

**Toward a Theory of Job Embeddedness in Teacher Retention:
Implications for the COVID-19 Pandemic Era**

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Abstract

This paper presents the framework of teacher embeddedness, borrowed from the theory of job embeddedness used in economics and applied psychology, and applies it to the unique circumstances of teachers in order to help better understand reasons for teacher retention. Used as a theoretical framework for studying teacher retention, teacher embeddedness consists of three components—links, fit, and assets—which are examined through the lens of both the school organization and the community. The analytic power of this framework is demonstrated with an analysis of the challenges of teacher retention during the COVID-19 global pandemic, as an example of its promise to inform supports for teachers during a time for radical change in many teachers' work and home lives.

Keywords: Teacher Retention, Job Embeddedness, Lives of Teachers, COVID-19

**Toward a Theory of Job Embeddedness in Teacher Retention:
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The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that began in early 2020 continue to be felt across globe in nearly all aspects of human activity. The disruption of everyday life has affected nearly all sectors of the global economy in some way. As of this writing, over 29 million coronavirus cases and 540,000 deaths had been reported in the United States alone. Unemployment rates reached historic highs in the United States as many in the labor force were laid off or furloughed, and businesses shut down or reduced their activity in order to comply with public safety recommendations. Public schooling in the U.S. was also greatly impacted, and by April 2020 most districts in the United States had terminated in-person classes for the remainder of the school year (Education Week, 2020). For the start of the subsequent school year in September, some districts shifted to hybrid or fully-remote instruction, while others made accommodations to the physical setting in order to maintain a sense of normalcy. For many teachers, such changes required a great deal of time and effort, and served as an extra source of stress in a time of upheaval. The degree to which these pressures have contributed to attrition from the teaching profession remains an open question (Will et al., 2020), yet a pressing matter for teachers and educational leaders alike in the present moment is how to support teachers so that they are not driven from the profession during a time when they are so desperately needed.

We approach this issue as education researchers deeply immersed in an empirical project of national scope on the issue of science teacher retention, which we are just beginning to report (Larkin et al., 2021), and believe that the theory of teacher embeddedness offers new insights on meaningful supports for teachers during this challenging time. Our work with this theory, which places emphasis on why teachers remain in a position rather than focusing on their reasons for

leaving, draws heavily on the framework of job embeddedness commonly used to study voluntary turnover in the workplace (Holtom et al., 2006; Mitchell et al., 2001). Our research was inspired as a response to the appeal by Luft et al. (2011) for the field to reconsider the strategies currently being employed to both recruit and retain secondary science teachers, because the models currently in use have been less than satisfactory. Instead of identifying a unifying set of factors that gives rise to increasing rates of teacher attrition that can be applied to all teachers in all schools, this paper proposes teacher retention has a greater dependence on how embedded a particular individual is within their place of employment.

The majority of this manuscript was completed prior to the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic, yet because the theoretical framework of teacher embeddedness offers powerful implications for understanding teacher retention in our current historical moment, we have rewritten our analysis to offer an example of its promise to inform supports for teachers during a time of radical change in many teachers' work and home lives. In this paper, we first briefly situate our work within the larger field of teacher retention and describe the existing theoretical frameworks used to understand the reasons why teachers remain in the classroom. Next, we introduce the theory of teacher embeddedness, and describe its components and their application to both the organization and the larger community in which it is embedded. Finally, we apply this theory to the current problem of teacher work during the COVID-19 pandemic, and offer suggestions for teacher support that emerge from this lens of teacher retention.

Teacher Retention in the United States

In the United States, teacher retention within P-12 schooling has been at the center of educational policy debates for decades (Guarino, Santibañez, et al., 2006). The nature of teacher attrition may be grasped by noting that almost 50% of all teachers leave within their first five

years of employment (Gray & Taie, 2015). Goldring, et al. (2014) found that over 15%, nearly half of a million, of all public-school teachers either left the profession or took a new position in the 2011-2012 school year. Attrition and position turnover need not be seen as detrimental or negative and may in fact be healthy for the profession (Ingersoll et al., 2016; Luft, Wong, et al., 2011; Simon & Johnson, 2015). While some teacher attrition is due to retirement, one study suggested this accounts for only 20% of total teacher attrition each year (Boyd et al., 2011).

Within the field of educational research, there has been a great deal of focus on why people leave teaching (e.g. Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino, Santibanez, et al., 2006; Ingersoll & May, 2012; Ingersoll & Perda, 2010; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Rinke, 2014; Saka et al., 2013; Santoro, 2011), and this work has identified variables that contribute to teacher attrition such as student behavior, poor administrative support, lack of autonomy, contradictions between theory and practice, scheduling, and socialization. Research that draws upon organizational theory identifies major trends that impact employee turnover and retention, which include: individual differences, interpersonal relationships, changes in job satisfaction, and financial incentives (Fulbeck & Richards, 2015; Holtom et al., 2008; Ingersoll & May, 2012). Simply put, the majority of this research focuses on factors that influence employees to leave a position, and in doing so has made valuable contributions to understanding attrition and mobility in teaching. However, we argue that it is equally important to examine the converse question of what makes teachers stay in the classroom, and suggest that it is not simply a matter of the negation or inverse of the reasons that influence teachers to leave.

Background: Explaining Teacher Retention

A number of studies have taken up the task of analyzing the effectiveness of various retention factors such as: salary (Bang et al., 2007; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Geiger &

Pivovarova, 2018), administrative support (Boyd et al., 2011; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Greenlee & Brown, 2009), mentor support (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004), student demographics (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Greenlee & Brown, 2009), and working conditions/school characteristics (Achinstein et al., 2010; Bang et al., 2007; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Yet throughout this large body of research, there has been little clarity in identifying specific factors that could be used to predict teacher retention. Papay et al. (2017) note that there was little evidence of strong relationships between teacher retention and the observable characteristics in their study, with the tentative exception of the existence of collective bargaining in the district, a finding also suggested by Goldhaber et al. (2016).

Certainly, there are factors outside of the direct control of individual teachers that determine whether staying in a particular position or even in the profession is possible. What these factors have in common is that they are larger than the individual and that, in their absence, the teachers in this category would likely continue employment as a teacher either in the position or in the profession. Consequently, these teachers constitute part of the “reserve pool” of teachers (Ingersoll & Perda, 2010) who may return to the profession if an opportunity arises.

However, for the vast majority of teachers, the decision of whether to remain in a teaching position falls on them personally as a rational choice to make. One simple model of retention with a long history in organizational theory invokes two factors: job alternatives (including the capacity to leave) and job satisfaction. Holtom et al. (2006) suggest that “given the same level of dissatisfaction, people with more alternatives will be more likely to leave than those with fewer alternatives” (p. 318). However, Swider, Boswell, Zimmerman (2011) examined a possible relationship between job embeddedness and search-turnover theory, and found that “not all job searchers are job leavers” (p. 432).

Job satisfaction is a loosely defined term that captures whether someone finds the material, intellectual, social, and emotional conditions of their job acceptable in part or in whole. Holtom and Inderrieden (2006), when using the lens of job satisfaction to analyze voluntary turnover in a variety of professions, found that more than half of the individuals in the study left due to a particular shock, not “accumulated job dissatisfaction” (p. 436) and that these shocks were within the organization. According to Lee et al. (1999) shocks are defined as “a particular, jarring event that initiates the psychological analyses involved in quitting a job” (p. 55). In general, shocks are not unique to the field of education, like being assigned a new supervisor that you do not get along with or dealing with the switch over to a virtual workspace during a global pandemic. However, some might argue that teachers may experience shocks that other professions do not tend to encounter. One example of a teacher-specific shock is being asked to teach outside of their discipline or certification.

Such a model is consistent with market-based theories of labor supply and demand, yet has been shown to have limited predictive power when applied to actual cases of job retention and voluntary turnover (Mitchell et al., 2001). By reducing attrition to job dissatisfaction, it fails to capture why some people can withstand either an accumulation of bad circumstances or shock and others cannot. Job satisfaction and job alternatives also neglect to include the importance of community attachment, both within and outside of the physical workplace (Holtom & Inderrieden, 2006).

Theory: From Job Embeddedness to Teacher Embeddedness

The theory of job embeddedness developed from the field of economics and applied psychology in order to serve as a better predictor of voluntary employee turnover than theories invoking job satisfaction and job alternatives (Holtom et al., 2006; Kiazad et al., 2015; Mitchell

et al., 2001). Holtom et al. (2006) state “one way to think about a person’s life is to visualize a net or a web created by strands connecting the different parts of one’s life” (p. 319), and Mitchell et al. (2001) note that the more connections in one’s metaphorical web, the more embedded, or “stuck”, that individual becomes within an organization. Holtom et al. (2013) argue that job embeddedness grows over time as an individual makes more connections to both job and place, and therefore the longer one remains at a job the more stuck they become, and the harder it is for one to leave. We note here that being stuck within an organization does not indicate whether such a state is desirable or undesirable on the part of either the individual or the organization.

In conducting research on employee retention, the theory of job embeddedness served as a predictor of job retention, and was used primarily for survey construction and subsequent quantitative analysis. Such job embeddedness surveys have been adapted for a broad variety of contexts and purposes, though in the existing literature its use tends toward prediction rather than as a guide to intervention (Mallol et al., 2007; Shah et al., 2020; Siedlok et al., 2015; Sun & Huang, 2020; Tröster et al., 2019). Even in studies that examine novice teacher retention through the lens of job embeddedness, findings are typically presented in terms of a correlation between measures of job embeddedness and retention (e.g. Watson, 2018; Yildiz, 2018).

Table 1. Job Embeddedness Definitions (Holtom et al., 2006, p. 320)

Construct	Description
Job embeddedness	Job embeddedness represents a broad array of influences on employee retention. The critical aspects of job embeddedness are (a) the extent to which the job and community are similar to or fit with the other aspects in a person's life space, (b) the extent to which this person has links to other people or activities and, (c) what the person would sacrifice if he or she left. These aspects are important both on (organization) and off (community) the job.
Fit-organization	Fit-organization reflects an employee's perceived compatibility or comfort with an organization. The person's values, career goals and plans for the future must "fit" with the larger corporate culture as well as the demands of the immediate job (e.g., job knowledge, skills and abilities).
Fit-community	Fit-community captures how well a person perceives he or she fits the community and surrounding environment. The weather, amenities and general culture of the location in which one resides are relevant to perceptions of community fit.
Links-organization	Links-organization considers the formal and informal connections that exist between an employee, other people, or groups within the organization.
Links-community	Links-community addresses the connections that exist between an employee and other people, or groups within the community. Links-community recognizes the significant influence family and other social institutions exert on individuals and their decision making.
Sacrifice-organization	Sacrifice-organization captures the perceived cost of material or psychological benefits that may be forfeited by leaving one's job. For example, leaving an organization likely promises personal losses (e.g., giving up colleagues, projects or perks). The more an employee gives up when leaving, the more difficult it is to sever employment.
Sacrifice-community	Sacrifice-community is mostly an issue if one has to relocate. Leaving a community that is attractive, safe and where one is liked or respected can be difficult. Of course, one can change jobs but stay in the same home. But even then, various conveniences like an easy commute or flextime may be lost by changing jobs.

The main components of job embeddedness (as shown above in Table 1) are *fit*, *links*, and *sacrifice*, and are applied to two distinct domains: the organization and the community. *Fit* refers to the comfort and compatibility of an individual into both the organization and environment, and includes the degree to which the goals, values, and worldviews of the employee are aligned with those in evidence at the workplace and in the community (Holtom et al., 2006; Watson,

2018). *Links* are formal and informal social connections and relationships, including family, religious, and other social affiliations, suggesting that commitments to these other links may also influence a person's decision not to leave their place of employment (Mitchell et al., 2001). The third component, *sacrifice*, refers to the "the perceived cost of material or psychological benefits that are forfeited by organizational departure," (Holtom et al., 2006, p. 320), as well to the ease or difficulty of breaking the links described above.

Teacher embeddedness takes elements of this earlier theory and applies it to the unique circumstances and contexts of teachers in order to help better understand the reasons for teacher retention. The components of teacher embeddedness are shown in Table 2 below. One primary difference in this aspect of the framework is in its specialization to the work of educators. Through the naming of the local education context, and the identification of specific examples (such as links to students), the teacher embeddedness framework is less ambiguous and more applicable for research that uses qualitative methods.

Two of the primary components of teacher embeddedness (shown in Table 2 below), *fit*, and *links*, are slightly expanded but mostly unchanged from the original job embeddedness framework, as are the two domains of organization and community. Within the original job embeddedness framework, the constructs of *fit* and *links* were defined in a positive sense with existing and identifiable indicators. However, the construct of *sacrifice* was defined as a conditional negative given its close association with potential loss. This formulation may have been acceptable for survey construction but was much less useful in qualitative research where existing and identifiable indicators are needed. Further complicating matters was the fact that such potential loss was often applied to aspects of the other two components, thus reducing the explanatory power of each.

Table 2. Teacher embeddedness as adapted from Mitchell, et al. (2001) and Holtom, et al. (2006)

Component	Domain	Definition
Fit	Organization	The comfort and compatibility of an individual with respect to the local educational context. This includes the degree to which the aspirations, career goals, values, culture, and worldview of the teacher are aligned with the environment of the local educational context in which an individual works.
	Community	The comfort and compatibility of an individual with respect to the community. This includes the degree to which the aspirations, career goals, values, culture, and worldview of the teacher are aligned with the environment of the local community in which an individual works.
Links	Organization	Personal relationships and connections made with colleagues, students, and others within the local educational context.
	Community	Personal relationships and connections made with individuals and groups within the community, which may include family, consumer, religious, and other social affiliations.
Assets	Organization	The sum of the tangible and intangible benefits from a job to an individual in terms of perceived material and psychological value. Such assets may include salary, workplace space and materials, perquisites, established patterns of working, and support for professional growth.
	Community	The sum of the tangible and intangible benefits from a community to an individual in terms of perceived material and psychological value. Such assets may include housing, sense of place, established patterns of living, personal safety, and other aspects of one's quality of life influenced by the community.

Within economics, assets are tangible and intangible things that have value, and being forced to give up assets is a reasonable definition of sacrifice. Consequently, we use the term *assets* to describe those things which would be sacrificed if an educator voluntarily left a position. From a qualitative research perspective, reframing sacrifice as a loss of assets allows for the discrete and positive identification of those assets. It is worth noting that the existence of the domains is more of a reminder of where to look for evidence of *fit*, *links*, and *assets*, rather than as separate constructs with distinct explanatory power. The three components of these two

frameworks is discussed in more detail below, beginning with a coarse description in the job embeddedness, and moving toward the more specific teacher embeddedness descriptions.

Fit

This component of job embeddedness refers to the comfort and compatibility of an individual into both the organization and environment, and includes the degree to which the goals, values, and worldviews of the employee are aligned with those in evidence at the workplace and in the community (Holtom et al., 2006; Watson, 2018). Another way to describe fit is as “an employee’s perceived compatibility or comfort with an organization and with his or her environment” (Holtom et al., 2006, p. 319). Studies suggest that the more a person feels connected to their job due to their personal attributes, for example receiving positive feedback on an annual evaluation, the more likely they are to remain in their current position. Watson (2018) describes fit as “the perception of shared values and goals within the organization” and argues that “if the employees’ goals, values, and future plans are aligned with the organization’s, the employees’ intention to remain is very high” (p. 30). Other studies, like Santoro’s (2011) work on teacher burnout and the demoralization of teaching, suggest that experienced teachers leave when their ideals don’t fit the practices of the school or when they sense a lack of community and a negative school climate (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). This suggests that teachers may remain in their positions due to how well they ‘fit’ within that school environment and if they share perspectives surrounding work ethic and day to day norms with others in their school’s network, whether or not one might deem those perspectives as either equitable or even effective.

Another consideration for fit concerns personal and psychological safety. For example, some employees may place great value on the racial or cultural homogeneity or heterogeneity of their work environment. The potential to experience discrimination along any number of

demographic or social dimensions may loom large in any deliberation to take a new position elsewhere or remain (Mallol et al., 2007).

Within the teacher embeddedness framework, culture has been incorporated into the definition of fit for this reason. Culture is a long-recognized factor in teachers' work within the field of education (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Spindler, 1988), and in recent decades has become an important aspect of understanding the experiences of novice teachers from non-dominant racial and ethnic groups in both learning to teach and remaining in the teaching profession (e.g. Carver-Thomas, 2018; Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2019; Villegas & Davis, 2008).

Teaching is often described as a vocation rather than simply a job or career choice. It is not unusual for teaching to be viewed as a mission with the learning of the student as the ultimate goal rather than prestige or even a competitive income.¹ This is often the case with jobs in the public service sector, and has led to studies around teacher retention and vocational belonging. One study, examining the possible relationship between job embeddedness found “teachers with a high level of perceptions of vocational belonging also had a high level of perceptions of job embeddedness,” (Yildiz, 2018, p. 1462). If an individual feels that they fit within the community in which they work, they may perceive a stronger sense of vocational belonging, leading to even stronger levels of embeddedness.

Links

Job embeddedness frames the component of links primarily in terms of human relationships. These relationships can vary in formality and frequency. For teachers who live in the same communities where they teach, these links can easily spill beyond the boundaries of the

¹ Obviously, such a view is the root of enormous harm and inequality. Apple (1986) argues that viewing teaching as a labor process that has been shaped by the sexual division of labor, patriarchal practices, and class relations. Such a view devalues teaching as “women’s work,” rather than as skilled labor.

school. Links may include family, religious, and other social affiliation given that commitments to these other links may also influence a person's decision to not leave their place of employment (Mitchell et al., 2001). Links may connect individuals and their family members psychologically and/or financially to their place of work (Holtom & Inderrieden, 2006), with some links becoming more significant than others (Ghaffar & Khan, 2017). As with fit, culture may play a role in developing and sustaining links. Individuals from cultures which emphasize social connectedness may find links to be more influential in their decisions to remain within a job voluntarily.

Holtom and Inderrieden (2006) posit that individuals with more robust links may be better able to make sense of and ultimately overcome situations of shock. They give the example of an individual and their mentor, suggesting that “when an employee with a mentor experiences a shock, she is likely to discuss the shock and make sense of it with the social support of the mentor” (p. 441), which may provide larger context and ability to withstand the shock, especially in comparison to an individual who experiences shock in isolation. Such an explanation can easily be extended to the ways in which a strong link to a mentor teacher or colleague might help a teacher weather the shocks that are common to the profession (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2019), especially for novice teachers.

The correlation between the strength of links and retention has genuine parallels to social network analysis, and indeed job embeddedness has been used to better understand social networks (Siedlok et al., 2015; Tröster et al., 2019). Siedlok et al. (2015), for example, suggest that embeddedness is “the more-or-less durable and situated nature of the relationships, which constitute social networks” (p. 3). This connection has placed emphasis on the aspect of links within the embeddedness literature.

Assets

The third component of the job embeddedness framework is sacrifice, which not only refers to the ease or difficulty of breaking the links described above, but in the “perceived cost of material or psychological benefits that are forfeited by organizational departure,” (Holtom et al., 2006, p. 320). The notion of sacrifice is closely related to the psychological phenomenon of *loss aversion*, as described by Kahneman and Tversky (1979), who defines it as “a salient characteristic of attitudes to changes in welfare is that losses loom larger than gains,” (p. 279). The original job embeddedness framework suggests that sacrifices may include such things as leaving fellow co-workers or a familiar office space, as well as the various other job perquisites (“perks”) that places of employment offer in order to sustain their workers without necessarily increasing their salary. Examples of job perks may include retirement programs, healthcare benefits, or day care options. Leaving a position will entail losing assets that one values, and human psychology is such that these losses will be perceived as disproportionately larger than equivalent gains.

As noted in the teacher embeddedness framework above, we have chosen to reframe this component primarily in terms of the assets themselves, which we define as the sum of the tangible and intangible benefits to an individual in terms of perceived material and psychological value. Within the context of educational employment, such assets may include salary, workplace space and materials, health benefits, established patterns of working, and support for professional growth. Assets within the context of the community may include housing, sense of place, established patterns of living, personal safety, and other aspects of one’s quality of life influenced by the community.

Teacher Embeddedness as a Theory to Drive Intervention

In the following section, we take an additional step with the teacher embeddedness framework toward intervention, driven by our understanding of theory as educational researchers. It is certainly possible that aiming to strengthen the fit, links, and assets of a teacher may be of limited or superficial impact; indeed social science research has a rich history of addressing indicators that do not substantially impact the underlying phenomenon (Campbell, 1979). Yet as researchers studying this issue deeply, the face validity of teacher embeddedness as an explanatory theory for explaining teacher retention suggests that it may also have value in developing constructive interventions for reducing voluntary teacher attrition and transfer during and beyond the pandemic, when the whole profession of education is under a great deal of stress.

The Implications of Teacher Embeddedness for Retention During and Beyond COVID-19

Deploying teacher embeddedness to understand teacher retention during the pandemic requires attending to the ways in which the links, fit, and assets change with respect to both the organization and the community from the perspective of the individual teacher. This analysis reveals implications for the design of potential supports for teachers during this crisis primarily by elevating the importance of factors that are not often accorded primacy in educational settings. We discuss these in terms of the framework, examining *fit*, *links*, and *assets* in turn.

The Implications of Attending to Fit

Given the major changes that have occurred in school settings since early 2020, it is worthwhile to reexamine the ways in which teachers' fit with their school contexts and local environments have changed. Some of the more major changes, like school closings, social distancing requirements, technology, and personal protective equipment use are driven by decisions beyond the control of individual teachers and local educational leaders. Yet such

changes may have had a major impact on how teachers perceive their fit within their work environment. Such fit can be further strained if an individual's perceptions about these changes reveal previously unknown divergences in culture or worldview. Further, the pandemic may have spurred the creation of new or temporary aspirations and goals, some of which may be aligned with the organization and community and others that may not be. For example, a teacher who has a health history or demographic group identification that puts them at a high-risk of COVID-19 infection may find that a school district in which they previously perceived a high degree of fit no longer feels as safe as it once did, especially if their colleagues only loosely accept mask-wearing or social distancing guidelines. Such a teacher might rethink their fit, at least in that school.

The implication for teachers and educational leaders is that attending to fit ought not to be ignored. Teacher embeddedness suggests that using educational time for the discussion of personal goals and career aspirations, conducting value affirmations (Borman, 2017), and explicitly dealing with issues concerning the ways that individuals perceive their fit, is a worthwhile use of professional time in schools. Of course, pre-pandemic issues of fit, such as the presence of racial microaggressions (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2019), and the impact of standardized testing and punitive teacher evaluation systems (Dunn, 2020), need continued attention.

The Implications of Attending to Links

In non-pandemic times, relationships are built through shared experiences in the school and classroom, scheduled or opportunistic personal interactions, and in the context of the daily operations of the school in a myriad of ways. Like any relationship, links are nurtured and grow over time, and a key ingredient is the development of trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

With the shift to hybrid and remote modes of teaching during the pandemic, it is worthwhile to inquire about the ability and capacity of teachers to establish new links and sustain existing ones. Novice teachers would appear to be particularly vulnerable to the dissolution of links, and unless forms of interaction and communication are established that permit existing links to persist and new ones to flourish, it is reasonable to predict that this component of teacher embeddedness will be weakened.

Given the importance of links in teacher retention, the implication is simply that the ability to maintain social relationships is key, and ought to be nurtured in new ways if previous approaches are no longer possible for the time being. For example, if members of a science department used to interact daily in a common prep room space, some of that interaction may be funneled into a group text chat. An administrator would be well served to be aware of such a chat—even if they themselves do not join in it—in order to encourage participation so that novice teachers continue to benefit from these collegial links.

Overburdened teachers with little time to co-plan or collaborate with colleagues built into their day will be less likely to develop the links necessary to sustain themselves professionally. And if links are not available within the school, it is likely that the strength of links formed outside the organization will not be working toward teacher embeddedness, even though they may benefit a teacher professionally. Similarly, a teacher who typically draws a great deal of professional satisfaction from working with student athletes as a coach is going to need new ways of sustaining those relationships if sports are curtailed or cancelled. Facilitating the creation of new pathways for link formation, both within the organization and to the community, would seem to be a worthwhile component of the effort to retain teachers.

The question that the tenet of *links* in the theory of teacher embeddedness poses to school leaders concerned about retaining teachers during the pandemic is: How are we ensuring that teachers (especially those at risk of leaving) are able to continue maintaining existing relationships and making new links within the school? Though we do not pretend to offer simplistic solutions to this question, we do wish to elevate the importance of even asking it.

The Implications of Attending to Assets

In some ways, the pandemic has initiated a reevaluation of the adequacy of the assets provided to teachers, particularly in terms of simply being able to do their job as teachers. While in the short term, state and federal policies in the U.S.—as well as teachers unions—have ensured that many teachers have not had to sacrifice salaries and benefits during the pandemic. Yet at the same time, some of these assets may have been insufficient to adequately address the challenges posed to teachers who found themselves with additional responsibilities for caring for young children and loved ones at home.

Certainly equitable funding for schools is a critical issue, and spans beyond the scope of the pandemic (Baker, 2018). Yet it is also the case that if teachers feel that they no longer have adequate resources to do their jobs, their embeddedness to their work may be weakened. Recognizing that time is also a resource that can be reallocated (or sacrificed) is important as well. Indeed, with the technological and social constraints now in place, many schools have found it necessary to rethink the time demands placed on teachers. School leaders would be wise to take careful stock of what teachers have had to sacrifice during the pandemic, and either find ways to restore or replace what was lost.

Conclusion

We suggest that interventions that are more carefully targeted at supporting the reasons that teachers remain (either in a specific classroom or in the profession) may be more effective, and that teacher embeddedness shows potential as a theory with demonstrated predictive power that may be used to guide such efforts.

The theory of teacher embeddedness holds great promise as a framework, and we suggest that it may have great utility beyond its use as a predictor of turnover, and even serve to guide the creation of mentoring and induction programs for teachers as well as improve long-term retention. We argue that new insights regarding a teacher's decision to stay in their current position may be elicited using this framework, as is demonstrated here by using job embeddedness to analyze issues of teacher retention during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

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