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Job Satisfaction for Teachers within a High School

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to research the extent to which job satisfaction affected teachers' decisions to remain in the teaching profession at one high school. Observation, interview, documentary, and survey data were collected and analyzed, revealing that burnout factors naturally occur within the teaching profession but do not necessarily negatively affect an individual teacher's overall satisfaction. Motivators outweighed burnout factors which resulted in higher job satisfaction rates and a decision for most of the participating teachers to remain in the teaching profession.

The ability to improve education in American public schools will depend in large measure on the ability of those schools to recruit and retain talented teachers. If teaching is widely viewed as an undesirable occupation, the talented personnel needed to implement and sustain the recent educational reforms are likely to seek other outlets for their professional aspirations. (Sedlak & Schlossman, 1987, p. 93)

This quotation is an accurate summation of apprehensions I encountered over the past ten years as I pursued my passion of becoming an educator. I feared I might quickly become dissatisfied with the profession and forced to begin the search for another professional venue. As a student-teacher, I saw that dissatisfaction seemed to plague many excellent educators whom I inadvertently heard complain to their colleagues.

I decided to research the extent to which job satisfaction impacted teachers' decisions to stay in the teaching profession within the school where I was student-teaching. Although this research topic was not a traditional action research model, I believed that it was, in fact, a viable action research topic in that teachers' levels of dissatisfaction ultimately influence their effectiveness in the classroom as well as psychological aspects (e.g., energy level, negative attitude) that impact their students' learning as well. The improvement of education depends in part on effective teachers' self-awareness of their levels of job satisfaction and ability to cope with stresses before they are lost to the teaching profession. I conducted my research at Washington High School (pseudonym) because I was student-teaching there and had rapport with the faculty.

Literature Review

I studied existing literature in order to see what other researchers had found with regard to teachers' job satisfaction and its effect on retention, a topic that proved multi-faceted and complex. Although stress affects individuals in different ways and similar situations may affect people differently, there are generalized and consistent causes of burnout inherent in the teaching profession including low salary, lack of administrative support, and lack of time (Certo & Englebright Fox, 2002). Certo and Englebright Fox (2002) explain that these overarching themes are why it is difficult for teachers to remain in the profession if their dissatisfaction in these areas remains unresolved. Terry (1997) reported that unrealistic self-expectations, lack of administrative feedback, multifaceted responsibilities, low salaries, and fear of school violence are generalized themes that cause burnout within the teaching profession.

Job Satisfaction

Other researchers have concluded that teacher burnout correlates with intrinsic values and dissatisfaction regarding personal goals, one reporting that an overall feeling of satisfaction reflects whether or not one's personal goals have been attained (Kudva, 1999). Kudva (1999) concluded that teachers' levels of burnout had more to do with their emotional and physical fatigue and low self-efficacy than it had to do with teachers' negative issues with their students. Another researcher attributed burnout to "excessively striving to reach some unrealistic expectation imposed by one's self or the values of society" (Farber, 1991, p. 6).

Mertler (2002) reported that the morale of teacher colleagues and students could be negatively affected by a small number of dissatisfied teachers. He found that 25% of teachers reported that they personally knew or worked with more than ten teachers that they considered *unmotivated* and whom they felt lowered school morale and negatively impacted students' learning. Regarding teachers' job satisfaction, he found that, on average, 25% of teachers were dissatisfied with their jobs and that younger teachers and older teachers experienced higher levels of job satisfaction than those in the middle of their teaching careers. By contrast, an older study found one-third of practicing teachers dissatisfied with their jobs and over half of former teachers dissatisfied for the majority of the time that they worked in the teaching profession (Heyns, 1988).

Teacher Retention

Studies on job satisfaction conducted in hopes of retaining more teachers have found certain burnout factors (e.g., working with students, colleagues, classroom autonomy, salary level) common among teachers in all schools (Kim & Loadman, 1994). Other studies have suggested that administrators should take a more active role in encouraging and supporting teachers in order to prevent losing qualified teachers to burnout or attrition and to avoid disruption of the school's organizational setup and the overall quality of learning (e.g., Certo & Englebright Fox, 2002). Certo and Englebright Fox (2002) found that school administrators played one of the most important roles in whether or not teachers felt that they were adequately supported. Kim and Loadman (1994) recommended that school administrators be proactive in identifying burnout conditions within their schools as a means of establishing early intervention to improve the overall levels of satisfaction. Betancourt-Smith (1994) further explained:

Early indicators of discontent, such as the consideration of leaving, must be recognized, analyzed, and addressed openly and with genuine concern by administrators so that a quality teaching force . . . may be retained and increased (p. 6).

Terry (1997) also suggested that teachers be proactive in recognizing their own symptoms of stress and burnout before it robs them

of their joy of teaching: "The best way to combat burnout is for individuals to recognize stressors and create their own methods of coping" (pp. 10-11). Terry explained that, rather than strive to avoid stress, it is crucial for teachers to self-assess their stress and burnout levels in order to effectively implement de-stressing techniques that may maintain job satisfaction.

My review of the literature led me to suspect that various stressors could affect burnout occurrences which, in turn, could cause overall job dissatisfaction for teachers. From the literature regarding generalized burnout factors and retention, I decided to develop a survey and an interview protocol in order to research the extent to which burnout factors and occurrences affected teachers at Washington High School and their decisions to remain within the teaching profession.

Methods

I chose to gather data through a naturalistic and mixed method approach, using both qualitative and quantitative methodology. According to Mills (2003), in order for effective and thorough action research to take place, data collection techniques need to be experienced-based, inquiry-based, and examination-based. Mills's methods for data collection, while focused on classroom-based action research, were still relevant to my inquiry. Instead of studying students, I studied teachers. The goal in traditional action research is for teachers to improve their classroom by continually realigning their practices for a better learning environment. My goal was to discover what, if anything, needs to be realigned to improve teachers' working environments by understanding their satisfaction.

Triangulation and validation were used throughout the data collection as a means of safeguarding against observer effects or bias. Triangulation involved use of both qualitative and quantitative data gathered from multiple sources from state to individual levels. Peer review was used for the development of two interview protocols and survey instruments. Interview protocols were field-tested, and observation and interview data were validated by those from whom it was collected. These methods were designed to obtain a clear reflection of teachers' job satisfaction.

Data Sources and Limitations

I collected employment data from the state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), the school district, Washington High School, and individual teachers at the high school. Faculty members from the high school served as both the primary and secondary subjects. Although it would have been interesting to have included school administrators and students as interviewees regarding their perceptions of teachers' satisfaction, their remarks would have been less immediate to the topic than those of the teachers. The data set was limited in that, although the high school and district administrators were willing to provide information regarding teacher retention, neither they nor OSPI reportedly had records of the percentage of teachers who ended their employment.

Data Collection Methods

Negotiating Access. The school administration granted me access to conduct both field-testing and research at Washington High School. I distributed a packet including an explanatory letter (see Appendix A), a consent form (see Appendix B), and a survey (see Appendix C) to teachers' school mailboxes. I presented my research topic to all of the teachers in the school via memorandum and asked for volunteers for one-to-one interviews. I explained in the memorandum that we would discuss the stresses and emotions they have experienced as teachers.

Observation. The topic of job satisfaction was discussed school-wide via e-mail and in two faculty meetings, generating documents regarding job satisfaction I was able to collect, and events such as faculty meetings that I could observe. In the first faculty meeting I observed, after the district superintendent presented the district's projected five-year growth plan, teachers responded with their concerns and objections about issues related to job dissatisfaction. This faculty meeting lasted for fifty minutes, with a second faculty meeting, conducted by one of the assistant principals, as a continuation of the first and focused on resolution of some of the issues that had surfaced. I recorded both observations via field-notes and then typed them as a narrative. I then asked faculty members who had attended the meetings to validate the narratives by reading over them and checking for accurate representations of the occurrences. With both observations, I took the role of a passive observer (Mills, 2003).

Documents review. I reviewed documents from the OSPI which provided statistical information on a state level, school district level, and school level about the average number of years of teachers' experience over two consecutive school years. I also reviewed informational e-mail messages sent by an assistant principal, principal, and district superintendent circulated school-wide regarding teachers' satisfaction. From the superintendent came an e-mail message to the faculty in which he described how the school board was planning to alleviate some of the issues of job satisfaction that the teachers had brought to his attention in the first observed meeting. Two final documents collected and reviewed were teachers' room assignments from two consecutive school years.

Survey. I attempted to gather quantitative information of teachers' satisfaction rates in the form of a survey, but it was difficult to see satisfaction trends because, of a Likert scale of 1-5, all surveyees chose between a 4 and a 5 (i.e., *somewhat satisfied* or *very satisfied*). When I designed the survey, I had not anticipated that result; a scale based on seven might have elicited a greater variation in responses.

In developing a survey distributed to all of the teachers, I intentionally made it a single page in length in hopes that a high proportion of them would be willing to participate and return it promptly. The survey (see Appendix C) offered structured items with a variety of possible responses, open-ended questions, and Likert scale items (Mills, 2003). Three drafts of the survey were subjected to a peer review and revision process. I was unable to field-test the survey because all of the 76 teachers from Washington High School were potential survey subjects, and I was unable to gain access to test the survey with teachers from other high schools.

I distributed 76 surveys and received 29 completed surveys, a 38% response rate. I requested that the surveys be taped or stapled closed and placed them in a designated box to ensure anonymity. I informed the teachers that, if their names were written at the bottom of the survey to indicate their willingness to be interviewed, that portion would be separated before I read their survey responses.

Interviews. Because a number of teachers were openly willing to discuss the matter in detail, job satisfaction was a viable topic to research. My student-teaching assignment was Washington High School for the entire 2006-2007 school year. By the spring semester, I had established rapport with most of the teachers at the high school prior to beginning my research. Interviewees were identified strictly on a voluntary basis by submitting their names on the bottom of the surveys if they were willing to participate in a one-to-one interview. Twelve teachers responded that they would be willing to be interviewed. From the twelve responses, I decided that six would be a feasible yet effective number in order to obtain an adequate representation of job satisfaction in the school. I purposefully selected six teachers with whom I had had no personal contact prior to the interviews; I had already built close professional relationships with the other six teachers who volunteered as they were teachers from my department. Although I was grateful that they were willing to assist me in my research, I wanted to minimize any presuppositions or biases as I tried to avoid

observer effects as much as possible. I arranged appointments to conduct one-to-one interviews with each of the teachers, but two of the teachers chose to cancel their interviews.

I conducted semi-structured interviews using a common protocol that allowed for flexibility in pursuing each participant's unique outlook. I developed six questions regarding personal perspectives of satisfaction level in teaching (see Appendix D) based on questions that arose in conducting my literature review. I submitted the protocol to a peer reviewer and created a second draft based on some of their suggestions. I conducted two field tests on the second draft of the protocol, administering it to two teachers who had originally volunteered to be interviewed but were not chosen based on our extensive working relationships. Based on the field tests, I made minor adjustments to the protocol and used the third draft as the basis for the interviews. I limited my protocol to six questions as a means of respecting the time of my subjects. The four interviews ranged from twenty minutes to one hour in length, based on how deeply each interviewee chose to go into the topic. Two of the interviews were recorded via audio-tape and transcribed, and one of the interviews was recorded via hand-notes and typed. The fourth interview was conducted via e-mail due to the interviewee's unfortunate case of laryngitis and his inability to reschedule the interview. I validated all of the interviews by asking the subjects to read through the notes that I had typed and by making sure I had accurately represented what they had to say.

Data Analysis Methods

In analyzing the data, I first took a method-by-method approach, constructing preliminary interpretations of the information gathered via each method. Using the information from the surveys that I gathered, I created databases and figured response averages from raw numbers. I then sorted the survey information into topical segments and compared the data to the overall totals. In order to recognize trends, I counted occurrences and ranked them from most common to least common, and created charts and graphs related to the major themes as visual representations.

I compared some of the documents that I received from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's website regarding teacher statistics with the 2005-2006 classroom assignments document from Washington High School. I then compared those numbers to a document listing the number of teachers who were not returning to teach at the high school in 2007-2008, not including those who were retiring, to determine a retention percentage.

In analyzing the qualitative data, I looked for similarities and differences in the content of the interview data. I identified occurrences and major themes in the data from each method by reading through the data and noting information and key quotes. This type of method-by-method analysis was used for the qualitative data in the surveys, interviews, observations, and documents.

During a second phase of data analysis, I looked at the preliminary themes from each data collection method and performed cross-method comparisons. I noted common occurrences consistent between the different research methods. I also noted differences and discrepancies where themes were found in one research method but were not found in another. By focusing not only on the similarities but also on the discrepancies, I was able to question the preliminary themes and revisit the preliminary findings.

The third phase of the data analysis involved analyzing the information across all methods of data collection to identify major themes and organize the material accordingly. Then, I refined and established assertions to express my interpretation of the data as a whole.

In addition to the validation measures described, I also discussed my data and my preliminary interpretations with researcher colleagues, non-WHS teachers, and my sister-in-law who researched a similar subject matter involving job satisfaction among nurses, at all times making sure to keep the subjects' identities confidential.

Ethics

My goal was to maintain an ethical stance consistent with Flinders's (1992 as cited in Mills, 2003) concept of *deontological ethics*, that is, to adhere to standards of ethical behavior consistent as a norm in our society. I sought to be entirely honest at all levels of the research. When obtaining site access from both the school and district administrations, I was forthcoming and honest with them about the topic of my research. I decided from the beginning that pseudonyms would be used at all levels, for all subjects, and for the site in order to protect all involved. I also let the teachers know the purpose of my research and the methods that I planned to use. Since the topic of job satisfaction was already at the forefront of discussion at the high school, I wanted the teachers to know that I was not acting as a spy but that I was working alone for research separate from anything the school district may or may not have been conducting.

An introductory letter (see Appendix A) and a letter of consent (see Appendix B) were distributed to each teacher to avoid confusion as to who was conducting the research or its purpose. I specified in the introductory letter and the survey (see Appendix C) how the subjects' anonymity was going to be maintained for a high level of safety. For those who were willing to be interviewed, I gave them a thank-you letter for their assistance (see Appendix E) and informed them again of the methods to keep their surveys anonymous. Also, within the appendices of this report, all proper names, excluding my own and that of Dr. Linda Mabry, my advisor, were changed in order to protect their confidentiality.

Subjectivity

Throughout the research process, efforts were made to represent the topic in a fair and accurate way. Measures were taken to avoid undue researcher subjectivity or to slant the topic based on presuppositions or personal opinions. Triangulation was implemented on many levels, from types of methods that were used for research, to using multiple data sources from varying levels of the educational system, to studying and analyzing the research over a period of multiple months. I also relied on peer review, receiving input from colleagues in order to see the information from other perspectives. Validation was also used in situations where I was representing a subject's view. These steps were taken to insure that I was carefully presenting the most accurate data and interpretations of the topic.

Limitations

Although I am confident I did as thorough a job as possible, some constraints prevented the research from being more in-depth. One difficulty throughout my research was gathering quantitative documentation because the records were either confidential or administrators truly had no record of the teacher turnover rate at the school, district, or state level. It was also difficult to measure or quantify teacher satisfaction. Even with those difficulties, however, I believe that the data collected solidly addressed my initial research question.

Data Presentation and Findings

Data gathered through survey, observation, interview, and documents were analyzed to address the research question, *To what extent job satisfaction impacted teachers’ decisions to stay in the teaching profession within the school where I was student teaching?* From this effort, two themes emerged: (1) teachers’ job satisfaction and (2) the decisions they make to stay in the teaching profession at Washington High School.

Theme One – Job Satisfaction

In order to get an idea of how accurately my sample of 38% responding to the survey represented the population of teachers at Washington High School, I gathered statistical information about the teachers at WHS from OSPI. OSPI reported that during the 2006-2007 school year, the teachers at WHS had averaged 11.4 years of teaching experience. The 38% of the teachers surveyed 11.9 years of teaching, which gave me reason to believe that the responding teachers could accurately represent the faculty at Washington High School.

By sorting and analyzing the survey results, some factors became evident. Demographic data indicated that WHS was not the first teaching assignment for those who were surveyed, since their average overall years of teaching experience was 11.94 years and the average years of teaching at WHS was 6.21 years. The total number of years teaching overall or at WHS did not necessarily correlate with a teacher’s reported degree of job satisfaction. While I had expected to find different degrees of job satisfaction based on how long a teacher had been teaching overall or at WHS, I had presumed that teachers with the least and most longevity would have the highest levels of satisfaction, but instead I found an even distribution of degrees of satisfaction between teachers with minimal, average, and extensive years of teaching. Thus, I could not see any evidence that the degree of satisfaction could be predicted by how long they had been in the teaching profession.

With both the survey and interviews, I asked open-ended questions about what motivated them as teachers. I made the questions unstructured as a way of seeing if any trends would appear without my presumptions interfering. Reading through the survey answers, I noticed categorical trends emerged (see Table 1). Overall, nine motivating factors were discussed by the teachers who were surveyed. Of the nine motivating factors, five of the categories involved intrinsic motivators.

Table 1. Occurrences of motivational factors reported by surveyed teachers at WHS

Amount of Occurrences	Motivational Factors Reported by Teachers
17	Working with students
9	Time Off
7	Knowing that you’re making a difference

5	Colleagues
5	Continuing Education
4	Job Benefits
3	Teaching content area/subject matter
2	Classroom Autonomy
1	Variety within the job

The teachers explained that the more that they were confronted with challenges, the more they sought those things which motivated them. For example, an English teacher at WHS, explained that he naturally encountered challenges that can cause burnout, but instead he focused on what motivated him as a teacher:

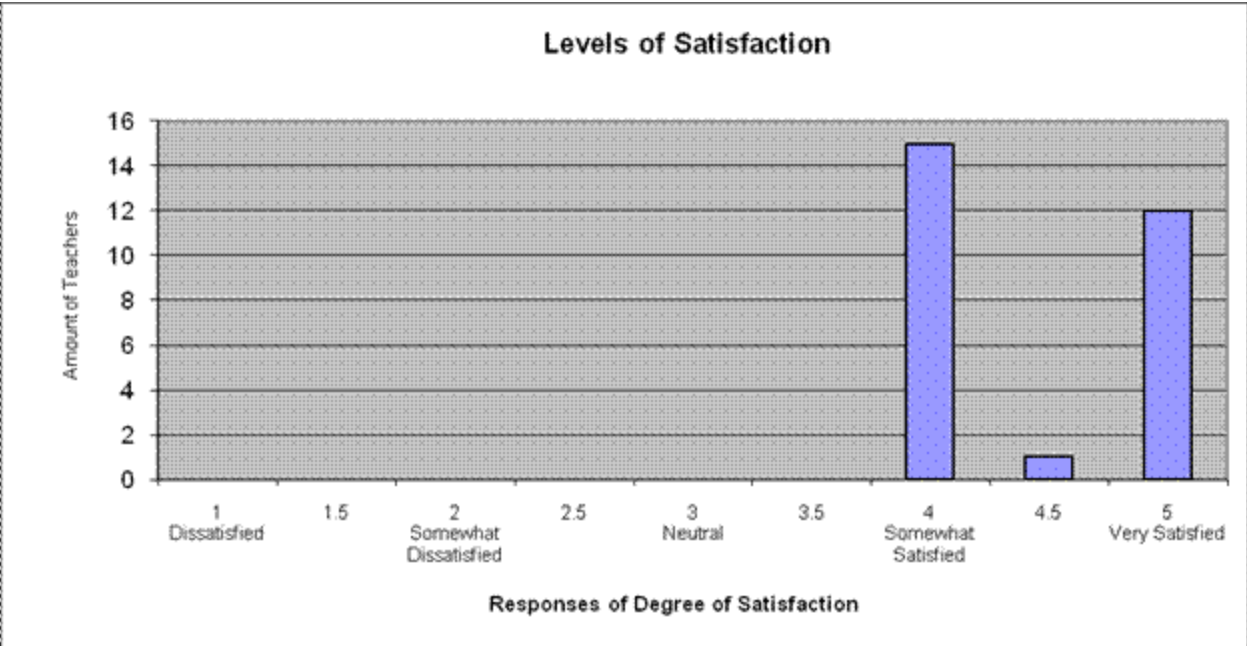
What keeps me going is trying to understand kids' minds. I use informal methods of learning and research by reading articles, networking with other teachers, and by my way of always wanting to reinvent the wheel . . . These are all ways that help me stay satisfied as a teacher. (personal communication, April 30, 2007)

A social studies teacher offered a motivation strategy for teachers facing challenges and burnout:

A lot of people burnout early on. Be proactive with communication. When you get letters of affirmation from parents and students, hold on to them. Read them on a *rainy day*. (social studies teacher, personal communication, May 1, 2007)

Of the 29 teachers who were surveyed, 28 reported their satisfaction rate (See Figure 1). Twelve rated their satisfaction rate as a 5 out of a possible 5, describing themselves as *very satisfied*. However, this same group also reported the highest average burnout factors and the lowest motivational factors among the teachers surveyed. Because not a single teacher who reported a satisfaction of a 3 (*neutral*) or lower, I concluded that job satisfaction is high among the teachers surveyed at Washington High School in spite of high occurrences of burnout factors.

Figure 1. Levels of satisfaction among surveyed teachers at WHS



Based on interviews and surveys, I assert: *Burnout factors were natural occurrences but that they did not necessarily negatively affect individual satisfaction for teachers at Washington High School.* Teachers who reported the highest levels of satisfaction rates also reported the highest burnout factor occurrences.

Theme Two – Decision to Stay

Factors that were reported as motivators were sometimes also reported as burnout factors. Working with students was the motivating factor reported by the largest number of teachers, with 17 occurrences. However, apathy from students and issues with students were also reported to contribute to teacher burnout, with 17.5 occurrences reported. Students at WHS were a main source of motivation for many teachers; yet, they also were a main contributing factor of burnout. Most subjects commented that working with students was a main reason that they chose to go into the teaching profession, but primarily interacting with students all day long could naturally trigger stress due to teacher-student personality clashes. Working closely with students could be greatly rewarding, yet could be stressful due to the high level of human interaction.

The commitment of time was another category that related to both motivation and burnout for teachers. Eight teachers reported the time required for teaching responsibilities outside the classroom as a factor in burnout. However, nine teachers reported the generous vacation breaks (or time off) as a motivating factor that kept them refreshed and recharged.

Seventeen teachers at WHS reported the licensing requirements of continuing education as a main burnout factor, while five teachers reported continuing education requirements as a main motivating factor. One teacher wrote, “I am almost always continually learning, challenging myself to seek better ways and strategies to be effective” (survey, March 30, 2007). It appeared that, when

continuing education connected to improving their teaching practice (e.g., workshops, conferences), teachers considered it a motivating factor. When continuing education seemed more bureaucratic, or *hoops* that they expressed they were required to *jump through* in order to keep their jobs (e.g., Professional Certification), teachers listed it as a burnout factor for them.

Colleagues also seemed to play a role, as a factor for either burnout or motivation. Two of the surveyed teachers categorized interactions with colleagues as a burnout factor. Of the four teachers interviewed, one expressed that lack of teamwork among her colleagues was a main burnout factor for her:

At my other high school, it was a total team. No question. Definitely there were personality conflicts sometimes, but that's normal. But as far as bending over backward for you, people would always help . . . It was very collaborative. Here, that doesn't exist. There are a few of us that try, but as a whole you're really battling for yourself . . . When I first came here, I was going to leave because I thought this was weird. I don't like being competitive against people who are teaching in the same department. (mathematics teacher, personal communication, May 1, 2007)

Five teachers reported that they relied on their colleagues for support and professional input, considering this a factor for staying motivated and in the teaching profession. Of the four teachers interviewed, three described their relationships with their colleagues as motivating factors that helped keep them renewed and energized. One of the three teachers said that working with colleagues was the factor that changed his job satisfaction from low to high.

[B]y November into my second year of teaching, I hit a low. But beginning my third year of teaching, I began team-teaching. This was the component that I needed. It was rewarding and uplifting to have that professional connection with other adults. (English teacher, personal communication, April 30, 2007)

Almost every teacher who responded via survey or interview reported high and low job satisfaction trends occurring at some point within their teaching careers. According to two of the teachers interviewed, trends of high and low job satisfaction occur for all teachers during a school year but are more prominent with newer teachers. One of the teachers commented, "[In my] earlier years as a teacher, I experienced broad swings" (English teacher, personal communication, April 30, 2007).

I observed that a specific burnout factor (e.g., *lack of administrative support*) could negatively affect teachers' overall job satisfaction on a broader scale. Of the teachers surveyed, 43% reported *lack of administrative support* as a burnout factor that affected them. I observed a meeting where faculty members voiced their feelings about lack of administrative support at WHS. The school district superintendent, formerly a WHS principal, met to discuss a bond measure that had recently passed and to let them know how the funds would be allocated. The funds would primarily be used to expand the schools in the district. He then announced that the district had already received permits and funds in order to erect four portables providing eight classrooms on the high school campus, but that the school board had decided to set up only two of the portables and then wait to expand the high school building until 2012, saving \$500,000. Several teachers in the audience reacted vocally regarding the district's decision and raised their frustrations to the superintendent. One teacher at the meeting commented:

I hear comments and receive e-mails on a regular basis from my colleagues who are extremely unhappy with their jobs. There is a historically low job satisfaction rate here on campus. Are you going to tell me that \$250,000 is more important than teachers' job satisfaction? Aren't teachers worth more than that? (observation of faculty meeting, April 12, 2007)

Another teacher commented to the superintendent, in front of the school administration, about frustrations with the school administration's course and classroom scheduling:

I feel that there are some administrators here who do not practice equity when they create the master schedule. When we don't see equity with the classroom schedules, it causes hard feelings for some teachers. How are we going to share the burden of working in an overcrowded building when some teachers never have to move and others have to move all the time? The burden needs to be spread evenly. (observation of faculty meeting, April 12, 2007)

At the faculty meeting, the teachers aired their grievances for 35 minutes, and the superintendent responded three times that the school board would not be discussing purchasing the additional two portables. However at the end of the meeting, the superintendent told the faculty that he had changed his mind and that he would "refigure the numbers and talk to the school board to see if [they] could go ahead and order all four portables instead of just the two" (observation of faculty meeting, April 12, 2007).

The principal did not comment during the faculty meeting but did send an e-mail to the WHS faculty the next morning:

Open and honest communication . . . is how we air our grievances and look for solutions . . . [P]roblems are bound to come up and mistakes and misunderstandings are going to happen but, as long as we continue to search for solutions and maintain an atmosphere of trust and respect, we will be able to get through the rough spots and keep our focus on student learning . . . While the addition of the module classrooms will greatly help to alleviate the current displaced teacher problem . . . I do not see the teacher/classroom disparity being resolved. (e-mail correspondence, April 13, 2007)

Twenty-five minutes later, the district superintendent sent an e-mail to the WHS faculty as a follow-up regarding the grievances discussed at the previous faculty meeting.

After our meeting I met with . . . our construction manager and asked him to look into the possibility of purchasing and placing the two additional portables at [WHS] sooner rather than later . . . After speaking with [him] I'm hopeful that we will be able to site the other two portables over the summer which will add four additional classrooms to [WHS] . . . [W]hen we begin the design process for the [WHS] expansion I encourage you to get involved and share your ideas with the architects. (e-mail correspondence, April 13, 2007)

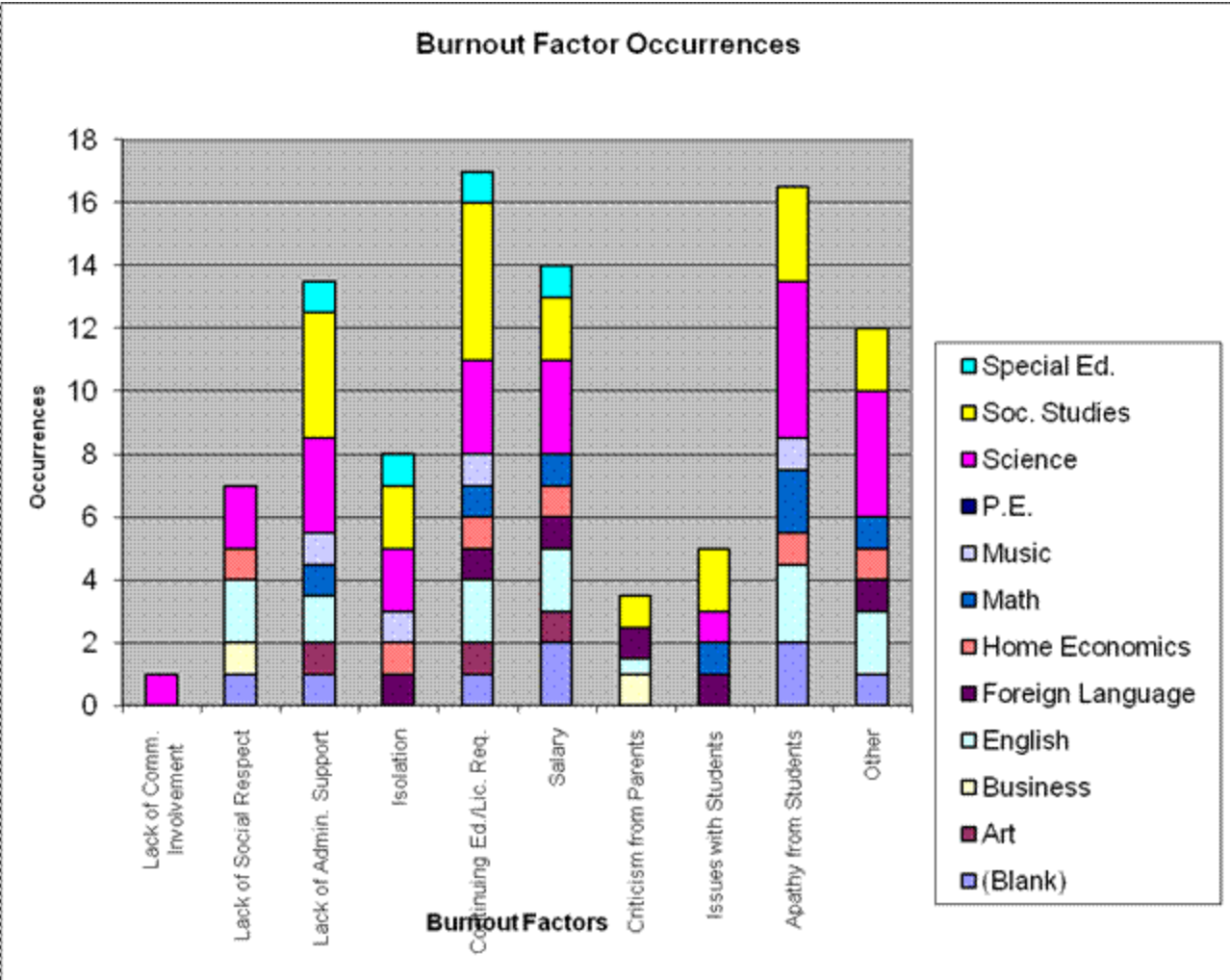
Less than three hours later, the district superintendent e-mailed his regular newsletter district-wide. Under his *action items* category, he announced that the school board approved the construction of all four portables, instead of the original two portables, at the high school and that they would all be in use beginning Fall 2007 (e-mail newsletter, April 13, 2007). It was apparent from the observation and e-mail correspondences that, when faculty grievances were brought before the school district, the district administration responded promptly to alleviate the burnout factors.

Of the four teachers interviewed, all four of the teachers felt that, overall, they received satisfactory support from the school district, yet three of the four interviewees commented that they did not feel that they received adequate support from the school administration. An English teacher commented, "The only positive support that I feel that I receive is from some of the assistant principals" (English teacher, personal communication, April 30, 2007). A social studies teacher described the administrative support as *passive support*. He added, "I've found myself wanting more instructional leadership support. To me, that's my vision of what an

administrator is, somebody who has a vision for morale and instruction” (social studies teacher, personal communication, May 1, 2007). Many of the subjects commented that they did not feel comfortable bringing their grievances to the school administration. While other subjects expressed similar discomfort, many of them believed that nothing would get resolved until faculty members made it visible to the district administration.

Burnout factors not only varied among individuals but also among the content areas that they taught. The trends for burnout factors varied among departments (see Figure 2). For example, there were more occurrences of *isolation* listed as a contributing burnout factor by teachers in non-general content areas such as foreign language, home economics, music, and special education departments. Within general content areas such as the English, mathematics, and science departments *apathy from students* had higher occurrences.

Figure 2. Reported occurrences of burnout factors by subject content



Smaller departments made up the non-general subjects, making isolation a contributing burnout factor, thus causing teachers to feel less connection than teachers who were a part of larger departments. *Apathy from students* contributed to a higher occurrence of burnout for teachers related to general studies. I concluded this was because every student was required to take general subjects, so the teachers had students who lacked interest in their content area. On the other hand, specific burnout factors, such as *lack of administrative support*, affected teachers across content areas.

On the survey, a total of 100.5 burnout factor occurrences were reported by the teachers along with 53 motivational factor occurrences promoting the decision to remain in the teaching profession. Yet, the average satisfaction rate of the teachers who completed the survey was a 4.45 out of a possible 5, and not one survey participant reported a satisfaction rate below a 4.

Of the four teachers interviewed, three reported that they were highly satisfied and had no current plans of leaving the teaching profession. The one teacher who was currently dissatisfied with her profession remarked that she would most likely continue to teach:

I'm in my thirteenth year [of teaching] now, and I can't imagine doing this for thirty more years. But realistically, I probably will . . . I just never doubted it more than I have recently, which is a shame. I always thought, just hands down, *boom*, I will have the same career the rest of my life. I always wanted this. And I think honestly this year has been very bad for a lot of reasons . . . Sadly, I just really want [this school year] over. I really want to start over next year and chalk this up as one of those years I don't want to repeat . . . When I sit down and calm down, I still think that the benefits do outweigh [the negatives]. But I've got to learn better ways of putting things into perspective because I've kind of lost that this year. But it will come back. (mathematics teacher, personal communication, May 1, 2007)

Based on a teaching roster for the 2007-2008 school year, of the original 76 teachers who had taught during the 2006-2007 school year, six teachers did not renew their teaching contracts with WHS (WHS, October 13, 2007). The six teachers who left did not include those who had retired. From the 2006-2007 to the 2007-2008 school year, there was an 8% turnover rate of non-retiring teachers who did not renew their teaching contracts with WHS. Due to the confidentiality aspect, there was no information available regarding the circumstances in which these six teachers decided not to return as teachers at WHS. Unfortunately, I was also unable to learn whether these six teachers decided to leave the teaching profession entirely or just to leave this particular high school and secure a teaching job at another school. I attempted to find their whereabouts but was unsuccessful in locating any of them.

Based on the analyzed data, I assert: *Because a high percentage of WHS teachers returned to teach at the school in 2007-2008, it was clear that the satisfactions of teaching outweighed the burnout factors they had identified.*

Conclusion

The reason that I chose this action research study was not only to gather information about job satisfaction among teachers but also as a way of addressing my own fears of burning out. I have witnessed a good number of truly gifted teachers start out with the best of intentions, yet quickly become burned out and leave the field within their first few years. This study was my way of being proactive as a new teacher. I found that teachers who were self-aware, not only of their burnout factors, but also of their personal motivators for why they were teachers had a higher sense of job satisfaction than those who were not proactive in self-assessment. This finding impacted my decision to continuously self-assess my own burnout factors and personal motivators with teaching as a means of being proactive in preventing dissatisfaction. I plan to develop personal coping and de-stressing methods as a means of monitoring, assessing, and hopefully preventing high levels of burnout factors and dissatisfaction rates throughout my career as a teacher. I did not want to be a statistical burnout who had a dream of making a difference in students' lives only to get bogged down with pressures, quickly lose sight, and question my career choice. By being proactive in researching this topic in hopes of combating personal burnout, I hoped to understand how to enhance my own intrinsic satisfaction and to be successful in achieving that which I had dreamed of one day becoming. An English teacher offered me good advice about combating self-burnout as a new teacher:

Understand that teaching is a completely unique beast. There are different areas of frustration that teachers will face at different times within their career. There are a lot of teachers that get into a trap of becoming cynical and sarcastic, which is not healthy. It can definitely be a trap to become like those whom we teach. Other teachers get into a trap of becoming too idealistic and setting the bar way too high for themselves. That is also dangerous because that is a sure-fire way of becoming discouraged, dissatisfied, and burned out as a teacher if you feel like you are never good enough. Also, understand that there are normal high and low phases within a school year. They tend to be more pronounced with new teachers. Yet, there will be a chance that one day a former student will return years down the road and will comment to you about a particular lesson that you taught, and he

[or] she will tell you that it was extra meaningful to him [or] her – and most likely it had occurred during one of your *low phases* when you had thought that you had not reached anyone. (personal communication, April 30, 2007)

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Appendix A Survey Cover Letter

March 30, 2007

Hello Washington H.S. Teachers,

My name is Rachelle Galvin and I am the lone student teacher who has been at WHS for the entire 2006-2007 school year. I have been working with Mike Thomas and Ed Jenkins and have really enjoyed my placement.

I am currently wrapping up my Masters of Education degree from Washington State University – Vancouver and am required to complete an Action Research Study. Looking ahead as a “newbie” teacher, I wanted to research job satisfaction of teachers in hopes that I could gain insight on how teachers remain satisfied with their jobs in spite of stressors.

My research will have both quantitative and qualitative elements in it. I am distributing a job satisfaction survey to use for anonymous, statistical information (quantitative). I am also looking for a few teachers who would be willing to have a one-to-one interview with me to discuss the topic in greater detail (qualitative). If you would be willing to be one of the interviewees, please write your name on the survey so that I can contact you to set up an appointment. For legality reasons, I am also required to distribute a consent form along with this packet to inform you that the research will be completely confidential, that I will use pseudonyms at all times, and that both the survey and the potential interview are completely voluntary.

So, if you would be willing to take a few minutes to complete the survey and sign the consent form, I would greatly appreciate it. When you have completed it, I would appreciate it if you could seal the survey (fold & staple it) in order to keep it confidential, and then place it in my box so that I could collect it in a confidential manner. Again, thank you in advance for your assistance with my research study.

Sincerely,

Rachelle Galvin

Attached: Survey
Consent Form

Appendix B
Consent Form

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
CONSENT FORM
JOB SATISFACTION FOR TEACHERS RESEARCH STUDY

PURPOSE AND BENEFITS

PROCEDURES

Participation in both the survey and interview is completely voluntary. Participants have the ability to opt out of any of the processes and/or questions within the survey and/or interview.

RISKS, STRESSES, OR DISCOMFORT

Confidentiality of both the identification of the participants as well as their answers will be kept at all times. Pseudonyms, rather than real names, for all subjects will be used in recording data and in reporting. A master list coding pseudonyms and real names will be stored separately from the data. The only two people who will have access to the data will be myself and my faculty sponsor, Dr. Linda Mabry. All data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and will be destroyed after the research report is submitted and accepted.

There will also be no deception used on the part of the researcher. As stated earlier, participation in both the survey and interview is completely voluntary. If a participant experiences any stress or discomfort regarding the processes and/or questions within the survey and/or interview, the participant has the ability to opt out at any time.

Printed name of researcher	Signature of researcher	Date
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SUBJECT'S STATEMENT

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have general questions about the research, I can ask the researcher listed above. If I have questions regarding my rights as a participant, I can call the WSU Institutional Review Board at 509-335-9661. This project has been reviewed and approved for human participation by the WSU IRB. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Printed name of subject	Signature of subject	Date
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Appendix C

Job Satisfaction Survey

1. How many years have you been teaching? _____
2. How many years have you been teaching at WHS? _____
3. What subject do you teach at WHS? _____
4. How satisfied are you with your career as a teacher?
- | | | | | |
|--------------|--------------------------|---------|-----------------------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| dissatisfied | somewhat
dissatisfied | neutral | somewhat
satisfied | very satisfied |

5. Which of these apply (or have ever applied) to your feelings of burnout? (check all that apply)
- _____ Lack of community support _____ Lack of social respect toward teachers
- _____ Lack of administrative support _____ Feelings of isolation
- _____ Continuing Ed./Licensing Requirements _____ Salary Level
- _____ Criticism from parents _____ Issues with student(s)
- _____ Apathy from student(s) toward learning/grades
- _____ Other: _____

6. What, if anything, helps you to stay motivated to continue to stay in the teaching profession? (i.e. strategies, techniques, job benefits)

-----FOR ANYONYMITY, THIS PORTION WILL BE REMOVED BY RESEARCHER-----

☐

If you would be willing to have a one-to-one confidential interview at a later date to discuss the issues of teacher job satisfaction in greater detail – then please include your name so that I can contact you to set up an appointment.

Name (ONLY fill this out if you want to be interviewed): _____

Appendix D One-on-One Interview Protocol

1. Why did you want to become a teacher?
2. Have you experienced an increase or decrease in job satisfaction over the years as a teacher?
3. If you could do it over again, would you still have chosen to become a teacher? Are there any other careers that you would have pursued instead?
4. What support do you feel you receive from administrators, the school district, the community, your friends, and your family? Is this support sufficient, or do you feel that you need more?
5. What advice would you give to new teachers about the rewards or frustrations they could anticipate within the field of teaching?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to comment on that has not been addressed in the interview?

Appendix E Thank-You Reply Letter

April 13, 2007

Thank you for taking the time to assist me with my research project. I truly appreciate it.

With the ironic buzz of “job satisfaction” in the air, I just wanted to reiterate that the information you provided will remain completely confidential. Before I even began to review any of the provided information, I separated the surveys from the consent forms, and (if you signed your name on the bottom of the survey) I removed that portion from the rest of the survey. I did this so that the answers would remain entirely anonymous – even to me.

If you did mark that you would be willing to allow me to conduct an interview with you, I wanted to let you know that I will be sending you an e-mail in the next few days. This is to see if we could set up a time to meet further at your convenience.

Attached is a copy of the consent form that I received from you. I am legally obligated to provide a copy of it to you as a means of letting you know that you were/are a voluntary subject within this research project.

Again, thank you for your eager willingness to assist me with my research. It was extremely helpful.

Sincerely,

Rachelle Galvin

Attached: COPY of Consent Form (for your personal records)