which argues that the struggle centers on challenging the economic system of capitalism by ultimately controlling the means of production. For Gramsci, the heart of the struggle centers around ideas, ways of thinking, and modes of perception, that is ideology. Whose ideas or ideology will prevail? Will it be the ideology of the ruling class or the majority of the population? According to Gramsci, counter-hegemony (the process and task of challenging the domination wielded by the ruling class) occurs at the level of ideology. In other words, the struggle around hegemony is ultimately a fight over competing ideologies. And so, according to Gramsci, the majority of the population (i.e., working or what he refers to as the subaltern class) needs to wage war in the arena of ideas wherein victory would be defined as defeating the ruling class's ideology. The hegemonic struggle is also ongoing and never a once-and-for-all event.

Education represents one of the arenas wherein the hegemonic process occurs. According to Gramsci, schooling is a conduit through which consent is achieved. Teachers and their work experiences represent the inner core of education and the learning process. This means that

teachers can simultaneously be victims of the hegemony that Gramsci speaks of or agents of the counter-hegemony he advocates. My study revealed that teachers in the underfunded category are bound by the *teaching as mission* perception, which my findings demonstrated forms the basis of their job satisfaction. The job satisfaction of teachers in the underfunded category grounds itself in those teachers believing that they should remain steadfast in their mission to provide the best learning experience for students and to do all they can as teachers to carry out and fulfill this mission. This way of thinking about teaching that teachers in the underfunded category have adopted represents a form of the hegemony expressed by Gramsci. The mode of perception regarding how teachers view their work in the learning experience and, specifically, in Gramscian terms, the ideology of teaching as a missionary endeavor embraced by teachers in the underfunded category and where their job satisfaction comes from serves to perpetuate inequality because it creates the conditions for keeping those teachers dedicated to their current posts in underfunded schools regardless of the funding and sub-par working conditions which emanate from being underfunded. The power or hegemony wielded over teachers in the underfunded category is enabled by the effective diffusion, popularization, and ultimately, the embrace of the *teaching as mission* ideology by teachers themselves, which keeps them dedicated to their positions in the underfunded schools. In a sense, the ideological hegemony of the teaching as mission modality leads teachers in underfunded schools to accept the glaring inequality. The ideology induces teachers to not only accept and consent to the situation of inequality but also to be happy with it because, as missionaries, they are tasked with being dedicated to making a difference in the lives of the students they teach.

Implications of my study's findings express the need to advocate for cultivating a broader ideological worldview that would promote teaching as a profession and not a missionary activity.

Teachers in the well-funded category experienced job satisfaction primarily because they felt happy simply being teachers, deriving immense joy from engaging in and cultivating the practice of teaching itself. Well-funded schools allow teachers to focus on and revel in the craft and endeavor of teaching as a profession, which they participate in daily and provides them with a more profound sense of satisfaction. Students' learning experience would be enhanced if teaching was regarded as a profession and teachers as professionals.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study demonstrate that a glaring difference between underfunded and well-funded schools emanated from two themes that emerged from the coding of the data. The first dealt with teachers' perceptions of how well-funded their school is and how this affects the overall teaching experience. The second theme centered around the availability and allocation of teaching resources and curricular support. All the teachers in the well-funded category expressed tremendous satisfaction in both of these areas. Teachers in the well-funded schools expressed that they never feel like they lack anything for their students, further saying that they remain confident their school will always provide the resources they request for effective teaching. The root of their satisfaction grounds itself in feeling confident that they can focus on teaching instead of focusing on how they will obtain the essential resources needed to teach. Teachers in the well-funded category described the satisfaction of simply walking into their schools and classrooms and being able to teach without worrying about lacking resources.

Conversely, teachers in the underfunded category expressed varying degrees of dissatisfaction in areas related to perceptions of funding and the allocation and availability of resources and curricular support. More than one teacher in the underfunded category described the frustration of having to rely on personal monies to purchase necessary classroom resources

and expressed how they no longer bother to complete request forms for resources offered by the school, knowing that they will not receive what they believe they need. There is a need for more research to determine how widespread the practice of teachers having to use their wages to purchase resources is and how this affects teacher morale and satisfaction.

Future research should examine the long-term impact on teacher satisfaction regarding the allocation of resources and curricular support. While teachers in the underfunded category expressed general satisfaction with choosing teaching as a profession, it would be interesting to explore further if and when teachers in the underfunded category reach a breaking point in dissatisfaction and how that might manifest itself in future decisions they make about where they would want to teach. It would also be interesting to see if a correlation exists between teacher attrition rates in underfunded schools and the practice of teachers purchasing school resources using their wages to fill in the gaps in the availability of resources and curricular support, as the injustice of that burden highlights the effects and consequence of the phenomenon of unequal school funding.

Parental engagement and involvement in the learning experience could represent another critical factor in analyzing teacher satisfaction. In the data collection of my study, the issue of parental engagement did not surface or come out in any meaningful way, as only one teacher in the selection commented on and offered views regarding the topic. Gabriella from the Red school briefly mentioned how, at times, she feels that parents are a bit removed from their children's learning experience and how she wishes that parents of students who struggle academically would take more initiative to be more involved in partnering with teachers to improve their children's academic status. Future research needs to assess the impact of parental

involvement in education across underfunded and well-funded schools and analyze how their engagement affects teacher morale and satisfaction.

Future research must also more thoroughly examine the dual perspective of teachers with work experiences in underfunded and well-funded schools. In my study, Thomas from the Orange school was the only teacher in the selection who had the work experience of teaching in a school categorized as underfunded and then switched to teaching in a well-funded school. He vividly expressed the dramatic change he experienced as a teacher when he started working in a well-funded school after working in an underfunded one. The most pronounced difference was in school resources and curricular support. Thomas described how the lack of basic teaching materials in the underfunded school where he worked led him to hide and hoard such items when available, knowing that it was the only way to secure what he needed to teach. One of Thomas's most significant sources of joy and satisfaction in teaching in the current well-funded school is that he can focus exclusively on teaching without worrying about procuring necessary materials. Future research should further examine the dual perspectives of teachers like Thomas to understand teacher satisfaction in the context of school funding more substantively.

Limitations

Limitations of the study derive from the theoretical and conceptual framework expressed in earlier chapters. Susan Moore Johnson's(2006) work represented the theoretical framework for this study. Her insight served as the lens through which to analyze how teachers of the sample described their job satisfaction and how well they felt that their schools were funded and supported. Specifically, three of the 11 benchmarks delineated by Johnson were employed to explore how teachers described their job satisfaction in under and over-funded school districts. As Marshall (2022) expressed, "Framing the study in specific research and scholarly traditions

places limits on the research." A limitation of the study is that the generalizability of the findings proves difficult to establish because of the boundaries set by the framework. Johnson designed her 11 benchmarks to focus on working conditions and support systems in schools to explore teacher retention within the context of improving the quality of education for students. I used her benchmarks to gain insight from teachers about how they described their job satisfaction within the broader phenomenon of school funding, thus narrowing my study's focus to that one area of teacher work experience. My study did not examine other factors influencing teacher job satisfaction, such as salaries and work setting. Also, a limitation of the study might present itself from within my transformative worldview, which leads me to hold the position that funding directly impacts the quality of education students receive.

Another limitation of the study centers on the small size of the sample and the fact that the teachers all came from one geographical region in New York, namely from two counties on Long Island. The sample consisted of nine teachers, some of whom were from the same school, which further limited my ability to make claims about under and well-funded schools more generally. A larger sample size and expanding the study to include different geographical regions around the state might have made generalizability more feasible.

Another limitation of my study centers specifically on the type of funding and nature of financial support that schools receive. My study was limited to analyzing the issue of teacher satisfaction in the context of official government-based and allocated funding, which comes predominantly from local property taxes. My study used official annual per-pupil spending amounts, forming the underfunded and well-funded financial categories. However, my study did not examine other forms of financial support and funding that schools receive, specifically monies garnered through hefty and generous donations that individual parents and parent

organizations such as PTAs in more affluent neighborhoods make available to their local public schools. In 2017, the Center for American Progress published a study entitled “Hidden Money – The Outsized Role of Parent Contributions in School Finance” (Center for American Progress, 2017). The study exposed how wealthy parents nationwide raise enormous sums of money to improve their already well-funded and advantaged public schools. The study showed how the “hidden money” in wealthy communities that manages to make its way into their local public schools amounts to thousands of additional dollars spent per pupil annually, all in addition to the funds that students in those well-funded schools already receive. In the future, it would be essential to conduct a more all-encompassing study analyzing how the hidden money in wealthy communities widens the gulf of inequality between underfunded and well-funded schools and how this affects teachers and their work experiences and satisfaction.

Trustworthiness

I applied multiple methods for ensuring trustworthiness in this study. I made sure to reflect often on my biases and preconceived notions using memos and interview notes during data collection and analysis. Also, in keeping with the suggestions of Creswell (2018), I provided readers with a "rich, thick description" (Creswell, 2018) to express the findings from my data analysis. I provided a vivid and detailed description of essential aspects of the background of the participants to transport readers of my study to the lived work experiences of the teachers in my sample. The coding of the themes gathered from the interview responses, which comprise the base of my data analysis, was coupled with a detailed description of the participants' backgrounds. According to Creswell (2018), describing matters in this way makes the results more "realistic and richer," thus contributing to the overall validity of the findings. Second, I also used member-checking (Creswell, 2018) to ensure validity and reliability. Upon completing the

study, I presented the qualitative findings to each of the nine teachers of the study's sample, requesting they read the relevant portions (i.e., data collection, analysis, and findings) to ascertain whether they felt the results were accurate. I heard back from four teachers, all of whom provided positive feedback on the findings and the information emanating from the interview data, with only a few minor corrections implemented to the findings in chapter four concerning the subject that one teacher is responsible for teaching and the major that another teacher received while a college student.

Peer auditing represents another method I used to ensure trustworthiness. Throughout the time I conducted this study and throughout the entire data-analysis phase, I shared information on the processes, methods, and subsequent findings with a fellow doctoral student. I shared the data and results with him, requesting him to comment upon the solidity of my approach and methods. Ongoing conversations and feedback on this study's conclusions occurred, ensuring trustworthiness.

Finally, I detailed my theoretical framework, methods, and analysis process to allow future researchers to replicate and build upon my analysis and data collection. My dedication to pursuing these well-documented protocols ensured this study's trustworthiness.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter presented the contributions of my study's findings, practical implications and implications for future research and policy, limitations of my findings, and the trustworthiness of my research design. When I initially embarked on my dissertation journey, I sought to understand the phenomenon of unequal school funding from the perspective of the lived experience of secondary-level teachers across underfunded and well-funded schools in New York. As a high school teacher, I hoped my study would provide an in-depth understanding

of the complex phenomenon of secondary-level teachers' lived work experience. The time has come to recognize the critical elements of teacher satisfaction in the learning process, realizing that teachers represent the main driving force in the endeavor to educate and that their morale and sense of satisfaction in the classroom matters to their overall effectiveness as teachers.

Furthermore, I hope that the socio-economic dimensions of unequal school funding, which directly impact teacher satisfaction, come to play a more prominent role in education policy both on the local school system and level as well as on broader legislative fronts as concerns policies of school funding so that all students can better benefit from the wisdom and hard work of teachers today and in the future.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval



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Patricia A. Eckardt, PhD, RN, FAAN
Chair, Molloy University Institutional Review Board
Professor, Barbara H. Hagan School of Nursing and Health Sciences
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T: 516.323.3711

DATE: May 3, 2023

TO: David Tomasic
FROM: Molloy University IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [2048846-1] A Critical Exploration of Unequal School Funding:
 Teacher Job
 Satisfaction Across Underfunded and Overfunded Schools

REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: May 3, 2023
EXPIRATION DATE: May 2, 2024
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW Expedited review category # 7
CATEGORY:

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Molloy University IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure. All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a MINIMAL RISK project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of May 2, 2024.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Patricia Eckardt at 516-323-3711 or peckardt@molloy.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sincerely,

Patricia Eckardt, Ph.D., RN, FAAN
Chair, Molloy University Institutional Review Board

This letter has been issued in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Molloy University IRB's records.