PUBLIC SCHOOL BUILDING CONDITIONS IN ONE NEW YORK STATE URBAN
SCHOOL: AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ EXPERIENCES WITH
TEACHING AND LEARNING

By

Ariana Ames

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DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

This study uses qualitative case study analysis to explore the lived experience of teachers in one school building in a New York urban school district, and examines how they perceive the effects of school building conditions on the teaching and learning process. This study found that teachers are not able to make teaching and learning a priority when the school building and surrounding neighborhood are perceived as unsafe. Moreover, it was found that teachers’ experiences of school building condition are largely dependent on their students’ experiences. Finally, while teachers are often indifferent about the condition of the school building itself, they are frustrated and upset by the lack of support they receive from school system leaders when they do report building issues. The outcomes of this study can be utilized to inform future research on the experiences of teachers and leaders in New York State urban school buildings. Moreover, the outcomes can be utilized to better understand the impact of teacher effectiveness on student achievement.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Chapter One: Introduction** ................................................................................................................................. 10

- Background and Context........................................................................................................................................ 11
- Law and Policy Review ........................................................................................................................................ 12
  - U.S. Strides Towards Fiscal Equity .............................................................................................................. 12
  - Achieving Fiscal Equity in New York City ..................................................................................................... 15
- Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................................... 18

**Problem Statement** ........................................................................................................................................... 18
**Purpose of the Study** ........................................................................................................................................ 19
**Research Question** ........................................................................................................................................... 19
**Conceptual Framework** .................................................................................................................................... 19
**Theoretical Framework** ...................................................................................................................................... 21
  - Studies Utilizing Broken Windows Theory .................................................................................................. 21
  - Critics of Broken Windows Theory ............................................................................................................... 23
  - Rationale ....................................................................................................................................................... 24
  - Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................................... 24

**Definitions** ......................................................................................................................................................... 25
**Assumptions** ......................................................................................................................................................... 25
**Scope and Delimitations** ...................................................................................................................................... 26
**Limitations** ......................................................................................................................................................... 27
**Significance** ......................................................................................................................................................... 28
**Summary** ............................................................................................................................................................ 29

**Chapter Two: Literature Review** ......................................................................................................................... 30
Chapter Three: Methodology ................................................................. 45

Research Design and Rationale .............................................................. 45
Methodology ............................................................................................ 46
Positionality Statement ............................................................................ 48
Participant Selection ................................................................................ 49
Procedures for Recruitment and Participation ......................................... 51
Data Collection .......................................................................................... 54
Data Analysis ............................................................................................. 54
Trustworthiness ....................................................................................... 56
Ethical Procedures .................................................................................... 57
Summary .................................................................................................... 58

Chapter Four: Results .............................................................................. 60

Demographic Data .................................................................................... 60
Description of the Data ............................................................................. 62
The Case Study Institution ......................................................................... 63
Description of Data Analysis Process ......................................................... 64
Semi-Structured Interview Data Analysis ..................................................... 65
Safety Team Meeting Data Analysis .......................................................... 66
Convergence of the Data .............................................................................. 66
Emergent Themes ......................................................................................... 67
The Classroom .............................................................................................. 67
Bureaucracy ................................................................................................. 72
The Neighborhood ....................................................................................... 75
Description of Findings ............................................................................... 77
Summary ....................................................................................................... 83

Chapter Five: Recommendations and Conclusions ..................................... 86
Summary of the Literature Review ............................................................... 87
Research Question ....................................................................................... 88
Summary of the Methodology ....................................................................... 88
Summary of the Results ............................................................................... 89
Discussion of the Conclusions in Relation to the Literature ......................... 90
Limitations ................................................................................................. 94
Implications for Future Research ............................................................... 95
Implications for Practice ............................................................................ 96
Conclusion ................................................................................................. 97

References .................................................................................................. 100
Appendix A ................................................................................................. 108
Appendix B ................................................................................................. 111
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Summary of Data Analysis Application .........................................................56
Table 2. Demographic Information ...........................................................................61
Table 3. Superordinate and Subordinate Themes .......................................................66
Table 4. Case Study Findings ..................................................................................78
Table 5. Conclusions ...............................................................................................89
Chapter One: Introduction

Students spend approximately 70 percent of their waking hours at school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008) with the goal ultimately being to learn and to eventually go on to college or secure a well-paying job one day. Regardless of how much time children spend at school, however, that goal of achievement of a level of learning to move them toward their future becomes more difficult to reach if there are building issues constantly distracting them and their teachers.

The Council of State Governments Justice Center (2015) published a report indicating four major elements that best facilitate learning in schools: safety, engagement, connectedness, and support. Teachers are indicated as the drivers of these elements, ensuring that a positive environment is created for students. In buildings with deferred maintenance, however, the ability of teachers to create environments with these core values in mind is significantly more difficult, which subsequently makes teaching and learning more difficult (Ayers, 1999). In order for children to feel safe, welcomed, and at home in under-maintained schools, teachers must constantly report malfunctioning elements of their building, and consistently follow up to ensure that they are addressed. This ultimately takes time away from instruction and leaves teachers feeling disengaged and not supported (Ayers, 1999).

The United States General Accounting Office (1995) also published a report estimating that 14 million students attend schools that need extensive repairs, or overall demolition and reconstruction. That equates to over 30 percent of all students in the United States attempting to obtain a quality education in buildings that are considered substandard. Thus, substandard facilities are affecting a significant number of students and teachers across the country. To explore this phenomenon, the current study sought to examine the lived experiences of teachers
in one school building in a New York State urban school district, and how they perceive school building conditions affect the teaching and learning process.

**Background and Context**

Former Secretary of Education, Richard C. Riley, states, “While the majority of [New York] schools are in *adequate* condition, three-fourths of our schools reported that they needed to spend some money to repair, renovate, or modernize their school building in order to get them in good condition. The cost investment is $127 billion” (Hunter, 2009, p. 10). If the cost assessed is $127 billion, this points to a likely deficiency in the condition of New York buildings. Major infrastructure neglect such as this will only continue to worsen facilities issues, thus creating a larger economic burden for the State and lowering the chances of student access to quality educational facilities.

Moreover, research shows that a connection can be made between academic achievement and school building condition in many different ways. School building condition can affect students’ attendance (Belanger, Kielb, & Lin, 2006), self-esteem (Maxwell & Chmielewski, 2007), and a student’s overall ability to concentrate (Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008). However, little research has been conducted on how school building conditions are experienced by teachers. Thus, this study sought to explore the lived experience of New York teachers with school building condition in the teaching and learning process in one NY urban school building.

In order the understand the context for the issue of school building condition, it is necessary to explore the law and policy background with regard to political efforts at the state and federal levels that impact NY public schools.
Law and Policy Review

Although this study aims to understand how teachers experience school building conditions in New York urban school districts, the history of inequity as it pertains to school building conditions in New York provides a context for understanding this experience. For example, a report published by the Service Employees International Union (2014) indicates that there is a strong positive correlation between NY public school district poverty rates and their respective Building Condition Assessment Survey (BCAS) scores. This means that schools located in the most impoverished neighborhoods in New York City are in the worst condition. A BCAS score is the City’s assessment of a public school building’s electrical, mechanical, and architectural integrity. Of the schools analyzed in the report, the ten percent located in census tracts with the lowest poverty rates had, on average, better BCAS scores than the ten percent of schools located in census tracts with the highest poverty rates (Service Employees International Union, 2014). The general ideology per the Service Employees International Union (2014) points to fiscal inequities and budgeting as one of the root causes of the extent of this problem. Thus, it is important to discuss the history of law and policy with regard to facilities funding and support.

U.S. Strides Towards Fiscal Equity

Throughout the years, there have been numerous law and policy efforts made at the federal and state levels to move towards fiscal equity for all schools. The following federal efforts have had a large impact on NY urban schools.

**Every Student Succeeds Act.** From a policy standpoint, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), enacted in 2015 by President Barack Obama, invoked a conversation regarding the fiscal equity of all schools in the United States and how that should be regulated to promote educational equity. The ESSA changed and increased reporting requirements for all schools and
mandated that districts regularly report the allocation of their per-pupil funds as well. The act requires:

The per-pupil expenditures of Federal, State, and local funds, including actual personnel expenditures and actual non-personnel expenditures of Federal, State, and local funds, disaggregated by source of funds, for each local educational agency and each school in the State for the preceding fiscal year. (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015)

This act was enacted to promote transparency and accountability across schools. The ESSA also required that schools are categorized as Comprehensive Support and Improvement Schools if school-level budgeting inequities are identified. Schools in which inequities were identified were put on a performance improvement plan, monitored by the respective state’s education department (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

This level of accountability and transparency in school funding had never been seen before the enactment of the ESSA. Due to the ESSA, previously existing financial reporting surveys had to be amended in order to comply with the new ESSA requirements. A contemporary example of an amended survey is the National Public Education Survey.

**National Public Education Survey (NPEFS).** The NPEFS is an annual collection of state-level finance data including data from all state-run schools in continental U.S. and U.S. Territories. This data is used for a number of reasons including, but certainly not limited to, calculating federal program allocations such as states' “average per-pupil expenditure” (SPPE) for elementary and secondary education and creating certain formula grant programs (e.g. Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 [ESEA] as amended, Impact Aid, and Indian Education programs) (Mullan, 2016). In 2016, the National Center for Education Statistics Division of the Department of Education proposed adding two additional items to the
NPEFS data. The two additions they proposed are a report on current expenditures disaggregated by source of funds and Local Education Agency (LEA) report cards. The reason for these amendments was to ensure compliance with the newly enacted ESSA. These amendments took effect in the 2017 reporting cycle because reporting as it existed prior to the ESSA was detailed enough to fit the ESSA requirements. One of the largest programs that relies on the accuracy of NPEFS is Title I.

**Title I Funding.** The states’ primary focus for fiscal allocation relies heavily on Title I funding, which is extremely important in order to ensure disadvantaged neighborhood schools are getting the money they deserve. Title I is the longest-standing federally funded program in the United States. The Title I funding program was created to offer aid to at-risk students (Tragdale, 2012). In order for a school to qualify for Title I funding in New York City, at least 60 percent of the students must be enrolled in the Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program (FRPL). In 2015, 98 percent of all public schools in New York City qualify for Title I funding. Any agency that utilizes Title I data in their formulas would benefit from the regulation modification to ensure more accurate reporting, as was encouraged by ESSA. The most recent Federal Register Notice on this policy proposal mentions three programs that Title I would directly benefit: The Educational Technology State Grants program (Title II Part D of the ESEA), the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program under Title VII of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, and the Teacher Quality State Grants program. The NPEFS is what ultimately determines Title I allocation and is the most integral piece to ensuring fiscal equity across schools. Ensuring that NPEFS data is more robust and accurate has a momentous trickle-down effect to Title I and other critical programs that it affects.
Summary. The ESSA, the NPEFS, and Title I are three federal-level examples of the United States’ push towards more fiscally equitable school system. The ESSA invoked a change in the NPEFS and the clarity of the NPEFS allows schools to allocate more accurate resources to Title I schools across the country. Thus, equitable funding mandates at the federal level influence equitable funding at the state level as well.

Achieving Fiscal Equity in New York City

Although there has been action taken towards equity of all United States schools from a funding perspective, NYC has made its own strides towards fiscal equity for schools as well. There are two court cases with significant impact on NYC fiscal equity for schools.

Levittown v. Nyquist (1982). In the **Levittown v. Nyquist** (1982) case, the Levittown School District of New York filed a suit declaring that the State’s school funding system at the time violated the right to a sound basic education as mandated by the State Constitution. The principal argument of the case being that low tax districts are not in a position to provide the same level of education as a high tax school district as school funding at the time was largely based on property taxes. The Court originally ruled in favor of the plaintiff. However, this case was appealed by the defendant. On appeal, the ruling was reversed and it was found that New York State is providing a sound basic education regardless of its funding algorithm because the State provides per-pupil funding to all schools. The New York Court of Appeals notes the literal interpretation of the New York State Constitution does not call for equality of funding; rather for students to have access to a sound basic education at all times (Columbia University Teachers College, 2011).

Campaign for Fiscal Equity v. New York State (1993). In response to the **Levittown v. Nyquist** decision, the Campaign for Fiscal Equality (CFE) filed a suit against the State of New
York in 1993. The CFE is a collaboration of parents, litigators, and education advocates who were all proponents of fiscal equality among schools (Rebell, 2011). Founded by Michael A. Rebell, an education litigator, the CFE was created with the primary purpose of combating against fiscal inequality in New York schools. The first thing on their agenda was creating equal funding for all schools in the state and so they did, by almost immediately filing a suit against the state.

The CFE stated that unequal funding prevents student access to the “sound basic education” that is referred to in the New York Constitution and that this must be rectified through fiscal equality across the State ("Campaign for Fiscal Equality Inc. v. State," 1993). The case was filed in the New York Supreme Court, reversed by the appellate division, then upheld in the New York Court of Appeals in 2003.

The Court ruled in favor of the CFE and ordered that the state reform current funding methods in order to create equality among all schools. In the appellate division of the Supreme Court, the ruling was reversed in 1995. The appellate division ruled that the only requirement of a sound basic education in the Constitution is that children must receive up to an 8th grade education. Anything beyond that should be considered a luxury. The CFE filed for appeal in the New York State Court of Appeals in 2003. The Court of Appeals ruled in the CFE’s favor and reaffirmed the original Supreme Court decision. So, although the original suit was filed in 1993, the ruling was not reaffirmed until 2006 and it was only then that action could be required of the state (Rebell, 2011).

In this case, both parties agreed, based on precedent, that the Constitution called for a sound basic education provided to all students. However, the legal question was whether fiscal inequality among the schools in New York State made New York schools unable to provide a
sound basic education therefore rendering fiscal inequality unconstitutional. The New York State Supreme Court held that fiscal equality is actually necessary in order to provide all students with access to a sound basic education as required by the New York State Constitution ("Campaign for Fiscal Equality Inc. v. State," 1995). That said, the CFE was on the winning side of this case. The CFE’s goal as an organization was for New York State to not only recognize the fiscal equality happening between schools, but to mandate a systemic change and that is precisely what occurred. The holding of this case triggered many projects that essentially forced the state to balance aid in a way that promoted fiscal equality. Based on the ruling, the court ordered three things: (1) By performing a cost study, the State must essentially determine the cost of providing a sound basic education, (2) the state must fund those costs, and (3) the state must create and implement an accountability system to ensure the two aforementioned things are actually happening (M. A. Hunter, 2004). The State was given a deadline of July 30, 2004.

On March 29, 2004, the State estimated the cost of a sound basic education to be $1.93 billion and proposed the current accountability structures in place that sanction failing schools is adequate enough. In 2006, this $1.93 billion price tag was adjusted based on district. A cost analysis was performed by Standard and Poor’s School Evaluation Services (S & P) to determine which school districts needed more funds based on the number of disabled students, the number of economically disadvantaged students, and the number of students with limited English language proficiency (Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc. v. State of New York, 2006). The new price of a sound basic education now ranged from $1.93 billion to $2.53 billion depending on the district.
**Conclusion**

Many argue that the root cause of deteriorating school building conditions in New York State is the lack of proper funding (R. C. Hunter, 2009). Because of these conditions, it is important to understand the rich history of the school funding battle in New York. Fiscal inequity for schools is the current conversation not only for New York City, as highlighted in this chapter, but for the entire state, and is influenced by law and policy at both federal and state levels. Although fiscal allocation is arguably the heart of educational equity, the current research argues that without proper acknowledgement of what actually needs to be corrected in New York, school buildings, and the influence of deferred maintenance on teaching and learning, fiscal allocation cannot be properly discussed. The current research aims to inform the fiscal dispute outlined in current law and policy conversations.

**Problem Statement**

Research shows that a connection can be made between academic achievement and school building conditions in many different ways. It can affect students’ attendance (Belanger, Kielb, & Lin, 2006), self-esteem (Maxwell & Chmielewski, 2007), and a student’s overall ability to concentrate (Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008). School building conditions can affect teachers in many different ways as well. It can have an impact on teacher retention (Buckley, Schneider, & Shang, 2004), instructional techniques, teacher burnout rates (Rivera-Batiz & Marti, 1995), and overall teacher morale (Earthman & Lemasters, 2009). School building conditions are not something to be taken lightly given these implications. In New York City alone, deferred maintenance of up to $127 billion is required to address existing school facilities issues (Hunter, 2009). While these connections have been made in the research, however, there is a gap in the literature with regard to how teachers experience school building conditions across the State.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this exploratory case study is to explore how school teachers in one school building in an New York urban school district experience the school building conditions and how teachers perceive those conditions affecting the teaching and learning process.

Research Question

How are New York urban district school teachers in the case study institution experiencing school building conditions and how do they perceive the impact on the teaching and learning process?

Conceptual Framework

The phenomenon that was studied was the lived experience of teachers in the teaching and learning process in urban school buildings in New York. In order to explore this phenomenon, and ultimately answer the research question, there are multiple literature streams that needed to be explored.

The teaching and learning process in urban New York school buildings was studied by examining three principal literature streams. The first stream focused on the student experience and how students can be affected by school facilities. As students are an integral part of the teaching and learning process, it was nearly impossible to answer the research question without understanding how school buildings can affect students and student learning. Within this stream, studies showed that students have been and can be affected by school building condition in a number of ways. School facilities can affect student health, attendance, their ability to concentrate, and their self-esteem (Belanger, Kielb, & Lin, 2006; Maxwell & Chmielewski, 2007; Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008).
The second stream that was explored was conditions of New York urban district schools. Within New York, public schools have a rich history that goes beyond the facilities themselves (Boese, 1869). Although literature shows that the condition of New York urban district school buildings is a major issue overall (New York City Council, 2018), it was important to understand why this came to be. New York State is home to the New York City Department of Education. This is the largest school system in the United States. This, within this stream, the first sub-stream that was examined concerned the New York City’s attempt to improve school facilities in the past. The creation of the School Construction Authority and the Building Condition Assessment Survey that the Authority conducts were NYC’s first attempts at facilities improvement (“BCAS: Making New York City’s Schools Safe and Sound”, 2013). However, the literature review outlines how and why these initiatives, although well-intended, are not currently successful. Within this second stream, it was also important to discuss the history of inequality that NYC public schools have faced in the past and face today. NYC public schools have experienced race issues, fiscal inequalities, and physical plant inequalities based on the geographical location of the school for decades.

The third stream of literature that was explored was how teachers can be affected by school buildings conditions in general. Just as students are at the core of the teaching and learning process, so are teachers. Without teachers, students cannot learn and without students, teachers cannot teach. Thus, it is critical to understand what the literature already shows as it pertains to teachers and school building condition. Literature showed that school facilities can affect teacher morale, retention, and instructional methods (Bowers & Burkett, 1989; Buckley et al., 2004; Chaney & Lewis, 2007; Earthman & Lemasters, 2009; Plympton et al., 2000; Rivera-Batiz & Marti, 1995).
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation to the study of this phenomenon is broken windows theory. Broken windows theory is a criminological theory first introduced by sociologists James Wilson and George Kelling in 1982. They used broken windows as a metaphor for disorder. The premise of this theory is that, “Social psychologists and police officers tend to agree that if a window in a building is broken and is left unrepaired, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken” (Kelling & Wilson, 1982, p. 11). They posit that crime is born from disorder in neighborhoods and communities and that if disorder is properly tended to and managed, crime and disorderly behavior would decrease. The relationships that Kelling and Wilson (1982) wish to establish using broken windows theory are that disorder contributes to fear, fear contributes to a breakdown of social controls, and a breakdown of social controls contributes to crime, or disorderly behavior. Kelling and Wilson (1982) talked about broken windows theory in terms of policing and crime. Kelling and Wilson (1982) suggest that if street crimes (pick-pocketing, graffiti, window-washers, etc.) are targeted by police, it will reduce fear and promote a feeling of safety within the community, thus preventing more serious crimes.

Studies Utilizing Broken Windows Theory

In 1985, New York City hired George Kelling to use broken windows theory as a tool to eliminate subway graffiti (Corman 2002). Although Kelling started this initiative as a consultant, William Bratton, upon his appointment as the NYC police commissioner in 1990, implemented broken windows theory on a larger scale and incorporated it into policing in NYC. Bratton, along with the mayor of the time, Rudy Giuliani, implemented broken windows policing as a means to decrease quality of life crimes and promote a feeling of safety around NYC. After approximately 10 years of implementation, it was found that major crimes decreased tenfold and were the
lowest they had been in the city’s history. Once major crimes dropped, the city seized broken windows policing as it was determined to have served its purpose in reducing crime (Corman, 2002). Although this was more of a longitudinal application, there were many short term studies that used broken windows as a framework as well.

Philip Zimbardo, a Stanford psychologist conducted a precursor experiment in 1969 that supported broken windows theory before it was even published in The Atlantic by Kelling and Wilson in March of 1982. In his experiment, Zimbardo left two cars without license plates and with the hoods left open in a poor, crime-ridden section of New York City. Zimbardo also left another car in the same condition in the affluent Palo Alto, California. After ten minutes, the car in New York City began being stripped of valuable goods and was subsequently vandalized and destroyed. The car in Palo Alto remained untouched for over a week. Zimbardo then took a sledgehammer to the car himself and within minutes, the car began being vandalized further and ultimately destroyed. The conclusion of his experiment was that no matter what the setting is, “once disorder begins…things begin to get out of control.” (Vedantam, Benderev, Boyle, Klahr, Penman, & Schmidt, 2016, p. 6).

Similarly, in 2005, a Harvard University researcher conducted an experiment on 35 crime-ridden areas in East Boston. Half of the corners were cleaned up, trash was cleared, street lights and poles were repainted and cleared of graffiti, and building zoning requirements were enforced, and more citizens in the area were ticketed for misdemeanor crimes. On the other half of the corners, normal policing continued and the corners were not cleaned. After the course of a month, it was shown that the corners that were cleaned and that practiced increased policing experienced a 20 percent decrease in police calls (Johnson, 2009).
The outcome was similar for school buildings and Stephen Plank’s study using broken windows as a framework as it applies to schools as well. Stephen Plank, a Sociology professor from Johns Hopkins University, conducted a study on how classroom surroundings influence student behavior and fear, using the broken windows theory as a theoretical framework (Plank, Bradshaw, & Young, 2009). By surveying 6th-8th graders, Plank determined that student behavior has a statistically significant relationship to the classroom setting. He concluded that fixing broken windows and improving building condition of the school will not be the sole impetus for effective teaching and learning. However, not addressing school building condition can make the ability to teach and learn more difficult as time progresses (Plank, et al., 2009). This doctoral study aimed to show a similar connection with a qualitative methodology, and showcasing the lived experience of teachers.

**Critics of Broken Windows Theory**

Although the broken windows theory seems to hold true in most applications and studies, there are numerous critiques of the theory. Ralph Taylor, a criminologist, criticizes broken windows theory claiming that fixing a “broken window” is solely a temporary solution. He agrees that many studies show improvement of crime after the implementation of broken windows policy. However, it is not guaranteed nor expected that these outcomes will sustain (Taylor, 2001).

Another criticism has been the subjectivity of the theory itself. Kelling and Wilson (1982) link crime to “disorder” in their article and use the idea of a broken window as a metaphor for disorder. However, Gau and Pratt (2010) share the fact that disorder is subjective. What one person perceives as disorder in one neighborhood may be considered normal and acceptable in another neighborhood. Gau and Pratt (2010) indicate that this is not an accurate measure for how
to handle crime, or perceived crime. Gau and Pratt (2010) also refer to the unintended consequences of broken windows policy enforcement. They outline that underserved neighborhoods are almost always the areas that are perceived as “disorderly” solely based on their appearance. Therefore, these neighborhoods end up being associated with crime and violence when that may not be the case at all.

**Rationale**

The premise of the current research is that both teachers and students are affected by their surroundings in schools. The premise of broken windows theory is that community members are largely affected by their surroundings as well. One of the relationships that broken windows highlights is the one between physical disorder and social disorder. The basis of the theory is that physical disorder (a broken window) can influence social disorder (crime). Within this doctoral study, the results suggest the same to be true in schools: physical disorder (deferred maintenance issues) influences social disorder (low attendance rates, low achievement, poor teacher engagement, etc.).

The data analysis process was informed by broken windows theory by extracting what forms of physical disorder exist within the school building of the case study NY public school based on interview and meeting minute data. Moreover, this categorized physical disorder was linked to the social disorders that they either directly or indirectly influence.

**Conclusion**

Broken windows theory was a revolutionary sociological discovery. There have been numerous effective applications of the theory to policing and education. However, there are many substantial critiques to the study that can invoke bias or threaten validity of the current study. While these critiques were taken into account, broken windows theory is the most
applicable theory to the current study as numerous parallels can be drawn between the physical and social disorder of a neighborhood and the physical and social disorder of a school.

**Definitions**

**Student Achievement** – Demonstrated proficiency in Math and English Language Arts (ELA) on statewide standardized tests (The Education Team and the Division of Budget of New York’s Policy Office, 2014).

**School Facility** – A building that is utilized for the purpose of teaching and learning. These facilities contain students, teachers, and classrooms (Mwamwenda & Mwamwenda, 1987).

**School Building Condition** – The state of the physical plant of a particular school facility (Al-Enezi, 2002)

**Deferred Maintenance** – The practice of postponing maintenance activities such as repairs (Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board, 2011)

**Specials** – Any subjects other than English Language Arts, Math, and History such as Physical Education, Special Education Teacher Support Services (SETSS), Occupational Therapy, Home Economics, etc. Specials are taught by specific, specialized teachers to give children a more rounded education. They're an addition to regular classroom studies (Schoolwires, Inc., 2018).

**Assumptions**

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) state, “Assumptions are so basic that, without them, the research problem itself could not exist” (p. 62). Therefore, the primary assumption of this study is that teachers lived experiences in New York urban district buildings can be articulated through semi-structured interviews and a collection of artifacts from one case study institution.
Additionally, it was assumed that all participants would answer the interview questions openly and truthfully. In order to ensure that was the case, anonymity and confidentiality were preserved throughout the implementation of the study. Interviews took place off site and outside of school hours so participants felt that they were far removed from the case study institution when answering questions. Moreover, the participants voluntarily participated and could decline to answer any question at any point without ramifications. These measures ensured that the participants felt comfortable answering the questions.

Through the pragmatic worldview, it is also assumed that a qualitative exploratory case study was the best way to not only close the gap in the existing literature, but to gain and understanding of teachers’ lived experiences of working in New York urban school districts. Currently, literature around teachers and school building condition assess the phenomenon through a quantitative lens. Offering the lived experiences of teachers using a qualitative methodology will support existing literature.

**Scope and Delimitations**

Only one case study institution was chosen in this study to ensure the research question is answered. Hearing from many different teachers in many different schools may not have had the same impact as hearing from many teachers, all in the same location, about the teaching and learning process in their building. The total population sampling method was chosen for the same reason. A total population sampling method is a purposive sampling technique that allows for the examination of the entire population (Lund Research Ltd, 2012). Although not all full-time teachers at the case study institution chose to participate, the experiences of every full-time teacher at the site could have been useful to the study because they all experience the same school building conditions on a daily basis, therefore none of them were excluded.
New York specifically was chosen for a number of reasons as well. First and foremost, New York is the largest state in the northeast and contains the largest public school system in the nation with almost 1 million students enrolled (Sawe, 2017). Additionally, New York urban districts are home to many historically under-maintained buildings which have been a point of contention in the media for years (New York City Council, 2018). Conducting research in New York allowed the research to address all features of the phenomenon the research question proposed.

**Limitations**

Throughout the implementation of this study, numerous limitations were identified. The first, and arguably most significant, limitation was that the scope of this study required participants to be full-time teachers who had a homeroom classroom. There are over 30 other staff members at the case study institution who teach children at some point in the day, but do not have a classroom or are not full-time. However, full-time teachers with a homeroom spend the most hours teaching every day based on the case study institution’s daily schedule. Moreover, they have a longitudinal outlook of their class as they teach the same students every day, over the course of 180 days. Thus, full-time teachers potentially have the most insight as it pertains to the teaching and learning process and how it affects them and their students. Including other staff members, however, could have provided a different perspective on shared spaces and how they can affect the teaching and learning process.

The second limitation of this study was that the Safety Team at the case study institution only includes teachers who volunteer to take part in it. Hence, the meeting minutes only reflect the experiences of teachers who are interested in expressing their safety concerns with a larger group. There were some teachers during the semi-structured interviews who have valid safety
concerns about the case study institution, however not all were not comfortable sharing with a 
group or were able to devote the time to take part in the Safety Team. Their thoughts about 
safety specifically, although discussed during the semi-structured interviews, were not captured 
when the Safety Team meeting minutes were analyzed.

The third limitation of this study was the sensitivity of the subject matter. Although 
participants were asked questions that pertained to the environment of the case study institution 
and their students, participants often addressed the issue of bureaucracy and management.

**Significance**

*Good teachers* are always the ones that students can remember throughout life, and are 
really able to make a difference in students’ lives (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011). The 
quality of education and student achievement on the whole is largely dependent on teachers 
(Ofoegbu, 2004; Rockoff, 2004). It is, therefore, important that teachers are able to function at 
the highest level so that they are able to make a positive impact on students. Government 
agencies have already somewhat agreed on this principle. The Education Team and the Division 
of Budget of New York’s Policy Office (2015) use teacher effectiveness as one of the 
determining factors of school failure in annual reports. Thus, the overall success of a school and 
its students is largely dependent on teachers and their ability to create a positive teaching and 
learning environment.

Factors that contribute to student success are at the forefront of educational research. 
Researchers have considered factors from school start times to parent engagement and how they 
affect student success (Blust, 2017; Gilpin, 2017). Every educational organization is looking for 
the secret formula to student success because it is essential to the function of our future.

Existing literature shows that school building condition plays an integral role in teacher
engagement in general. School building condition can affect teacher morale, teacher retention, and burnout (Buckley et al., 2004; Earthman & Lemasters, 2009; Plympton et al., 2000). Thus, addressing deferred maintenance will go beyond just ensuring students are able to perform, but it will indicate a commitment to teacher effectiveness and student success.

Summary

School building conditions can affect both students and teachers in a number of ways including student attendance, student health, student self-esteem, teacher morale, and teacher retention. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to examine the lived experiences of teachers in the teaching and learning process in a New York urban school district building. The research question guided the study by asking how teachers experience the teaching and learning process within a New York urban district building. Moreover, the conceptual framework provides a map of the pool of information surrounding this phenomenon. In Chapter Two, the Literature Review follows the conceptual framework to discuss overarching themes as it pertains to school building condition and its effect on the teaching and learning process.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Much research has been conducted on school facilities, how they may affect students and teachers, and why deteriorating facilities may exist in the first place. The problem addressed in this study is deferred maintenance in New York urban district school buildings and how it impacts teachers’ experience in the teaching and learning process. However, the purpose is to uncover what has seldom been discussed: the lived experience of teachers in NY public school buildings. The literature thoroughly addresses school facilities as a whole and the inequities surrounding them. The two common themes in literature on public school facilities are fiscal and societal inequities and the lack of space for public schools in large cities. These themes will be discussed from an empirical standpoint. The review will then more specifically discuss urban district facilities in New York and what has been done so far in order to address the issue of deferred maintenance.

Finally, the review will discuss how previous researchers have made the connection between school facilities and academic achievement. Moreover, the review will discuss how school facilities is said to have impacted teachers’ work. The review outlines school facilities, why deferred maintenance is an issue, and how students and teachers are reacting to it. This study will add to this body of research by including the lived experiences of teachers in the empirical literature.

Literature Search Strategy

The initial search of the literature had primarily a school facilities focus. The recent literature was prioritized that discussed school facilities and how they can affect student achievement. This included how school facilities can affect both students and teachers. The databases primarily used were Education Resource Information Center, Education Resource
Complete, Academic Search Complete, PsycINFO, and Criminal Justice Abstracts. After aggregating that literature, it was important to look specifically at school facilities issues in New York. New York City was used as an example because it is unique in that there are systems and agencies in place to address school building maintenance, yet the issue of substandard facilities still persists. That finding lead to a literature search on the history of school facilities in New York City and the inequalities that surround NYC schools; both geographically and financially. These themes, together, along with the lived experiences of teachers, provide a conceptual framework for how the condition of New York urban district school buildings affects the teaching and learning process, the focus of this research study.

**Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

The empirical literature review discusses current information on school facilities in the literature, how school facilities have been defined by researchers in the past, and common trends in school facilities. The literature review then, more specifically, discusses the history of school facilities in New York City, and how New York City has attempted to address some of the existing issues within the realm of school facilities. The review concludes with the literature demonstrating the effects school building condition can have on both students and teachers and what the specifics of those effects are.

**School Facilities in the Literature**

An extensive amount of research has been conducted on many different aspects of school facilities around the United States. Primarily, the research addresses fiscal inequities in capital improvement expenditures for school buildings and existing lack of space for the construction of school buildings in highly populated areas. Research shows that both of these points have an adverse effect on students and teachers (Chaney & Lewis, 2007).
School Facilities Defined. As the literature stands, there is a divide on the definition of school facilities. Some researchers define facilities as the availability of valuable resources. For example, Mwamwenda & Mwamwenda (1987) operationalize the measurement of adequate facilities by availability of resources like the size of classrooms, student:teacher ratio, size of libraries, student:book ratio, etc. In studies regarding school facilities in developing countries, these resources expand to include: desk:student ratio, the number of classrooms exposed to the elements (classrooms without roofing or walls), etc. The second stream of literature operationalizes optimal facilities by measuring environmental and architectural standards. Picus, Marion, Calvo, & Glenn (2005) includes air quality and indoor climate as a standard of measurement while Pasalar (2007) goes further to include building aesthetics and age (i.e. what is the appearance of the building’s facade? Is it welcoming and up-to-date?)

Ultimately, both ideologies are valuable. Aspects from both schools of thought include factors that affect student achievement in the long term based on empirical research studies. Moreover, the existing literature attempts to confirm that these factors affect student achievement. However, while the research shows a correlation, they simply point out the problem without offering solutions.

School Funding Inequity. Although schools are funded by federal, state, and local budgets, more than 50 percent of school funding comes from local property tax revenue (Kozol, 1991). This is an inherently unequal process and higher taxes do not necessarily equal more funding (Kozol, 1991). Camden, New Jersey, for example, is the fourth most dangerous city in the United States with 58 violent crimes occurring per 1,000 residents each year (NeighborhoodScout, 2017b). Despite this, Camden has almost the highest property tax rate in New Jersey although property in Camden is worth very little (NeighborhoodScout, 2017a). So,
although the tax rate is high, revenue is astonishingly low, making school funding extremely low in this city as well. The implications of this inequity are grave. This, in turn, drives families with children to live in suburbs with higher property values in order to have access to a better education, better facilities, and higher paid teachers (Kozol, 1991). The school facilities in more affluent areas are not only better, but studies have also shown that districts with lower socioeconomic status tend to house school buildings that are under-maintained and dilapidated (Duncombe & Wang, 2009). With property taxes as the largest determinant of school funding, inequity among school buildings and student opportunity will persist.

To address this inequity of funding and opportunity, states like Texas and Illinois, enacted facilities financing plans to battle fiscal inequities in financing improvements for districts that need it most. These states do so by funding schools based on poverty rate in addition to property tax, to promote equity across districts (Duncombe et al., 2009). In creating a plan to promote fiscal equity, there is a missing piece. Even if funds were distributed evenly amongst districts to promote capital improvement projects, the proper identification of what building issues affect students and teachers the most is missing.

Lack of Space. The second issue with school facilities that research shows effects students and teachers is the general lack of space for school buildings and overcrowding. Overcrowding in schools is a major issue that, in some instances, calls for new school building construction. In some states, their School Construction Authority approves new building construction for any new housing developments being constructed in a zone that is already overpopulated (R. C. Hunter, 2009). However, real estate in New York City makes it difficult to identify a feasible place for school construction, let alone execute proper buildout. The existing literature regarding lack of space proposes plans for new building construction; however, it does
not discuss what to do in instances where that is not possible. Erecting a new school building for every new high rise would be ideal, but resources on what to do as an alternative have not been provided.

Over time, the adverse effects of overcrowding on teachers and students tend to worsen, making it difficult for academic success to be achieved. Emmer and Stough (2010) conducted a study on classroom management and how it fits into the teaching process. They found that overcrowded classrooms were among the top stressors for teachers. Overcrowding made it difficult to manage behavior and difficult to teach a complete lesson. This, in turn, has environmental implications. When classrooms are difficult to manage, teachers tend to close doors and windows to prevent further distraction of students (Burden, 2017). However, the lack of ventilation in an overcrowded environment causes carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels to rise, and increased CO₂ levels have a direct negative impact on human cognition (Lee & Chang, 1999).

Aside from classroom management, Onwu and Stoffels (2005) study on teaching science in under-resourced classrooms found that overcrowding does not allow for teacher creativity. In an overcrowded environment, teachers often have to resort to a didactic teaching method, even if it is not the most effective. All of these implications create road blocks to academic achievement.

What some places like New York City are doing to combat overcrowding is turning to private facilities for their schools to be housed in. Instead of just relying on DOE buildings provided by the state, Charter schools are looking towards office buildings instead and changing the Certificate of Occupancy with New York’s Department of Buildings from Commercial Use to School Use (Medina, 2009). In the past, the New York City Charter School Center offered Charter Schools 20 percent per pupil in rental assistance costs when renting out private space. However, because of the influx of private space use and lack of space and feasibility in existing
DOE buildings, the New York City Charter School Center increased their rental assistance to 30 percent per pupil for private facilities in 2017 (New York Charter School Center, 2017). Again, this leaves no plan for what to do with DOE buildings that are currently experiencing deferred maintenance and overcrowding.

**Conclusion.** Although existing literature on school facilities is solutions-oriented with regard to the two most prominent facilities issues (funding and space), there is a subcategory of students that is not being helped with any of the solutions proposed. Children who (1) are living in a district with a failing zone school, (2) haven’t been lucky enough to get off of the waitlist to attend a charter school, and (3) cannot afford private schools and literally have no other option but to attend DOE zone schools. Additionally, little existing literature discusses what can be done in existing DOE buildings to make them a better place for children.

**School Facilities in New York City**

New York City Public Schools are maintained by the School Construction Authority (SCA) which is responsible for existing deferred maintenance issues in New York. Thus, it is important to note how the SCA came to fruition, its current status, and what it does to address deferred building maintenance today before identifying its shortcomings and how they affect students and teachers. Although this section focuses on the history of school buildings in New York City, it is impossible to discuss that without also discussing the inequalities that exist within education in NY and how that effects students and teachers as well.

**Segregation and Inequality.** Previous discussion outlined how school buildings are fiscally unequal. However, there are other inequalities facing New York City public schools. Serving over 1 million students in more than 1,700 schools, New York City houses the largest public school system in the country (Mehrotra, 2016). Unfortunately, New York City also has
some of the most extreme school segregation issues in the country as well. A 2014 UCLA study found that over the past twenty years, segregation in middle and high schools has increased in New York City. This could be due to the suspension of districtwide zoning for middle and high school (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014). For both middle and high school, the New York City Chancellor employed a school choice model which allows students to choose and apply to wherever they want to go; similar to the college application process (Service Employees International Union, 2014). This was originally employed to promote diversity and to offer students the ability to attend school outside of their zone. However, with high stakes testing and rigorous entry standards to most schools in New York City, children from low-income neighborhoods are usually left with no choice but to attend their zone schools (Mehrotra, 2016). These zone school demographics often mimic those of the surrounding area (Service Employees International Union, 2014).

To combat these findings, the City Council of New York passed the School Diversity Accountability Act in 2015. This Act has two main objectives: (1) DOE schools are to submit an annual report on diversity in their schools and make improvement proposals based on outcomes and (2) establish diversity as a priority in admissions, zoning, and other decision-making processes ("School Diversity Accountability Act," 2015). With the first annual report data published in 2016, the Citizens’ Committee for Children conducted a study and found that 70 percent of New York City schools were intensely segregated while only 23 percent of schools are considered to be diverse (Mehrotra, 2016).

Due to the segregation issues that New York City is facing, Black and Latino children tend to attend schools that have a predominantly Black and Latino makeup. These schools tend to sit in low-income areas, and also have the lowest building maintenance scores (Service
Employees International Union, 2014). Kozol (1991) discusses fiscal inequalities that schools face and the unjust property tax algorithm utilized to determine funding. However, those inequalities almost directly affect black and brown children living in low-income areas. Students of all races benefit from diversity in schools. A 2014 study on extreme school segregation found that racial integration in schools results in greater academic achievement, future earnings, and an improved ability to communicate with people from differing cultural backgrounds (Kucsera & Orfield, 2014). This study is not only about school building conditions, it’s about examining an issue that many minority children are experiencing that most white children are not. Not addressing the issue of school building conditions would be to ignore the underlying inequalities that surround this issue.

**New York School Construction Authority.** The School Construction Authority (SCA) was established by the New York State Legislature in December 1988 to build new public schools and manage the design, construction and renovation of capital projects in New York City's more than 1,200 public school buildings, half of which were constructed prior to 1949 (School Construction Authority, 2016). The SCA bill’s passage by the New York State Legislature came as a surprise to most. There was lots of discussion among state officials about how the SCA was going to improve schools but remain under a tight budget, but there were no actionable next steps, and so this was not appealing to the Senate on the onset (Kolbert, 1988). In response, New York’s Governor Cuomo wanted to push for the SCA to be exempt from Wicks Law and employ a single contract method. Wicks Law requires that any government agency in New York State hire four separate contractors for each construction job (general contracting, electrical, plumbing, and heating/ventilation). Under Wicks Law, none of the four contractors
have authority over each other and this leaves the government agency in charge of the project. New York General Municipal Law § 101, known as Wicks Law, reads as follows:

When the total cost of contract work for the erection, construction, reconstruction, or alteration of a public building exceeds $500,000 or more, independent prime contractors must be used for the 1) plumbing and gas fitting work; 2) steam, hot water heating, ventilation and air conditioning work; and 3) electrical wiring and illuminating fixtures work. Separate specifications are required for each aspect of the project so that each may be separately and independently bid. This ensures expert performance in each of the specified areas, rather than leaving the selection of subcontractors to the general contractor, so as to reduce the likelihood of delayed performance or poor quality of work. (Wicks Law, 2002)

Because Wicks Law requires the contracting of essentially four different construction firms, construction jobs under Wicks Law always end up costing more. Governor Cuomo’s rationale was that if the SCA was exempt from Wicks Law, school construction jobs would end up being much cheaper for the state as they would only need to employ one contractor. New York Construction Trade Unions considered this proposed exemption as a threat and were in extreme opposition. Wicks Law opens up many job opportunities for subcontractors. If Wicks Law did not exist and every government agency was allowed to utilize a single contract method, there would be no need for subcontractors and they would have to struggle to find work. This caused an uproar in the contracting community (Kolbert, 1988). Because of this, Governor Cuomo eventually backed down and applied Wicks Law to the SCA. Many skeptics argued that this caused the SCA to lose a lot of the fiscal autonomy that it had set out to achieve in the first place, however the legislation was passed regardless (Kolbert, 1988).
The SCA started with much controversy and it exists with much controversy today. The SCA is running extremely over budget with nearly 63 percent of its jobs grossly over in cost, costing taxpayers and estimated $300 million (Gonen, 2017). From direct experience, three-four year waiting periods for capital improvement projects are the norm. The SCA often turns over buildings that are incomplete while representing that they are complete (Kontorovich, 1998). Public School 55 in the Bronx is a perfect example of this. During the 2012 school year, outstanding capital improvements were done and the SCA represented that the school was up-to-date as far as their survey standards were concerned. There was, however, incomplete plumbing work which caused the temperature of any water running through the pipes of the school to sit at boiling temperatures at all times. A number of students and staff suffered from burns and other injuries because of SCA’s neglect. This is an example that is far too familiar among all New York City Schools.

**Building Condition Assessment Survey (BCAS).** The SCA administers the BCAS each year. This survey is supposed to determine what the current status of a school building (whether it is in poor or good condition). The issue here is that the SCA are the survey administrators as well as the governing body in charge of making those improvements. There is no system of checks and balances which seems unethical on its face. Moreover, the structure of the BCAS leaves a lot to be desired. The survey includes an inspection of architectural, mechanical, and electrical components of every building. For example, if a school needs scaffolding because the roofing is no longer secure, the BCAS will identify that through architectural review. However, there is not qualitative aspect to BCAS measurement. Thus, if something is generally unsafe for children or teachers, and is not necessarily a mechanical, architectural, or electrical issue, it will not be addressed by the SCA. There is one small qualitative component to the BCAS where it
asks the school’s principal to identify any issues they believe are important. However, this section is often left blank if the principal is not present on the day of inspection or if the inspector simply does not ask.

**Conclusion.** School building condition is a complex issue. Deferred maintenance and most school building condition issues occur in low-income areas and disproportionately affect minority groups (Service Employees International Union, 2014). School building condition and deferred maintenance are not just two of New York’s logistical issues, they are issues of social inequality as well.

Theoretically, if the SCA and the BCAS were both functioning at full capacity and doing what they were created to do, deferred maintenance in NY school buildings would be less of an issue. Unfortunately, based on empirical evidence, those systems created to address deferred maintenance are not functioning at a high level (Kontorovich, 1998). This study sought to uncover whether the failure of the current systems have any effect on teachers and the teaching and learning experience in NY.

**School Facilities and Academic Achievement**

There is a fair amount of recent literature on the effect of school facilities on academic achievement and there are two large areas to discuss. First and foremost is how school facilities effect student achievement specifically. The next area is how school facilities have affected teachers and their experiences.

**Student Achievement.** Another area relevant to this study discussed in existing literature is student achievement. Studies have found that there is a correlation between student achievement and school facilities. The prevailing methodology is quantitative, and researchers have made the connection between student achievement and school facilities in a few different
ways. Most studies that wanted to measure student achievement used test scores as their dependent variable. Bowers and Burkett (1989) conducted a study on how school building age affects standardized test scores. They found that there is a strong positive relationship between school building age and standardized test scores. Studies on overall school building condition and classroom daylight exposure also found a strong positive relationship between those variables and standardized test scores through quantitative data analysis (Al-Enezi, 2002; Horswill, 2011; Plympton, Conway, & Epstein, 2000). However, they failed to control for confounding variables that may contribute to this relationship. Uline and Tschannen-Moran (2008) were able to add to this body of literature by considering confounding variables. They considered school climate as a third variable, and they wanted to determine whether it played a role in the relationship between school building conditions and student achievement. To measure school climate, they employed a 28 question Likert-scale School Climate Index survey in 80 Virginia middle schools. They found that there is also a strong positive relationship between school facilities and school climate, as well as a strong positive relationship between school climate and academic achievement. Additionally, L. E. Maxwell (2016) was able to do the same by considering student attendance as the confounding variable in the relationship between school building conditions and academic achievement. She found that there is a strong positive relationship among all three.

Further research measures how school building condition affects students in different ways. It was determined that the personalization of students’ classrooms and their ability to feel that they have, in some way, contributed to their school’s physical environment has a positive impact on self-esteem (Maxwell & Chmielewski, 2008). Moreover, it was found that certain air quality in schools leads to a rise in the asthma hospitalization rates of students (Belanger, Kielb,
Researchers also found that school facilities and academic achievement is aligned with traditional broken windows theories. Specifically, physical disorder within a school has a strong positive relationship with social disorder within the school (Plank, Bradshaw, & Young, 2009). These relationships have been determined by administering surveys and secondary data analysis. Although these researchers did not measure student achievement directly, student self-esteem, social disorders, and hospitalizations all contribute to a child’s ability to succeed in school.

Teacher Experience. Although not abundant, there is literature on the effect that school buildings can have on teachers as well. Like literature on student achievement, the prevailing methodology is quantitative as well. However, researchers were able to show how school building conditions affect teachers in many different ways. Based on the literature, school facilities can affect teachers in three primary ways: (1) retention, (2) burnout, and (3) morale (Bowers & Burkett, 1989; Buckley et al., 2004; Chaney & Lewis, 2007; Earthman & Lemasters, 2009; Plympton et al., 2000; Rivera-Batiz & Marti, 1995). Through both secondary data analysis and survey data, both Bowers and Burkett (1989), and Earthman and Lemasters (2009) found that the conditions of both the school itself and the classrooms had an influence on teacher morale and burnout potential. Teachers who taught in buildings that were updated with optimal classroom conditions were able to be more productive throughout the day and have better overall attitudes (Earthman & Lemasters, 2009). Research has also found that school building condition is one of the largest indicators of teacher retention (Buckley et al., 2004). Through secondary data analysis, Buckley et al. (2004) was able to identify a correlation between school building condition and whether teachers stayed with that specific school or not.
Although quantitative is the prevailing methodology found in the literature, there is still qualitative literature on this specific topic. Rivera-Batiz and Marti (1995) conducted a qualitative study on how overcrowding and lack of sufficient space within school facilities affects teachers. Through conducting interviews, they found that teacher burnout was a common issue among staff in an overcrowded school environment. Additionally, through case study research, Plympton et al. (2000) found that direct sunlight exposure in a school building can improve the well-being and overall moods of teachers. These qualitative studies do not necessarily have findings based specifically on school building condition itself. However, overcrowding and lack of sunlight exposure are related to the structure of the school building itself.

Summary and Conclusions of the Literature Review

There is a fair amount of literature on school facilities and how they can contribute to both student and teacher success. However, the prevailing methodology is quantitative. The majority of studies have concluded that facilities are connected to academic achievement. However, very little literature was found where researchers employed qualitative methods to reach those conclusions. This study took a qualitative approach. It focuses less on identifying measurable variables for analysis and more on collecting information on experiences from teachers that inform the teaching and learning environment. Moreover, there is just an inherent difference in the data was collected in this study compared to the existing research. Existing research identifies variables the researcher thinks are important then compares and analyzes them. This study did not identify or suggest what variables are important, but rather gathered that information directly from the very subjects who work in these buildings daily, then synthesized the themes and analyzed them. In other words, specific facilities concerns were identified by the teachers themselves through interviews, not by the researcher. Additionally, although there is
 qualitative literature on the impact facilities have on teachers, there is a gap in the research on school building condition specifically and how it can affect teachers and the teaching and learning process. This study sought to address that gap. This study also aimed to give a voice to teachers who experience school building conditions on a daily basis through a qualitative case study.
Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore how school teachers in one New York urban district school building experience the school building conditions and how they perceive those conditions affect the teaching and learning process. This chapter will outline the research method of choice, data collection strategies, and data analysis procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

Qualitative research is a high level methodological approach that encompasses a variety of research methods. Qualitative research seeks to answer how or why a phenomenon occurs through in-depth participant research (Creswell, 2008). Currently, a body of research exists that quantitatively addresses the phenomenon of how teachers experience the teaching and learning process in NY school buildings (through surveys). However, “a qualitative researcher holds that understanding of a phenomenon or situation or event comes from exploring the totality of the situation.” (Bogdan & Taylor, 1984). There is a gap in this body of research around qualitative exploration of teachers’ lived experiences.

This study is based on a pragmatic worldview. With a pragmatic worldview, researchers emphasize the research problem and use all approaches available to understand the problem instead of focusing specifically on methods (Creswell, 1998). The problem addressed in this study is the impact that deferred building maintenance has on teaching and learning. Researchers have used many quantitative methods to show the importance of deferred building maintenance and why deferred building maintenance should be addressed. However, the issue itself has still not been ameliorated. This study aimed to take a different approach, a qualitative approach, to show the importance of addressing deferred building maintenance from a different perspective.
Another way the pragmatic view affects the current study is through the research question. Within the discussion of education, there is an underlying theme of inequity for marginalized groups when it comes to both facilities and instruction. As mentioned, underserved communities tend to bear the brunt of both low-quality facilities and instruction due to a number of factors (Service Employees International Union, 2014). However, this study did not address inequality itself but rather addressed the less nebulous issue of deferred building maintenance and how teachers experience it. This study aimed to uncover what it takes for teachers to perform at a high level in their buildings so students can learn at a high level in their buildings as well; regardless of geography. The current study also does not address the fiscal responsibility of the city, which is also a common theme in the existing literature. It costs money to make building improvements, but if the city is not seeing the issue as important enough to address yet, there is no purpose in discussing fiscal allocation at this time. The pragmatic approach influences general thinking about the issue and promotes the use of a qualitative approach to address it.

**Methodology**

A case study can be defined as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin, 1989). In other words, a case study is an analysis of an individual unit or multiple units. This unit could be a person, an institution, a community, or a situation. But, case studies aim to emphasize a detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events (Yin, 1989). What makes this case study exploratory is the lack of preliminary detailed research (Streb, 2010). This study defined the necessary questions to develop consecutive studies on the experience of teachers in New York urban school district buildings (Yin, 1989).
Case study critics argue that case studies are not generalizable and lack rigor in collection, construction, and analysis of the empirical materials that give rise to the studies (Hamel, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, case studies allow the researcher to take an in-depth look at a particular issue, and extend existing theories and bodies of literature nonetheless. Since case studies are anchored in reality, they create a vivid depiction of a particular phenomenon for readers to learn from. For example, a case study showing a vivid depiction of excellent teaching can become a prototype for future research (Stake, 2005). From that study, researchers may want to know what practices teachers can employ to become better educators, or what specific qualities educators can adopt to be considered excellent.

Many researchers have found case studies particularly useful when there is a need to obtain a detailed, in-depth look at a particular phenomenon. Because of this, case studies have become more popular in recent years and are now being used for more than research (Stake, 1995). Case studies can be used as professional development tools. To do this, organizations use specific scenarios for employees to analyze and either replicate or learn from in the future. Case studies can also be used as learning tools in the classroom. Teachers can present a specific problem or scenario to a class and students can work together to identify issues or solutions to that problem (Stake, 2005).

This particular case study sought to take an in-depth look at the lived experience of NY Public School teachers in a NY DOE building. Moreover, it sought to add to the existing literature that already consists of a wide variety of “hard data.” This study did not necessarily seek to present generalizable outcomes. However, it did seek to add the exploration of teachers’ perspectives to the existing body of research. A semi-structured interview instrument utilized in this research is informed by this exploratory case study approach. There were a number of pre-
determined questions that were asked of the participants. However, there were a number of questions that were not prepared prior to the interviews but evolved as the interviews progressed. The goal of the semi-structured interview is to have responses to the predetermined questions that are comparable to one another, but also be able to grasp the unique experiences of each participant (Bernard, 1988).

**Positionality Statement**

I did not begin my career in education. I attained my B.A. in Sociology and my M.A. in Criminal Justice. I began working as a Corporate Investigator shortly after completing my graduate studies. My role was essentially to interrogate and prosecute those who were guilty of theft. After a few years of that, I finally realized that if many of the people I was interrogating were presented with positive opportunities at an early age (i.e. in school), they would be a lot better off in their adult lives. It was then that I decided to pursue a career in education. Since I had not pursued any degrees in Education, I assumed a School Operations role. I began my career in Education as a Business Operations Manager with the largest and highest performing charter organization in New York State. I was the Leader of all things non-instructional. While I was a Business Operations Manager, I grew to love the facilities part of my job. I loved new construction and being responsible for building beautiful institutions of learning for children. From there, I became a Director of Facilities for a smaller charter organization and that is where I am today. As a Director of Facilities, I am responsible for the acquisition, build-out, and maintenance of school facilities for my organization.

For people who do not work in Facilities or Operations, it is hard to believe that school facilities can have such a huge impact on students and teachers. However, I truly believe that a student cannot receive an outstanding education in a facility that is not in outstanding condition.
After looking deeper, I found that there are many researchers that agree. In fact, the positive correlation between school facilities and academic achievement has been identified by many. However, I sit in my Director of Facilities role in a building rampant with mice and cockroaches, fluctuating temperatures, and shattered glass in the staircases wondering how this public information has not invoked change in our city. Moreover, to hear teachers complain about these things daily without any hope for improvement is disheartening. I have made it my responsibility to at least shed light on the issue from a different perspective and share that both students and teachers have experiences that are worth sharing.

There is some inherent bias in this. First and foremost, I am biased in assuming that NY public schools need improvement in the first place. There are certainly people who believe that NY public schools are in fine working condition and do not need improvement. I am also assuming that these facilities are not in outstanding condition, as I mentioned previously. Additionally, the case study site is a site I used to work in. So, I have inside knowledge of what the building’s worst issues are for teachers and how they may feel about those issues. However, the interview questions are open-ended in such a way that does not lead participants to certain conclusions. Although my inherent assumption is that all teachers will have complaints about the facility, I do not plan to probe in a way that provokes that response, nor lead participants in a particular direction. The goal is to solely focus on teachers’ experiences and refrain from framing building condition as a problem (Barlow, 2010).

**Participant Selection**

The case study institution is housed in one of the largest urban school district buildings in New York. Principals of all schools in New York were contacted by e-mail to host the study, and
the case study institution’s principal was the first to respond with interest. The participants are full-time teachers with a homeroom class at the case study institution.

Although there has been no previous demographic data collected on the site itself, New York City Public School teacher population is 84.5 percent Female, 58.8 percent White, 19.6 percent Black, 15.5 percent Hispanic, and 4.9 percent Asian. The median age of the NY teacher population is 40 years old and the average time working as a teacher is 10.8 years (New York City Independent Budget Office, 2011). In this study, demographic information was collected on the participants to ensure that the study is representative of the citywide teacher population. The demographic makeup of the study participants is 64.2 percent Female, 57.1 percent White, 35.7 percent Black, and 7.1 percent Hispanic (no participants identified as any other race or ethnicity). The median teaching age at the case study institution was 7.5 years.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews as opposed to unstructured interviewing focus groups. Unstructured interviewing usually accompanies ethnographic observation (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In the current study, the subjects were not observed, they were asked questions based on their lived experience throughout their entire career. One-on-one interviews were conducted in this study to capture a variety of responses and personal experiences that may not be shared in a group setting. This is possible because interviews allow for more response time for a single participant. It allows them to go in depth about their responses without being concerned with other people in a group (Barlow, 2010).

A total population purposive sampling strategy was used in this study. Purposive sampling is a method in which the researcher uses his or her own judgement to select study participants (Black, 2010). Specifically, total population sampling is when a researcher chooses to examine an entire population. In this case, only one case study institution is being studied so
there were a limited number of primary data sources that can contribute to the study itself. Therefore, if the teacher works at the site full-time, they can offer a meaningful contribution to the study. Thus, it was beneficial to include all participants instead of relying on a partial sample using any other sampling method. There are limitations to using this sampling method, however. Purposive samples are subject to high levels of bias since the site and subjects are chosen by an inherently biased researcher. The goal of this study, however, was not provide generalizable findings per se. The goal was to offer an opportunity for teachers to express how they have experienced teaching and learning in a New York urban district school building. In addition, this study aimed to add a different perspective to existing research.

In qualitative interview research, it is argued that anywhere between five and 50 participants could be sufficient given the researchers limitations (Dworkin, 2012). The sample size for this study was 14. Qualitative researchers also suggest that the sample size has reached its limit when the researcher hits the point of saturation. According to Dworkin (Charmaz, 2006) saturation occurs “when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical categories” (p. 1319). Due to the relatively limited population available in this case study, the current study will not aim to reach saturation, but to gather all accounts from the entire population.

**Procedures for Recruitment and Participation**

Research protocols submitted to the IRB must be prospective, so no research can begin prior to IRB approval. That said, an IRB Application in Appendix A was submitted to the IRB and was approved. Upon Northeastern University’s IRB approval, the New York Department of Education’s IRB application process began. Per the NY DOE website, NEU’s IRB approval is needed before submission to NY DOE’s IRB. That said, NEU’s approval was a part of the NY
DOE IRB application. The NY DOE IRB application was ultimately approved and the data collection began.

A feasibility inquiry was conducted to understand participation interest among all NY DOE schools. The principal of the case study institution volunteered to participate after the initial inquiry.

The inclusion criteria for the study was full time, general education teachers (not substitutes or temps) who are college graduates, certified to teach elementary education, and must have a homeroom class. There were 22 total teachers employed at the case study institution who fit the above criteria. Therefore, all 22 general education teachers at the site had an equal opportunity to participate and were recruited. All 22 general education teachers at the site were asked to participate via email. A follow up (reminder email) was sent a week before the interview dates. There was no incentive offered for participation and the recruitment email clearly indicated that there are no ramifications for non-participation.

Once a participant expressed interest, an interview was scheduled off-site, after school hours with the participant, in a location of the participant’s choosing. There was an informed consent process to ensure that all participants willingly participated in the proposed study and knew what to expect. At the start of the interview, a consent form was read aloud to the participant by the primary researcher and two copies of the consent form were given to the participant. One was to read, sign with an ‘X’ and give back to the researcher while the other was for the participant to sign and retain.

Since this research involved Human Subjects, there were ethical considerations involved as well. The study aligns with National Institutes of Health Office Extramural Research Web-Based Training on Protecting Human Research Participants requirements. Thus, the relationship
between researcher and participant is one based on honesty, trust, and respect (National Institutes of Health, 2008). Therefore, a number of steps were taken to ensure confidentiality. No interviews took place when other teachers are present—none took place during school/work hours and they took place off site, wherever the participant chose. All interviews were recorded then transcribed on one device (MacBook Air). The laptop has a microphone attachment that allows it to pick up extremely low sounds. This attachment was used to record interviews and the laptop was visible to the participant at all times. Those recorded interviews and transcriptions are kept in a password-protected document folder on the researcher’s personal computer and only the researcher has access to these files. As a further measure, at the beginning of each interview the researcher announced a code. That code is linked to the participant’s identity in a separate password-protected file on the researcher’s computer, only accessible by the researcher. Pseudonyms were used in the completed study and the case study institution’s name was never used. All of the password-protected documents are kept on the researcher’s personal computer for at least five years after the completed research. They are also backed up on a password-protected hard drive in case they are inaccessible from the computer for any given reason.

To safeguard against internal confidentiality, the participants were told during the consent process that the way they answer questions was included in the final dissertation and their answers may help co-workers identify who they are. Thus, it is important that they consider that fact when answering questions. Participants were also provided with their interview transcript in a follow up email to reflect on their responses to protect their identity and return it to the researcher with any necessary redactions.

All data will be stored on the researcher’s primary computer (MacBook Air) in password protected file folders. The data will be destroyed after five years. Identifiers will be destroyed
along with the data collected. Signed consent documents are being kept in a locked file cabinet in the primary researcher’s home office for three years.

**Data Collection**

The 22 participants were asked a series of thirteen questions using a semi-structured interview guide. There have been three iterations of the interview guide. The first iteration, after testing, proved to be not valid. The line of questioning lead the participant to answer questions specifically about school building condition. The second iteration was also too specific about school building condition. The third iteration, after testing and approval from the principal investigator and the dissertation committee, proved to be less leading and asked more general questions to allow the participant to draw their own conclusions and responses. The transcripts from 22 interviews became the primary source of data to support this study.

The interviews were just one data source. Another form of data collected during this case study was all school safety team meeting minutes from the 2017-2018 school year. These data sources were kept separately and coded separately. However, existing patterns across both sources were identified during the coding process.

**Data Analysis**

Before any of the interview transcripts were analyzed, the researcher holistically analyzed field notes and interview recordings. This helped the researcher gather the overall attitude of the participants and the overall tone of the sample. Data gathered during this study was analyzed using an inductive approach. Thomas (2006) explains that an inductive data analysis approach can, “develop a framework of the underlying structure of experiences or processes that are evident in the raw data” (p. 145). The interview transcripts (transcribed with Express Scribe) and meeting minutes were subsequently coded and analyzed.
All interviews and meeting minutes were coded. The coding process allowed the researcher to analyze data for relationships, patterns, and material differences. Commonalities and patterns in the interview responses were extracted and became themes. Those themes were then analyzed to become findings. The coding of both the interviews and the meeting minutes was split into two cycles. The first cycle is a process that happens during the initial coding of data, while the second cycle uses the first cycle findings to conceptualize and theorize findings (Saldaña, 2015).

In the first coding cycle of the semi-structured interviews, In Vivo coding and Values coding frames were used. In Vivo prioritizes the participant’s voice by using direct quotes as codes (Saldaña, 2015). Values coding reflects a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs as a way to represent the participant’s perspective (Saldaña, 2015). Using the two coding frames in tandem allowed the researcher to assess the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the teachers while prioritizing their voices by using their literal language. The first cycle of coding implemented for the Safety Team meeting minutes was Descriptive coding. Descriptive summarizes the basic idea of a qualitative data passage in one word or a short phrase (Saldaña, 2015). Using this coding frame for the meeting minutes allowed the researchers to easily categorize what exactly it was that the Safety Team deemed unsafe and whether these were repeated issues or not.

During the second cycle of coding, the two data sources converged and two coding frames were applied, Pattern coding and Focused coding. For the purposes of this research, Pattern Coding was utilized for the “development of major themes from the data” (Saldaña, 2015). Focused coding was utilized to develop meta-categories for first and second cycle coding segments (Saldaña, 2015). The collective findings and themes of the application of the five
coding frames are outlined in Chapter Four. A visual display of the data analysis plan is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First Cycle Coding</th>
<th>Second Cycle Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-Structured Interviews (SSI)</td>
<td>Safety Team Meeting Minutes (STM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Vivo Coding</td>
<td>Descriptive Coding</td>
<td>Pattern Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values Coding</td>
<td></td>
<td>Focused Coding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Trustworthiness**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness of a qualitative study involves establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. There are many techniques that can be used to establish these key principles. The technique used to establish credibility in the current study was peer debriefing. Peer debriefing can be defined as, “a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind.” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 26). This will help to expose biases that the researcher who is interested in the topic and has an opinion on it may take for granted. To establish transferability, thick description was used in the study. Holloway (1997) defines thick description as providing the reader with a context of behavior that can be transferrable to other interactions and cultural situations. For example, if a respondent snarls while they are responding to a question or telling a story, an explanation of the reaction as well as the context in which the reaction was made will be described in detail for the reader. To establish dependability, external audits were used. In this case a third party, unrelated to the research will review the research.
findings and the data are aligned (Creswell, 1998). Finally, to establish confirmability, audit trails were created. Halpern (1983) defines audit trails as, “a transparent description of the research steps taken from the start of a research project to the development and reporting of findings. These are records that are kept regarding what was done in an investigation” (p. 90).

Audit trails for the current study are extensive. It will enable readers to trace through the researcher’s logic and determine whether the study’s findings may be relied upon as a platform for further enquiry (Carcary, 2009). At every step of the process, all decisions made and the thinking behind each decision in the moment were outlined in the audit trails in a handwritten notebook, kept separate from digital field notes and interview notes.

As all researchers are human with inherent subjectivities, these were addressed. This was addressed through the audits that were performed on the research. However, the interview questions were also asked in such a way that does not imply negativity towards school building condition. Regardless, a natural limitation of qualitative study is researcher bias. Confirming trustworthiness with the aforementioned techniques will help mitigate that.

**Ethical Procedures**

There have been numerous safeguards taken during the implementation of this study to mitigate various ethical dilemmas. First and foremost, both internal and external confidentiality protections must be addressed. Within participant interview transcripts, there were numerous individual indicators that could reveal the identity of the participant to his or her colleagues. In order to protect against this, the researcher sent the participant the completed interview transcript to review. During this review process, the participants were encouraged to redact any information that could identify who they are to others. When participant-reviewed transcripts were returned to the researcher, they were reviewed a second time to ensure that there are no
individual identifiers remaining. If any individual identifiers were identified during this second review process, they were redacted by the researcher.

Measures were taken to protect against external confidentiality as well. No interviews were conducted on school grounds or during school hours. This ensures that no teachers were seen missing from their classrooms and presumed to be participating in an interview. All interviews were scheduled in a venue of the participants choice that was, in most cases, not in close proximity to the case study institution at all. Moreover, pseudonyms were used throughout the course of the research as well.

**Summary**

School building condition can affect students and teachers in many different ways. It can affect students’ attendance (Belanger, Kielb, & Lin, 2006), self-esteem (Maxwell & Chmielewski, 2007), and a student’s overall ability to concentrate (Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008). It can also impact teacher retention (Buckley, Schneider, & Shang, 2004), instructional techniques, teacher burnout rates (Rivera-Batiz & Marti, 1995), and overall teacher morale (Earthman & Lemasters, 2009). To explore the phenomenon of school building condition and how teachers experience it, an exploratory qualitative case study was conducted. Adhering to pragmatic worldview, current qualitative case study added to the existing body of quantitative literature apropos school building condition and how it can affect teachers and students. A qualitative methodology is the most appropriate methodology to explore the lived experience of teachers as qualitative research seeks to answer how or why a phenomenon occurs through in-depth participant research (Creswell, 2008).

The data sources selected to explore the phenomenon of how teachers experience school building condition were semi-structured interviews and a review of Safety Team meeting
minutes from one case study institution. These data sources were individually coded using three coding frames and subsequently merged using one coding frame. This data analysis procedure supported in addressing the research question of how teachers experience school building condition and how they perceive it affects the teaching and learning process. The semi-structured interviews resulted in 72 pages of transcription data and the Safety Team meetings yielded 118 pages of meeting minutes. The data analysis procedure allowed for the coding and eventual merge of this large body of separate data sources. Additionally, conducting semi-structured interviews and analyzing meeting minutes further supported the empirical exploration of this phenomenon. During both the interviews and the meetings, participants were allowed to speak freely about their experiences as they pertain to the school building condition at the case study institution.
Chapter Four: Results

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore how school teachers in one school building in a New York urban school experience the school building conditions and how teachers perceive those conditions affect the teaching and learning process.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted and Safety Team Meeting minutes from the case study institution were collected. These data sources were subsequently analyzed to explore the phenomenon of how teachers experience the teaching and learning process in New York urban school district buildings. The findings presented in Chapter Four follow a chain of evidence utilizing the methodology presented in Chapter Three. This chapter outlines a description of the data sources, a description of the case study institution, a data analysis overview, and a thorough description of findings supported by the analysis to answer the research question presented in Chapter One: How are New York urban school district teachers in the case study institution experiencing school building conditions and how do they perceive the impact on the teaching and learning process?

Demographic Data

All 22 full-time teachers at the institution were given the opportunity to participate in interviews. 14 of those teachers ultimately volunteered to participate in the study. Demographic data was collected from the participants prior to the commencement of the interview. The demographic data collected from the interview participants was quite similar to the demographic makeup of the teacher population at New York City Public Schools. The demographic makeup of New York City Public School’s teacher population is 84.5 percent Female, 58.8 percent White, 19.6 percent Black, 15.5 percent Hispanic, and 4.9 percent Asian. The median age of the NY teacher population is 40 years old and the average time working as a teacher is 10.8 years
(New York City Independent Budget Office, 2011). The demographic makeup of the study participants is 64.2 percent Female, 57.1 percent White, 35.7 percent Black, and 7.1 percent Hispanic. No participants identified as any other race or ethnicity. The median length of time teaching for teachers at the case study institution was 7.5 years. Additional demographic information was collected to include grade currently teaching, number of years teaching at the institution, age range, and whether they live within 3 miles of the school or not. Some demographic trends were identified during the data analysis process. Those trends are discussed later in this chapter.

Table 2 shows the demographic data compiled from all participants. In certain cases, participants declined to divulge certain demographic descriptors. In that case, these were excluded.

Table 2.

Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Number of Years Teaching</th>
<th>Grade Currently Teaching</th>
<th>Number of Years at Institution</th>
<th>Age Range (~5 year increments)</th>
<th>Lives within 3 miles of Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Pre-K</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iris</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashlee</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>46-49</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kat</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26-29</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breanna</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
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<td>Pre-K</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscar</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michele</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Description of the Data

The data collected consists of two elements. The first element being interviews. 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted for this study. A series of 13 questions were asked during these interviews. Additional follow up questions were asked when responses warranted further explanation. However, the same series of questions were asked in every interview. The questions were asked in an attempt to understand a teachers’ experiences as they relate to building condition and how it may affect the teaching and learning process for them and their students.

The second element of data collected were School Safety Team meeting minutes from September to April of the 2017-2018 school year. Every month, one of the Assistant Principals of the case study institution conducts a Safety Team Meeting. The “Safety Team” is comprised of multiple staff members from both the case study institution and the co-located school. It is the duty of the Safety Team to raise safety concerns in and around the building to the larger group. During these meetings, the Safety Team raises concerns in an attempt to address and/or ameliorate them. The concerns raised in these meetings include building-related issues, neighborhood safety advisories, student movement around the building, and communicable disease awareness. Whenever an issue is raised, it remains on the agenda from month-to-month until some sort of resolution is reached. The meeting minutes are an integral piece of data as they often speak to building-related safety issues. Moreover, the Safety Team gives insight into why something is a safety issue and how it affects students or teachers. Finally, the Safety Team also speaks to issues that have not been resolved and attempts to identify bottlenecks or roadblocks that may be preventing a resolution.
The Case Study Institution

In order to fully understand the findings of the qualitative case study, it is important to understand the setting from which the data was collected. The case study institution was built around 1905. It currently holds approximately 700 students ranging from Pre-K to fifth grade. The demographic makeup of the student body is 53.6 percent Female, 47.4 percent Black, 52.1 percent Hispanic, and 0.6 percent Asian. Moreover, 92 percent of students qualify for Free and Reduced Priced Lunch (FRPL) which the NYC DOE’s measure of poverty rate. The average state exam scores for the past three years for NYC have been 46.3 percent proficiency in ELA and 57.3 percent proficiency in Math. The institution’s New York State Exam scores are far below the state average and have fallen between 8 percent and 21 percent proficiency in ELA and Math over the past three years.

The case study institution operates out of a portion of a seven-story building. Another school operates out of the other portion of the building and has a student population of approximately 500. In 2016, the institution’s BCAS score was 4, which is considered a “Poor” rating. The building is currently considered to be under construction and is wrapped in scaffolding to prevent materials from falling from the roof and possibly injuring passersby. However, it is not an active construction site and there no predetermined construction completion date. The case study institution has 22 homeroom classes with about 31 students per class.

Based on observation, the school has an outdoor track and a newly constructed playground that was completed in 2017. The playground project was sponsored by the school that the case study institution shares the building with, but the case study institution was able to offer design input as well. There is a small teacher’s lounge, but teachers often eat in their classrooms during their prep periods or during their class’ lunch time. The common spaces of the
institution consist of one conference room, one multipurpose room, one cafeteria, one Related Services space, and an auditorium. Some of which are shared by between the case study institution and the co-located school. There is a shared space schedule that is managed by Assistant Principals for both schools, but the Assistant Principals have trouble adhering to the schedule and often encounter scheduling conflicts when using a shared space.

The building sits in the middle of a neighborhood that spans approximately 1.5 square miles. In the 2017, there were 22 shootings, over 80 burglaries, over 100 robberies, and over 700 accounts of assault reported in this area.

**Description of Data Analysis Process**

All interviews and meeting minutes were coded. The coding process allowed the researcher to analyze data for relationships, patterns, and material differences. Commonalities and patterns in the interview responses and meeting minutes were extracted and became superordinate themes. Those themes were then analyzed to become subordinate themes. Those subordinate themes were then synthesized to become findings. The coding of both the interviews and the meeting minutes was split into two cycles. The first cycle is a process that happens during the initial coding of data while the second cycle uses the first cycle themes to conceptualize and theorize findings (Saldana, 2015).

In the first coding cycle of the semi-structured interviews, In Vivo coding and Values coding frames were used. In Vivo prioritizes the participant’s voice by using direct quotes as codes. Values coding reflects a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs as a way to represent the participant’s perspective (Saldaña, 2015). Using the two coding frames in tandem allowed the researcher to assess the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the teachers while prioritizing their voices by using their literal language. The first cycle of coding implemented for the Safety Team
meeting minutes was Descriptive coding. Descriptive summarizes the basic idea of a qualitative
data passage in one word or a short phrase (Saldaña, 2015). Using this coding frame for the
meeting minutes allowed the researchers to determine what exactly it was that the Safety Team
demed unsafe and whether these were repeated issues or not.

The second cycle of coding implemented for both the Safety Team meeting minutes and
the semi-structured interviews was Pattern coding. For the purposes of this research, Pattern
Coding was utilized for the “development of major themes from the data” (Saldaña, 2015). These
themes were developed from the respective first cycle codes. Finally, in the Focused coding was
applied during the second cycle of coding. Focused coding is used to develop meta-categories for
first and second cycle coding segments. Focused coding was applied to all of the major themes
developed from the Pattern coding of the semi-structured interviews and the Safety Team
Meeting minutes.

**Semi-Structured Interview Data Analysis**

The first step to analyzing the semi-structured interview data was to apply both the
Values and In Vivo coding frames. These frames were applied by individually coding 72 pages
of interview data. These data were analyzed by extracting the values, attitudes, and beliefs of
teachers based on their literal language about school building and their experiences. The codes
extracted from this initial cycle were separated by values, attitudes, and beliefs. These initial
coding frames yielded during the First Cycle of coding yielded 168 separate coding segments.

The coding segments were further analyzed by identifying the meaning, interaction, and
interplay of values, attitudes, and beliefs of participants determined during the First Cycle of
coding (Saldaña, 2015). The resulted in a reduction from 168 original coding segments to 32
segments. Pattern coding was then applied to these 32 segments to develop 7 major themes. The
emergent themes include the classroom environment, class isolation, self-reliance, indifference, student attitudes towards school, influence of adults, and unawareness of bureaucracy.

**Safety Team Meeting Data Analysis**

The first step to analyzing the safety team meeting minutes was to apply a Descriptive Coding frame. This frame was applied by individually coding 118 pages of raw meeting minute date. These data were analyzed by using one-word categorization to extract what exactly it was that the Safety Team deemed unsafe.

The initial application of descriptive coding resulted in a reduction from 118 pages of raw meeting data to 76 descriptive categories. Pattern coding was then applied to these 76 categories to develop 4 major themes. The emergent themes include safety of students, unsafe for teachers, unsafe for both students and teachers, proactive/reactive issues.

**Convergence of the Data**

In order to categorize the emergent themes from both the Semi-Structured Interviews and the Safety Team Meeting minutes, Focused coding was applied. Focused coding is used to develop meta-categories for first and second cycle coding segments (Saldaña, 2015). Focused coding was applied to all of the major themes developed from the Pattern coding of the semi-structured interviews and the Safety Team Meeting minutes. 3 major themes emerged: the classroom, bureaucracy, and the neighborhood. A visual display of superordinate and subordinate themes based on the first and second cycles of data analysis is shown in Table 3.
Table 3

**Superordinate and Subordinate Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superordinate Themes (Developed via Focused Coding)</th>
<th>Subordinate Themes (Developed via Pattern Coding)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **The Classroom** | • Classroom Environment  
• Class Isolation  
• No Safety Concerns for Students  
• Influence of Adults |
| **Bureaucracy** | • Self-Reliance  
• Indifference  
• Unawareness  
• Proactive v. Reactive Responses to Safety Concerns |
| **The Neighborhood** | • Student Attitudes Towards School  
• Unsafe for Both Students and Teachers |

**Emergent Themes**

Based on the application of five coding frames to the semi-structured interview and meeting minute data, a number of superordinate and subordinate themes emerged (shown in Table 3).

**The Classroom**

Throughout the data analysis process, there was a continued emphasis on the classroom. Participants strongly valued the classroom and believed students should value it as well. Participants emphasized the classroom in four principal ways: the value of classroom environment, class isolation, the absence of safety concerns for students, and the influence of adults.

**The classroom environment.** Interview data indicated that teachers value the classroom environment immensely. They value the size of their classrooms, classroom aesthetics, autonomy over their classroom, and creating a positive classroom culture. Although the participants’ attitudes towards their classrooms were always positive, their attitudes towards the rest of the
building and the surrounding neighborhood were generally negative. Participants take pride in their classrooms and mention many things they have done and continue to do to improve their space. However, they seldom mention ways they can improve shared spaces in the building, outside of their classrooms. The overall belief is that the classroom should look and feel just as good or better than a student’s home and teachers go above and beyond to achieve that.

More specifically, the data showed the degree to which teachers value the classroom environment. Although participants do value safety overall, they value students being in the classroom significantly more. Angel shared a story of when their classroom flooded and they had to teach outside of the classroom for two days. Angel decided to have their students return to the classroom before the deep clean was actually finished because of the amount of “chaos” in the multipurpose room (MPR) wasn’t workable any longer. In this case, returning to the classroom was more important than any potential safety risk that improper cleanup of the flood could have caused. Kat also shares that she consistently gets fire code violations in her classroom because of the extensive amount of decorations and personalized furniture she has in her room. However, she ignores the violations if it means that her students can feel comfortable and happy in her classroom.

The data also showed that teachers tend to prioritize being in their own classrooms opposed to what may be more effective for students in terms of learning. When Ashlee was asked about what she would change about the school or the classroom, she responded by explaining how certain students are mandated for small group instruction, which requires a more isolated space with no more than 11 other students. However, the spaces that the school offers for small group instruction are “not as good as her classroom”, so she sacrifices having small group instruction, in exchange for time in her classroom with all 31 of her students. Several
participants mention overlooking IEP requirements in order to keep kids in the classroom. For example, Bryan, Jackie, Mindy, and Cheryl all have make-shift small group instruction spaces within their classrooms, even though certain students’ IEPs call for a more isolated space.

**Class isolation.** The coded interview data indicated that teachers value student inclusion and want to ensure the students in their class are able to integrate into the rest of the school community. Despite that, however, teachers feel forced to isolate their students due to the state of the school outside of their classroom, and the state of the neighborhood beyond the school. Teachers exhibit this isolating behavior in a number of ways. Cheryl shares that her class often has lunch in the classroom opposed to the cafeteria. She thinks the environmentals in the cafeteria are so dangerous that she tries to avoid eating there at all costs. By having her class eat lunch in the classroom instead of the cafeteria, she inadvertently isolates them from their peers in other classes. Oscar, Michele, and Angel use similar tactics to avoid the cafeteria by eating lunch outdoors during warmer months.

Iris and Richard discuss the need to close their classroom door as a form of unwanted isolation. Richard and Iris prefer to keep their classroom doors open to promote an “open door policy” to any visitors. However, because of the smell of the bathrooms and the loudness of other students/classes around them, they feel that they are forced to close their doors. Iris states, “I really shouldn’t have to do that. I don’t want to isolate myself.”

Breanna, Jackie, Kat, and Marissa unintentionally isolated their students by ensuring they get extra time outside whenever they can. Marissa and Kat ensure their students get an extra recess twice a week to ensure they get a “break” from all of the rest of the students and the “madness” of the school. Breanna takes her students from periodic walks around the building and Jackie takes her students to a local park regularly to give them a sense of having something
that’s “theirs”. Breanna explains, “…I want my class to feel like they have time of their own. At the school, space is always being used, or someone else is about to use it and it cuts your time short. It must take a toll on the kids after a while.”

Participants share a narrative of valuing inclusion overall and wishing the school community could come together, but not being able to act on that due to the condition of the building. They respond to this by keeping their students in the classroom as much as possible and unintentionally sheltering them from the rest of the school community.

The influence of adults. Interview data indicated that participants felt stressed and unhappy with the adult culture of the school overall. Many participants felt disengaged with other adults in the building and did not express a sense of camaraderie. Richard describes her relationship with her colleagues as “non-existent” while Cheryl describes his relationships with his colleagues as “solely work-based”.

Despite this, however, participants also believed that adult behavior can very easily affect student behavior. Thus, participants valued staying positive around children no matter the circumstance, especially within the classroom. They pretended to ignore numerous issues around the classroom and the school when they were around children to ensure students were not affected by these issues. Mindy, Jackie, and Marissa all share stories about mice in the classroom or leaking pipes and the lengths they go to ignore these issues to ensure students don’t notice. Jackie states, “I don’t think they should know that kind of stuff about their school. That the pipes are leaking onto their teacher’s head. It’s kind of a crappy way to see your school.” Marissa agrees by saying, “They’ve probably seen countless mice in their lives, even in their homes. If I make a big deal out of it, they’re going to go home and think it’s a big deal. I just keep it cool.”
Participants also share frustration and stress around bureaucracy and leadership. Richard explains how his frustrations are extremely apparent when children students aren’t around, but he masks them when students are around in order to promote a positive culture:

Pretty much everyone knows how pissed I am with (the bureaucratic process in general).
But when the kids around, man, you can’t let that shit get to you. I don’t want the kids disrespecting (leaders) and stuff you know? So I squash it for that moment.

Participants do all they can to ensure that the adult culture of the building does not permeate the student body and alter students’ moods/overall thoughts about school or their classrooms.

Safety of students. Meeting minute data indicated that a majority of the topics discussed in Safety Team meetings were around the safety of children only. However, these often were repeated issues. On average, a meeting agenda item that addressed something unsafe for students only took three months to be addressed. Often times, these issues are addressed with temporary solutions, rather than permanent. For example, the November meeting minutes outlines cracked seating in the auditorium that students have gotten their fingers stuck in. It wasn’t until January that the particular seats were identified and roped off, but never repaired. Moreover, a hallway tile was identified as “peeling up” in January, and multiple students had tripped on it and gotten hurt. The area was not roped off until February and was ultimately never repaired.

Data also showed that the Safety Team only discussed student safety issues that occur outside of the classroom. None of the issues of student safety involved the classroom at all. Participants shared student safety concerns as it pertained to the building itself, like the aforementioned auditorium seating example, and the surrounding neighborhood. Participants even changed the student schedule during the winter months in order to protect them from the perceived dangers of the neighborhood. In November, there were multiple safety advisories that
School Safety Agents shared with the Safety Team. To prevent students from going home in the dark, all after school activities (to include tutoring) were cancelled until February 15 to prevent children from unsafe encounters after leaving school in the dark. Despite the perceived dangers of the neighborhood and the building, the classroom itself was never mentioned as unsafe, or as having unsafe characteristics.

**Bureaucracy**

Throughout the data analysis process, there was a significant emphasis placed on bureaucracy and the negative influence it has on teachers. Participants expressed their frustrations with bureaucracy through four principal themes: self-reliance, indifference, unawareness, and proactive vs. reactive responses to safety concerns.

**Self-Reliance.** The coded data indicated that teachers feel a strong sense of self-reliance as it pertains to school building condition and the desire for improvement. Teachers highly value having autonomy over their classroom and how it looks, but it comes with the cost of receiving little to no assistance from leadership. Because of this, teachers rely on themselves to ensure their classrooms are environments that are welcoming. Michele, Marissa, Breanna, and Ashlee exhibit self-reliance by purchasing aesthetic additives for their classroom with their own money without receiving reimbursement. They all share the sentiment that they should not have to pay for materials that make their classrooms more welcoming for children. It makes them question whether ensuring kids want to keep coming to school is a priority to leadership as much as it is to them.

Michele and Angel discuss their ability to fix things when they are malfunctioning in the classroom. However, without that ability, they don’t believe they’d get the support they would
need. Michele states, “If I wasn’t able to fix stuff myself, I don’t know what I’d do. All of my furniture would probably be broken forever.”

Participants were upset and frustrated by the fact that they do not receive financial or physical support from leadership when it came to improving their classroom environments. However, participants felt that the main roadblock is bureaucracy and “red tape”. They expressed their understanding of the difficulty in getting approval from the “higher-ups” in a timely fashion.

**Indifference.** The interview data indicated that participants felt a sense of indifference as it pertained to improving the condition of the school. Participants felt indifference about improving certain aspects of their classrooms as well. Participants were tolerant of temporary solutions with the understanding that a permanent solution would likely never come. A majority of the participants exhibited a “things are the way they are” attitude towards the condition of the school building with no vision for change in the near future. The reason behind the lack of change, in participants’ opinion, is the lack of urgency from general schools leadership. Mike stated:

> Once you’ve taught in one NY Public School, you’ve taught in them all … there are always union issues, there always building issues, as you know, there are always rats and roaches. It’s just what comes with the territory.

This attitude was shared amongst most participants.

The interview data also showed a demographic trend. Participants that had been teaching for approximately 10 years or longer exhibited far more feelings of indifference than participants with less teaching experience. Richard shared his feelings towards building issues after teaching for 21 years and states, “Usually I report issues (but get no response). It used to piss me off a
long time ago, but now it’s whatever. I’m too old to make this a priority.” Over time, the feeling of indifference increased and participants became more and more comfortable with the condition of the school, focusing solely on ensuring their classrooms are up to the standard that they want.

**Inaction due to bureaucracy.** The coded interview data indicated that participants value a sense of leadership but the manifested a negative attitude largely due to the lack of follow up they receive when they report building issues. Participants believe that the lack of responsiveness is due to bureaucracy and “red tape”. Richard, Iris, Oscar, and Michele all share stories about serious issues they’ve raised and nothing ever being done about them. They speculate that the inaction has something to do with the system. Iris explains:

The teachers can’t get the kids the resources they need without getting the resources that they, I mean the teachers, need. And then I’m sure (leadership) can’t get what teacher’s need without some approval or some[thing]. It’s really just a huge cycle of wading in the water and red tape and it stresses everyone out.

Because of this cycle of inaction, participants have resorted to reporting things for the sole purpose of ensuring that they are not blamed for it later. Jackie, Bryan, and Marissa all share that they only report things to “cover their asses” and ensure they have the report in writing in case it becomes a larger issue in the future.

**Proactive/reactive issues.** Meeting minute data indicated that 86 percent of safety concerns that were raised as proactive became reactive before they were resolved. All of the proactive concerns that were raised were student focused. On average, 60 percent of the proactive concerns raised took one month to become reactive issues. Moreover, reactive issues tended to have a deadline attached to them while proactive concerns did not. For example, an issue with the see-saw in the playground was identified in October. The Safety Team indicated
that this issue *may* cause a student issue if it is not fixed. This proactive concern became a reactive issue in November when the see-saw actually did injure a student because of the issue raised a month prior. It was only at this time that a deadline was assigned to fixing this issue. Moreover, issues that never became reactive (i.e. never actually hurt anyone) were usually never addressed or fixed. For example, mold was found in an MPR in November. The Safety Team proactively identified it as a safety concern as this could cause asthma flare-ups for children. A possible solution was discussed, but the item remained on the agenda as unsolved throughout the year with no deadline assigned.

Conversely, reactive issues were solved, on average, in two months. Interview data supports this theme in that participants felt that the only reason reactive issues are even addressed is so leadership wouldn’t be to blame for a student being seriously injured. Participants expressed that leadership has a “let’s cover our ass” mentality when it came to solving issues and this is due to “the DOE”.

**The Neighborhood**

Throughout the data analysis process, there was a continued emphasis on the neighborhood and how it influences students. Participants strongly valued students being in school because of the overall negative perception of the neighborhood. Participants emphasized the neighborhood in three principal ways: student attitudes towards school, unsafe for teachers, and unsafe for teachers and students.

**Student attitudes towards school.** The data indicated that participants heavily value student attitude and how students feel about coming to school. Eight of fourteen participants emphasized the belief that students need to love being in school in order for them to keep attending due to the extraneous factors of their neighborhood keeping them from wanting to
come to school. To make this possible, these participants ensure their classrooms can be seen as a sanctuary for their students. Participants talk about their classrooms in relation to the students’ homes with the goal of making sure their classrooms are “better than the students’ homes”. Kat describes how she feels when her room seems chaotic:

    There are times that my classroom is messy or whatever, or there’s writing on the desks or something. And I’m so ashamed of myself because I’ve been on home visits. I know what Johanna, and Layla, and Khalil’s homes look like. They shouldn’t have to see that same stuff when they come to school. They shouldn’t have to live in chaos wherever they go. It’s unfair.

The half of participants indicated that because students’ home lives are so difficult in the surrounding neighborhood, students love coming to school regardless of what their classrooms look like. Angel discusses how bad some of the students’ home lives are. Angel believes that the students love coming to school because they know they’ll have food, they know they’ll get to interact with friends, and they don’t have to worry about when their mothers or fathers are coming home.

    Unsafe for teachers. Data indicated that participants rarely discussed unsafe conditions for teachers. When they did, however, none of the issues were resolved and they did not resurface in later meetings. Any safety that were raised for teachers, however, were all related to the surrounding neighborhood. Still, these issues were not addressed. As an example, in April, three teacher car windows were shattered and items were stolen from their cars during school hours. The teachers individually filed police reports. However, the further action was taken to help make teachers feel protected. Teachers were ultimately told to park at their own risk and were given public transportation alternative routes in a newsletter.
Unsafe for students and teachers. Because of the unsafe nature of the surrounding neighborhood, safety concerns that were raised in regards to protocols and procedures were tended to expeditiously. These were the only category of issues that were addressed with 100 percent fidelity almost immediately. Examples include doors that do not lock properly during lockdown procedures, external building fire door alarm malfunctions, Safety Agent sign-in procedure, and building evacuation procedures. These issues were responded to with the utmost urgency because it leaves the building and those inside susceptible to external threats.

Description of Findings

To effectively analyze the semi-structured interviews and the Safety Team meeting minute data, five collective coding frames were applied. During the initial coding phase of the semi-structured interviews, both the Values and In Vivo coding frames were applied. Using these coding frames simultaneously allowed for the researcher to extract the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the participants while using their exact language. The application of these coding frames preserved the teacher voice, which is essential to address the lived experience of teachers in New York urban school district buildings. The initial application of these two coding frames yielded 168 individual coded segments. During the initial coding phase of the Safety Team Meeting minutes, Descriptive coding was applied. This allowed for the researcher to easily determine and categorize precisely what the safety team deemed unsafe and how quickly they resolved these issues.

During the second cycle of coding, the data converged. Pattern coding was applied to both the semi-structured interviews and the Safety Team Meeting minutes. Pattern coding was utilized to develop major themes from the data. The application of Pattern coding yielded ten subordinate themes under which the initially coded data fell. Focused coding was then applied to
the collective Pattern codes of the semi-structured interviews and meeting minutes. Focused coding was applied to develop meta-categories, or superordinate themes. Focused coding yielded three superordinate themes. Following a chain of evidence, these three superordinate themes resulted in the emergence of four findings. A visual display of the chain of evidence is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Chain of Evidence

Specifically, these four emergent findings are displayed in Table 4.
Table 4

Case Study Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semi-Structured Interview and Safety Team Meeting Minute Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finding 1: The classroom is a sanctuary.</strong> In the midst of a neighborhood and a school building that are perceived to be unsafe, teachers believe that the classroom is a sanctuary for students and teachers treat it as such.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finding 2: Teachers are student-focused.</strong> When discussing building related issues teachers encounter, they speak in terms of the children deserving more, but never themselves.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Finding 3: Teachers lack awareness of bureaucracy.</strong> Teachers often attribute long-standing building issues to bureaucracy. However, the intricacies of the bureaucracy they refer to are an enigma to teachers. This creates a negative adult culture and attitude.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finding 4: Teachers convey a positive attitude.</strong> Through all of their frustrations, teachers maintain a positive attitude around children to ensure that children are met with a positive environment when they come to school.</td>
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Finding 1: The classroom is a sanctuary. In the midst of a neighborhood and a school building that are perceived to be unsafe, teachers believe that the classroom is a sanctuary for students and teachers treat it as such.

Teachers shared that the classroom is a sanctuary in relation to both the school building itself and the surrounding neighborhood. In terms of the neighborhood, teachers collectively shared the belief that the neighborhood surrounding the school is riddled with tertiary influences that could potentially prevent students from wanting to come to school at all. In support of this finding, Cheryl, Michele, and Marissa all shared similar stories of their students having older brothers or fathers who engage in illegal activities in and around the surrounding neighborhood and make a decent living by doing so. The three teachers believed they needed to work even harder to show their students that coming to school can be more fruitful than making money...
illegally. Thus, teachers work hard to ensure those students have fun in school and see it as a sanctuary protecting them from negative outside influences.

A majority of the teachers that were interviewed have conducted home visits in the past and shared the sentiment that students come from extremely underprivileged home lives. A large majority of the participants shared stories about how their students at times had no electricity, running water, or even food at home. Teachers want to ensure that their classrooms are the opposite of that, given that students often spend more time in the classroom than they do at home. Mike, Breanna, Marissa, Michele, and many others spend their own money on their classrooms to ensure that temperatures are properly regulated and students always have the supplies they need. In these instances, teachers work hard to ensure that the classroom is a sanctuary protecting them against their home lives.

Teachers also shared that classrooms are a sanctuary from the rest of the building. There were many stories shared about how the rest of the building is not welcoming for children and how teachers would much rather be in the classroom. Bryan and Oscar talk specifically about having to teach out of the MPR and how unsafe and distracting that is. Even if their classroom had potentially unsafe conditions, they would still choose their classroom over anywhere else in the building. Other teachers also shared how they sacrifice small group instruction space to stay in the classroom with all of their students in a whole class setting, even if certain students require it on their IEP.

Finding 2: Teachers are student-focused. When discussing building related issues teachers encounter, they speak in terms of the children deserving more, but never themselves.
Throughout the data analysis process, it was apparent that teachers measure the condition of the building on how well the needs of the students are being met. Despite there being a lack of teacher prep space, no teacher parking, and an extremely small teacher workroom, as observed by the researcher, none of these issues came up in the interviews or the meeting minutes. The sole issues around teachers that were mentioned were issues of personal safety. For example, in April, the Safety Team discussed that teachers’ cars are being broken into on the street in front of the school. There was no follow up about this issue, it was only mentioned once and was seemingly treated like a non-priority. Conversely, in the November Safety Team meeting, unsafe conditions in the neighborhood at night were mentioned. Immediately, the team decided to cancel all after school activities for children during the winter months to prevent anything bad from happening to students.

Teachers frequently discussed what “kids deserve”. A prevailing belief amongst participants was that students at the case study institution “deserve more” and the building has not been able to give students that. This was elaborated on to mean kids deserve more small group spaces, or more playground space, or a better cafeteria. However, the teachers themselves are often indifferent about the adult-focused amenities, or lack thereof, at the case study institution. The experience they reflect on was largely focused on student needs.

**Finding 3: Teachers lack awareness of bureaucracy. Teachers often attribute long-standing building issues to bureaucracy. However, the intricacies of the bureaucracy they refer to are an enigma to teachers. This creates a negative adult culture and attitude.**

Overall, the shared goal of all teachers is to provide a safe and fun environment for students to keep them wanting to come to school. However, they feel that they can only rely on themselves for this and they get no help from leadership. Most teachers share the sentiment that
this is due to the bureaucracy and “red tape” beyond the scope of school leadership. Although no one teacher could actually explain the bureaucratic process of the school, almost all participants mentioned that it existed and it was their central roadblock to making their classrooms better for students. To support this finding, Angel attempts to explain the bureaucratic process:

Well, let me tell you how it is. I (report) something is wrong, like my radiator cover came off and it could potentially burn someone. He listens intently and talks about how he agrees that it’s something that should be fixed immediately, right? But this is also a solution that requires money and manpower. So, he walks away, seeming like he’s got it all under control. I’m sure he goes to ask someone for money, puts a request into some system somewhere, or something, and they say “no” or “it’s not in the budget” or something that these people usually say. Then, I never get followed up with and my cousin [a professional handyman] end up figuring out a way to do the work ourselves after school one day.

Many other teachers use examples like Angel’s of not getting a follow up with and an unclear understanding of the bureaucratic process. However, teachers tend not to blame the school leadership, rather they tend to blame “those above school leadership” or “those leadership has to answer to”. No participant seemed sure if school leadership even had to report these issues to anyone or ask anyone else for funds. However, they all speculated that this is the case. Regardless, teachers all shared a negative attitude towards the bureaucratic process and feels that it pulls them away from achieving their goal of a student-centered classroom.

Finding 4: Teachers convey a positive attitude around their students. Despite all of teachers’ frustrations, mainly around bureaucracy, teachers maintain a positive attitude around children to ensure that children are met with a positive environment when they come to school.
Teachers express frustration with anything that pulls them away from providing a welcoming environment that students will continue to want to come to every day. In their opinion, the most prevalent roadblock is bureaucracy and the steps that the principal must go through to help them provide a welcoming environment for their students. In support of this finding, teachers discuss feeling extreme amounts of frustration with the bureaucratic process. However, when students are around, they never let their frustration show, or discuss it. The general consensus is that adult attitude influences student attitude. Thus, on the outside of the classroom, away from students, teachers’ attitudes are generally negative. However, while in the classroom, teachers attempt to maintain a positive attitude at all times. Teachers see maintaining a positive attitude as embodying the student-focused ideology.

Teachers also share instances of maintaining a positive attitude when they’re frustrated with a part or parts of the building. Most participants shared that they do not tell their students when things go wrong in the classroom or in other parts of the building. For example, Breanna has spotted mice in her classroom on more than one occasion. When this happens, she calmly moves her classroom out into the hallway or takes them for a walk around the building while she texts the custodian to try to capture it while their gone. “The students could never know things like this,” she says. Perception that students have on the school play a huge role in whether they want to come to school or not. Therefore teachers do their best to keep the negative aspects hidden from the students.

**Summary**

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore how school teachers in one New York urban school experience the school building conditions and how teachers perceive those conditions affect the teaching and learning process. Moreover, the purpose of the analysis
of semi-structured interviews and meeting minute data was to add to the existing gap in the literature with regard to how teachers experience school building conditions.

This chapter first discussed demographic data, the case study institution, and the data analysis process. Through the data analysis process, following a chain of evidence, three superordinate themes emerged. The first of which being the Classroom. Under this superordinate theme, four subordinate themes emerged: classroom environment, class isolation, influence of adults, and safety of students. The second superordinate theme is Bureaucracy. Under this theme, four subordinate themes emerged: self-reliance, indifference, inaction, and proactive/reactive issues. The third, and final, superordinate theme is the Neighborhood. Under this theme, fell three subordinate themes: student attitudes toward school, unsafe for teachers, unsafe for students and teachers.

The findings of this study were supported by semi-structured interviews and Safety Team Meeting minute data and each of the findings relate to one another in unique ways. Within a larger neighborhood, that is perceived as unsafe, exists the case study institution. Classrooms exist within the case study institution. Based on the data, the classroom is a sanctuary from the outside, unsafe, neighborhood and the rest of the building. Teachers spend significant time and money ensuring their classrooms are welcoming for students so students want to continue to come to school. Most importantly, the classroom is student-focused. Also within the case study institution, bureaucracy exists. Although teachers are largely unaware of the bureaucratic process, they are ultimately upset by it. Teachers share the belief that bureaucracy is not student-focused and it pulls them away from their student-focused classrooms. At the point where bureaucracy and the classroom intersect, teacher attitude exists. Teacher attitude depends on their surroundings. When teachers are in the classroom, the place they consider a sanctuary, they
ensure they reflect a positive attitude in the presence their students. Regardless of what outside factors may be pulling them away from their students, teachers’ attitude remains positive and they remain student-focused. Figure 2 shows a visual display of the findings and their relationships.

![Figure 2. Visual Display of Findings](image-url)
Chapter Five: Recommendations and Conclusions

I emphasize teachers because they are largely left out of the debate. None of the bombastic reports that come from Washington and think tanks telling us what needs to be ‘fixed’—I hate such a mechanistic word, as if our schools were automobiles—ever asks the opinions of teachers.

- Jonathan Kozol

Research shows that a connection can be made between academic achievement and school building conditions in many different ways. It can affect students’ attendance (Belanger, Kielb, & Lin, 2006), self-esteem (Maxwell & Chmielewski, 2007), and a student’s overall ability to concentrate (Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008). School building conditions can affect teachers in many different ways as well. It can have an impact on teacher retention (Buckley, Schneider, & Shang, 2004), instructional techniques, teacher burnout rate (Rivera-Batiz & Marti, 1995), and overall teacher morale (Earthman & Lemasters, 2009). School building conditions are not something to be taken lightly given these implications. In New York City alone, deferred maintenance of up to $127 billion is required to address existing school facilities issues (Hunter, 2009). Although the research shows that school building condition can affect teachers and students in the aforementioned ways, there is a gap in the literature with regard to the lived experience of teachers in these conditions. Thus, this exploratory case study sought to explore how school teachers in one New York urban school building experience the school building conditions and how those conditions affect the teaching and learning process. In shining a light on the experiences of this particular group of teachers, it is hoped that the significant impact school building condition has on the teaching and learning process can be a catalyst for further research and ultimately, accountability structures at the state level to promote timely building maintenance.
Summary of the Literature Review

The teaching and learning process in New York urban district school buildings was studied by examining three principal literature streams. The first stream being students in general and how they can be affected by school facilities. As students are an integral part of the teaching and learning process, it was nearly impossible to answer the research question without understanding how school buildings can affect students and student learning. Within this stream, studies showed that students have been and can be affected by school building condition in a number of ways. School facilities can affect student health, attendance, their ability to concentrate, and their self-esteem (Belanger, Kielb, & Lin, 2006; Maxwell & Chmielewski, 2007; Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008).

The second stream that was explored was New York City public schools and their history. Within NYC, public schools have a rich history that goes beyond the facilities themselves (Boese, 1869). Although literature shows that the condition of NYC school buildings is a major issue overall (Johnson, 2018), it was important to understand why this came to be. Within this stream, the first sub-stream that was examined was how NYC has attempted to improve school facilities in the past. The creation of the School Construction Authority and the Building Condition Assessment Survey that they conduct were NYC’s first attempts at this (“BCAS: Making New York City’s Schools Safe and Sound”, 2013). However, the literature review outlines how and why these initiatives, although well-intended, are not currently successful. Within this second stream, the history of inequality that NYC public schools have faced in the past and face today was also discussed. NYC public schools have experienced race issues, fiscal inequalities, and physical plant inequalities based on the geographical location of the school for decades.
The third stream of literature that was explored was how teachers can be affected by school buildings conditions in general. Just as students are at the core of the teaching and learning process, so are teachers. Without teachers, students cannot learn and without students, teachers cannot teach. Thus, it is critical to understand what the literature already shows as it pertains to teachers and school building condition. Literature showed that school facilities can affect teacher morale, retention, and instructional methods (Bowers & Burkett, 1989; Buckley et al., 2004; Chaney & Lewis, 2007; Earthman & Lemasters, 2009; Plympton et al., 2000; Rivera-Batiz & Marti, 1995).

**Research Question**

How are New York urban school teachers in the case study institution experiencing school building conditions and how do they perceive the impact on the teaching and learning process?

**Summary of the Methodology**

To answer the research question most effectively, the lived experiences of teachers in a New York urban school building must be analyzed. Thus, a qualitative exploratory case study methodology was utilized which guided the exploration of the phenomenon of teacher’s lived experiences in NY urban school buildings. Case studies allow the researcher to take an in-depth look at a particular issue, and extend existing theories and bodies of literature. Since case studies are anchored in reality, they create a vivid depiction of a particular phenomenon for readers to learn from.

This qualitative exploratory case study relied on two data streams: semi-structured interviews and Safety Team Meeting minutes from September to April of the 2017-2018 school year. The semi-structured interview instrument utilized in this research is informed by this
exploratory case study approach. There were thirteen pre-determined questions that were asked of the participants and follow up questions asked on a case-by-case basis if necessary. The Safety Team is comprised of a mixture of teachers and leadership. The Safety Team meets monthly and records all safety issues and solutions in their meeting minutes. Collectively, these data sources yielded 190 pages of raw data. These data were then analyzed by applying five coding frames within two coding cycles.

**Summary of the Results**

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore how school teachers in one New York urban school building experience the school building conditions and how teachers perceive those conditions affect the teaching and learning process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and Safety Team Meeting minutes from the case study institution were collected. These data sources were subsequently analyzed to explore the phenomenon of how teachers experience the teaching and learning process in New York State urban school buildings. The findings based on a comprehensive analysis of the data are listed below:

**Finding 1: The classroom is a sanctuary.**
In the midst of a neighborhood and a school building that are perceived to be unsafe, teachers believe that the classroom is a sanctuary for students and teachers treat it as such.

**Finding 2: Teachers are student-focused.**
When discussing building related issues teachers encounter, they speak in terms of the children deserving more, but never themselves.

**Finding 3: Teachers lack awareness of bureaucracy.**
Teachers often attribute long-standing building issues to bureaucracy. However, the intricacies of the bureaucracy they refer to are an enigma to teachers. This creates a negative adult culture and attitude.

**Finding 4: Teachers convey a positive attitude.**
Through all of their frustrations, teachers maintain a positive attitude around children to ensure that children are met with a positive environment when they come to school.
Based on the previous analysis of the data, the emergent themes, and the four principal findings, three conclusions were drawn. These conclusions synthesize the findings and can directly answer the research question. The three conclusions are shown in Table 5.

### Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion 1:</strong> Teaching and learning are not a main priority for teachers when they are in a building and a surrounding neighborhood that they perceive to be unsafe. The priority is keeping the children safe from outside influences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion 2:</strong> Teachers experience school building condition through students. Teachers do not determine the quality of a school building based on what it offers teachers, they determine quality based on what the building offers students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion 3:</strong> Teachers’ main point of frustration is not the school building condition itself, but the lack of responsiveness and assistance they receive when they are faced with school building issues. Teachers’ perception is that this lack of responsiveness is due to multiple levels of bureaucracy that they are at the bottom of.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Discussion of the Conclusions in Relation to the Literature

Based on the conceptual framework explored in depth in the literature review, the exploration of the study evolved quite drastically. The exploration of this phenomenon began with discussing school building condition and its history in NY, along with its impacts on students and teachers, as discussed in existing literature. However, through the semi-structured interview and meeting minute analysis, new themes and findings emerged from which the three aforementioned conclusions could be drawn.

The first stream of literature on school building history in NY indicated that school building condition has been an ongoing issue for decades. This was based on news reports, government reports, and peer-reviewed articles. The findings of this study align with that
ideology. Through the Indifference and Self-Reliance findings, veterans of NY public schools discuss their long-time frustrations with NY public school buildings and have lost all hope for change in the future. They have thus shifted their source of frustration, as outlined in Conclusion 3. Since teachers have seemingly come to terms with the building and its issues, there is more frustration around inaction when issues are raised. While school building condition is seen as a nuisance, inaction and a lack of responsiveness due to bureaucracy is a bigger issue for teachers.

The second stream of literature synthesized existing literature on how school building condition affects student achievement. In existing literature, definitive comparisons were made between school building condition and student achievement using standardized test scores, attendance records, or suspension data. However, in support of Conclusion 1, there are tertiary factors at play that could contribute to low test scores, low attendance, or suspension data. In the current study, teachers refrained from mentioning the teaching and learning process at all during the interview process. Per the Classroom is a Sanctuary finding, teachers mentioned safety of students and the overall protection of students from the outside influences of their neighborhoods. This was a common theme during the data analysis process. However, the ultimate goal was not to create rigorous learning environments. But to ensure that students enjoy being in school and are having, whatever that may mean. Teacher focus on safety and not on learning could contribute to the data that was relied on so heavily in the existing literature.

The third stream of literature covered how teachers are affected by school building condition. Literature showed a strong positive correlation between school building condition and teacher retention, teacher morale, and teacher burnout. However, when synthesizing the Teachers Convey a Positive Attitude and Teachers are student-focused findings, it was apparent that teachers very rarely consider themselves as “experiencing” the condition of the school
building themselves. Rather, they spend their time shaping their students’ experiences. At times, teachers set aside their unhappiness to ensure their students are happy, which supports Conclusion 2. Moreover, teachers are willing to give up their personal prep time in order to ensure that their students get an extra recess or get to eat outside on a nice day. However, this comes at a cost of not being 100 percent prepared for upcoming lessons or benchmark exams, and this supports Conclusion 1. This can, however, contribute to teacher burnout and teacher retention because teachers are constantly practicing selflessness and giving up personal time, money, and energy ensuring students have what they need.

Existing research often refers to the direct relationship of school building condition and teacher and/or student attitudes, attendance, effectiveness, and other variables. Per the literature review, numerous studies did identify a relationship between school building condition and all of those factors. However, this study offers insight into why that relationship exists between those variables. It is not necessarily school building condition that contributes to low morale, poor teacher attendance, or low retention. It can be other variables to include teacher perception of bureaucracy or teacher perception of the surrounding neighborhood, as concluded in this study. Moreover, low teacher morale could be attributed to the constant output of personal energy and resources to ensure a positive student environment.

**Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework utilized to support this study was Broken Windows Theory. Kelling and Wilson (1982) theorized that physical disorder (deferred maintenance issues) can influence social disorder (low attendance rates, low achievement, poor teacher engagement, etc.) The premise of the framework holds true in the results of the study.
As indicated in *Finding 1* (Classroom is a sanctuary), teachers believe that their classrooms are sanctuaries from the disorder in their surrounding school and the disorder in the surrounding neighborhood. Teachers perceive their neighborhood and school as unsafe, so they feel forced to shield their students from it. Therefore, students are not familiar with their peers in other classes or other teachers in the school. Additionally, teachers feel pressure and stress to keep their students safe from the perceived dangers surrounding their classrooms. Broken windows theory supports almost this exact idea. In the case of the current study, physical disorder of the school building and the surrounding neighborhood drive social disorder. Social disorder can be categorized as teacher anxiousness and stress to protect their students from harm.

Additionally, as indicated in *Conclusion 1* (Teaching and learning is not a main priority), the issue of the disorder of the surrounding neighborhood comes to light again. The perception the teachers have of the surrounding neighborhood shifts teacher focus to student safety rather than learning. In this instance, teachers attempt to protect students from the physical and social disorders of their neighborhood and create a new reality for them within the four walls of their classrooms. Teachers are well aware of the influence that external disorder can have on their students and they utilize their time and resources to protect against that instead of focusing on providing rigorous instruction.

Although there are intermediary factors that affecting the social disorder of the school, the physical disorder of the building and the neighborhood is, in large part, responsible for those intermediary variables. For instance, if teachers did not feel the need to isolate their classes due to the condition of the building outside of their classroom, students who require small group instruction on their IEP would be receiving it in the proper setting. This, possibly increasing their achievement scores.
Limitations

Throughout the implementation of this study, numerous limitations were identified. The first, and arguably most significant, limitation was that the scope of this study required participants to be full-time teachers, who had a homeroom classroom. There are over 30 other staff members at the case study institution who teach children at some point in the day, but do not have a classroom or are not full-time. However, full-time teachers with a homeroom spend the most hours teaching every day based on the case study institution’s daily schedule. Moreover, they have a longitudinal outlook of their class as they teach the same students every day, over the course of 180 days. Thus, full-time teachers potentially have the most insight as it pertains to the teaching and learning process and how it affects them and their students. Including other staff members, however, could have provided a different perspective on shared spaces and how they can affect the teaching and learning process.

The second limitation of this study was that the Safety Team at the case study institution only includes teachers who volunteer to take part in it. Hence, the meeting minutes only reflect the experiences of teachers who are interested in expressing their safety concerns with a larger group. There were some teachers during the semi-structured interviews who have valid safety concerns about the case study institution, however are not comfortable sharing with a group or feel they are not able to devote the time to take part in the Safety Team. Their thoughts about safety specifically, although discussed during the semi-structured interviews, were not captured when the Safety Team meeting minutes were analyzed.

The third limitation of this study was the sensitivity of the subject matter. Although participants were asked questions that pertained to the environment of the case study institution
and their students, participants often addressed the issue of bureaucracy. Some participants were very vocal about their overall dissatisfaction and confusion.

**Implications for Future Research**

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore how school teachers in one New York urban school building experience the school building conditions and how teachers perceive those conditions affect the teaching and learning process. The original gap in existing literature was in regard to the lived experience of teachers in NY urban school buildings. This qualitative case study methodology utilized in the current study offered much insight to the existing gap in the literature as it pertains to teacher experiences.

Despite this study’s representation of teachers’ experiences in NY urban school buildings, this exploratory study is only the beginning to future studies of its kind to expand even further on this phenomenon. First, it would be prudent to include multiple institutions in future research. These institutions should be from a diverse group of districts including districts in affluent neighborhoods. Teachers who see the surrounding neighborhood as a threat and teachers who do not should be compared and analyzed.

Additionally, to replicate the case study with leaders and administrators would give insight into how they experience school building condition and how they believe it affects the teaching and learning process. Moreover, replicating this study would indicate how the bureaucratic process works as it pertains to school building condition and offer insight to the teachers who are unsure and frustrated by the lack of clarity around that process.

Finally, although utilizing a qualitative exploratory case study was the most effective way to answer the research question, utilizing focus groups as a data source in addition to semi-structured interviews could offer meaningful insight. A focus group would allow for teachers to
hear the answers of others and share experiences they may have had that were similar, ultimately adding to the body of data.

**Implications for Practice**

Based on the indicated findings and conclusions, two recommendations for practice can be made:

**Recommendation 1: Creation of a more transparent escalation process at the school level.** The escalation process should be automated to promote visibility across the school and include a written protocol that all staff will easily be able to follow and share if asked by a new staff member. Through an automated reporting system, teachers and other staff would be able to sign onto a website, app, or intranet to report building issues and track the status of completion. The automated system would be visible to leadership and other maintenance staff to track issues as well. This automated system would address a number of findings and conclusions.

First and foremost, one of the many reasons teachers found that their classrooms are sanctuaries was because they are in more control of their classroom than they are any other part of the building, as indicated by *Finding 1* (Classroom is a sanctuary). Having a transparent automated system with which teachers can follow up with their requests and track progress will help teachers feel that they are in control of all of the spaces in the building, not just their classrooms. Second, teachers are unaware of the bureaucratic process and are frustrated by this as indicated by *Conclusion 3* (Teachers’ main point of frustration is inaction) and *Finding 3* (Teachers lack awareness of bureaucracy). This system will allow for more visibility by indicating steps that have been and still need to be taken in the building maintenance process.

**Recommendation 2: Implementation of accountability structures for leadership and teachers.** These accountability structures should include student academic achievement targets
for teachers to be held to. This accountability structure should also include a qualitative reporting piece for teachers as well as a timeframe in which leadership must address (by creating a plan for or solving) the issues raised. This would allow teachers to indicate roadblocks or challenges they experience in attempting to hit their targets. The accountability structures would address

**Conclusion 5** (Teaching and learning is not a main priority for teachers).

It was concluded that teaching and learning is not a main priority for teachers because of the surrounding neighborhood and the concerns it brings. Accountability structures will allow teachers to hold their students to specific academic standards. Additionally, if teachers fail to meet targets, the qualitative portion of the report will allow for teachers to vocalize roadblocks they’ve experienced during the year that prevented them from being able to meet these targets. This will promote teacher transparency and lead to teachers to bring issues to the forefront that prevent teaching and learning in their classrooms.

Implementing these recommendations will address many of the findings and conclusions of this research that prevent the teaching and learning process from being at the forefront of the case study institution.

**Conclusion**

This study’s research question was, *How are New York school teachers in the case study institution experiencing school building conditions and how do they perceive the impact on the teaching and learning process?* To answer this question, both semi-structured interviews and Safety Team Meeting minutes were analyzed by applying multiple coding frames to the data. Based on this analysis, findings emerged and conclusions were drawn that ultimately answer the research question as follows:
Teachers experience school building conditions through the eyes of their students. If their students are lacking resources or are unsafe due to the conditions of the building or the surrounding neighborhood, teachers are ultimately dissatisfied. Teachers will do all they can to keep them in the classroom and keep them safe in a sanctuary-like setting. Teachers do not experience school building conditions in terms of their own needs, they experience school building condition in terms of their students’ needs. Moreover, because of teachers’ strong emphasis on keeping kids safe and protected from outside influences of the building and the neighborhood, teaching and learning fall to the wayside. The priority of student safety, and sometimes classroom isolation ultimately outweigh teaching and learning. Thus, achievement at the case study institution is low and teachers rarely discuss rigorous teaching and learning environments.

In order to address these conclusions, it is recommended that the school, and other schools experiencing the same sort of dynamic, implement automated reporting for teachers. Teachers would be able to track their service request in an app or website to allow them to feel more control over their building and more visibility into the bureaucratic process they are currently unclear about. Additionally, it is recommended that the case study institution implement accountability structures for student achievement as well as means for teachers to indicate why they are not hitting their specific targets. An accountability structure should also be implemented to hold leadership accountable for addressing the issues raised by teachers in a given timeframe.

Given these conclusions and recommendations, it is imperative that teachers are heard. They understand better than anyone what the needs of their students are to be successful. If teachers are solely focused on the building and protecting their students, they are only able to
protect them in the short term. They do not have the time to prepare their students for the long term educational trials they will face as they get older. The results suggest that something as seemingly trivial as providing teachers insight into the bureaucratic process at the school level would relieve stress and allow teachers more time to focus on teaching and learning. The existing literature points to a direct correlation between school building condition, student achievement, and teacher effectiveness. However, the current study suggests that there are other tertiary factors that affect the teaching and learning process and school building condition is only a part of the larger issue of mistrust, dissatisfaction, and perception of neighborhood safety. The current study is a stepping stone to future research that can give a voice to teachers and leaders to eventually improve building issue responsiveness at the school level and ultimately improve school building condition across the city.
References


Horswill, R. A. (2011). *The Effects of School Building Condition and School Geographical Location on Student Achievement in Alberta*. (Doctor of Business Administration), University of Phoenix, ProQuest. (3480371)


Appendix A
IRB Approved Informed Consent
NU HSRP Rev. 2/7/2017

Northeastern University, Doctor of Law & Policy
Name of Investigator(s): Principal Investigator, J.D. LaRock, Student Researcher, Ariana L. Ames

Title of Project: New York City Public School Building Conditions: An Exploratory Case Study of Teachers’ Experiences

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
We are asking you to be in this study because you are a full-time New York City Public School Teacher with a homeroom class.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this proposed case study is to explore how school teachers in one New York City Public School building experience the school building conditions and how those conditions affect the teaching and learning process.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to participate in one interview.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
You will be interviewed will take place outside of normal school/work hours and will be located at a place where you choose. The interview will take about 30 minutes.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
The loss of time – For most teachers, time is coveted. The loss of 15-20 of your day could potentially cause harm and stress. I will keep each interview timed and the clock will be visible to you at all times. You are allowed to excuse yourself from the interview at any time.

Potential loss of confidentiality – You may have something to say that others may perceive as negative. In the event of a loss of confidentiality, those opinions could end up being shared. Although the loss of confidentiality is very serious, likelihood of the loss of confidentiality happening is extremely low. There have been many measures taken to ensure confidentiality throughout the research process.
Potential loss of internal confidentiality -- The way that you answer questions will be included in the final thesis. Although the researcher protects against external confidentiality, your responses could help co-workers identify who you are. It is important that you take that into consideration when you're responding to questions. Moreover, you will be given a chance to look over your interview transcript before it is put into the final thesis to ensure that you are protecting yourself appropriately.

Will I benefit by being in this research?  
There will be no immediate, measurable benefits. However, in the long term, the outcome of the research may inform policies regarding school building conditions in the future.

Who will see the information about me?  
Your identity as a participant in this study will not be known. That means no one, not even the researchers, will know that the answers you give are from you.

All interviews will be recorded then transcribed on one device (MacBook Air). The recorded interviews and transcriptions will be kept in a password-protected document folder on the researcher’s personal computer and only the researcher will have access to these files. As a further measure, at the beginning of each interview, the researcher will announce a code. That code will be linked to the participants identity in a separate password-protected file on the researcher’s computer, only accessible by the researcher. Pseudonyms will be used in the completed study and the school’s name will never be used or revealed. All of the password-protected documents will be kept on the researcher’s personal computer for at least 5 years after the completed research. They will also be backed up on a password-protected hard drive in case they are inaccessible from the computer for any given reason.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?  
You have the option to refuse participation at any time.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?  
No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of your participation in this research.

Can I stop my participation in this study?  
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?  
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Ariana L. Ames at ames.a@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact J.D. LaRock at jd.larock@northeastern.edu, the Principal Investigator.
Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?
No.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
No.

Is there anything else I need to know?
All relevant information is clearly indicated above.

I agree to take part in this research: New York City Public School Building Conditions: An Exploratory Case Study of Teachers’ Experiences.

____________________________________________ ________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part Date

_____ Initial here if you agree to be audio recorded

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above

____________________________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent Date

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendix B

IRB Approved Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Semi-Structured Interview

New York City Public School Building Conditions: An Exploratory Case Study of Teachers’ Experiences

1. How long have you been a school teacher in New York City?
2. How long have you worked in this school in particular?
   a. If respondent has worked in other schools: How would you say your experience here has differed from the other locations you’ve taught in?
3. What do you think students like most about going to school here?
   a. What are some things you think they would change based on what you’ve heard?
4. How would you describe this school to someone who has never been here before?
5. Describe your classroom.
   a. What do you like most about your classroom?
   b. What are some things you would change?
6. What do you think your students like most about your classroom?
   a. What do you think they would change, if anything?
7. Do you feel that any aspects of the school or your classroom affect your teaching methods in any way? Whether good or bad?
   a. If yes: What are those things?
8. Do you think any aspects of your classroom or the school building affect student ability to learn in any way? Whether good or bad?
   a. If yes: What are those things?
9. What are some of the best things about working here, in your opinion?
   a. What are some things you would change?
10. Are you active in the school community?
    a. If yes: How so?
11. Is there a process for reporting building issues?
    a. If yes, what is it?
12. Is there anything I didn’t ask you that you wish I did?
13. Do you have any questions for me?