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Teachers' Descriptions Of The Impact Of False Accusations By Students And Parents

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TEACHERS' DESCRIPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF FALSE ACCUSATIONS BY
STUDENTS AND PARENTS

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctorate in Education

Hamline University

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Abstract

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This mixed method study utilized grounded theory analysis through the use of survey and interview to research how teachers describe the impact of false accusations by students and parents. The study focused on survey results as well as interviews of a selection of teachers and administrators from various levels, rural, suburban, urban areas and disciplines of education.

The concepts that emerged from the data illustrated the impact of false accusations on teachers with regard to their emotional and physical health, teaching practice, relationship with administrator(s), and relationships with students and parents. The data also indicate the need for increased training and support for teachers and administrators in dealing with difficult situations and conflict resolution.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly...who at the best knows? In the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly... President Theodore Roosevelt

Teachers stand somewhere between being a private citizen and a public employee who unwillingly enter into a political world that seems ever changing. Teachers have the powerful responsibility of influencing student lives and supporting lifelong learning. It is a richly rewarding profession as each day teachers challenge student minds to stretch and grow. Though exhausting on the best of days, teaching and caring about students offer vitality and thrills that continuously replenish energy (Cunningham, 2009). Teachers have the unique opportunity to prepare students for jobs that do not exist yet, to help young people become members of society, and act as role models of good citizenship (DuFour, 2015). Gone are the days of “sage on the stage,” when teaching was dispensing knowledge, providing childcare, and the churning out of students following the factory model (*Editorial Projects in Education*, 2000). Today, teachers and students work collaboratively to create learning and make meaning together. The perception of teaching

as a career has also changed, from a profession thought to be women's work as second mothers (Rury, 2013) to one of the most challenging and respected career choices as Lanier (1997) wrote in an article for Edutopia.com. Due to the importance of teaching as a profession, the increase in public awareness and scrutiny has also changed, "as the nation's interest in schooling has grown, the stakes for success and failure have gone up" (Rury, 2013, p. 223). Scores on standardized testing and rankings by local media, Newsweek, and other journals on the desirability of schools and districts often measure the stakes of success. It is in this environment of fear of failure and high stress, surveillance, and an emphasis on performance that teachers have also seen a rise in the number of accusations sometimes great and atrocious things, other times minor offenses such as losing work or failing to update grades appropriately brought against them by students and parents.

As the number of accusations rise, so do the claims of false accusation. "More and more [Canadian] teachers are being accused of often frivolous [things]" (Gollom, 2012, unpagged) University of Ottawa education professor Joel Westheimer said in an interview for CBC news (Gollom, 2012). The number of false allegations being made against teachers is difficult to determine, as there is no central database or available statistics about the issue. However, a study conducted at Nipissing University in Canada, found that nearly thirteen percent of male educators said they had been falsely accused (Gosse, Parr, & Allison 2007). Professor Douglas Gosse, one of the authors of the study, believes it is prevalent. "There's a general belief among many teachers that the pendulum has swung too far," he said, adding that male teachers in particular seem to be targeted (2007,

unpaged). In a March 2015 article for the *Independent*, Richard Gardner cited a United Kingdom Department for Education survey that found one in five teachers surveyed had experienced a false accusation by a student and one in seven by a parent or family friend of a student (Rawlinson, 2017).

With the pendulum swinging in an unfavorable direction and teachers becoming more at risk, Westheimer accused administrators of being spineless for not automatically ordering investigations regardless of how credible the allegation of abuse may be because while investigations can be time consuming and expensive, a lawsuit can be more detrimental to the accused and the accuser (Gollom, 2012). An investigation, however, would bring a swift resolution one-way or the other without the cost of a lawsuit. Westheimer asserted that the possibility of false accusations being made and the limited resources available to help teachers may also be deterring people from entering the profession (Gollom, 2012). In a March 2015 broadcast, NPR radio looked at several states once considered to be “big producers” of teachers and asked where have all the teachers gone (Westervelt, 2015)? Several big states have seen alarming drops in enrollment at teacher training programs. The numbers are grim among some of the nation's largest producers of new teachers: In California, enrollment is down 53 percent over the past five years. It is down sharply in New York and Texas as well. In North Carolina, enrollment is down nearly twenty percent in three years (Westervelt, 2015). Several reasons were given for the declining teacher candidate enrollment including student loans, budget cuts, and the use of teachers as scapegoats for policy makers and

politicians. It seems that the larger problem is one of public relations, according to Bill McDiarmid, the dean of the University of North Carolina School of Education:

It is the way in which people talk about teachers because they are giving blood, sweat and tears for their students every day in this country. There is a sense now that, 'If I went into this job and it doesn't pay a lot and it's a lot of hard work, it may be that I'd lose it.' And students are hearing this. And it deters them from entering the profession (Westervelt, 2015, unpagged).

Research Questions

As the number of accusations being made against teachers continues to increase more teachers will begin to leave the profession (Strauss, 2015). Thus, the teacher shortage will continue to worsen as teachers become more disillusioned and leave the profession. Compounded by the decreasing number of those seeking a license (Strauss, 2015), there are major concerns within the profession that need resolution. I believe it is important to look into what teachers are doing in order to help themselves cope and continue teaching. It is also imperative to examine what school districts should do to support teachers who find themselves facing false accusations. Thus, I have come to these questions:

1. How do teachers describe the emotions, emotional state, health impact resulting from false accusations by students and parents?
2. What are the strategies that teachers develop to overcome, cope with the impact of false accusations by students and parents?

3. What can districts do to help teachers who are faced with false accusations?

Historical Significance of the Problem

Gone are the days of “sage on the stage,” when the expectation for teaching was dispensing knowledge, providing childcare, and the factory model. Today, effective teachers work collaboratively with students to create learning and make meaning together. Due to the importance of teaching as a profession, the increase in public awareness and scrutiny has also changed “as the nation’s interest in schooling has grown, the stakes for success and failure have gone up” (Rury, 2013, p. 223). An interest that has also included the moral standards of the teachers themselves; for while there are professionals in every occupation, some opine that teachers are held to a higher moral standard. In an op-ed piece in the LA Times, Jonathan Turley, a law professor at George Washington University, writes that punishing teachers for behavior in their private lives is unfair as teachers are private citizens just like everyone else and thus should not be “fired or suspended for perfectly lawful activities during off-work hours when those activities are deemed inappropriate by parents or school officials” (Turley, 2012). Turley concludes that society demands

a great deal of public school teachers. They put in long hours in overcrowded classrooms, and yet they receive lower salaries than people in other professions requiring similar education levels.

For this sacrifice, we now demand that they live their lives according to a morality standard set to satisfy the lowest common denominator of parental sensibilities. They live under the transparent conditions of celebrities without any

of the benefits, with parental paparazzi eager to catch them in an unguarded moment. They deserve better (Turley, 2012,unpaged).

Scores on standardized testing and rankings by Newsweek and other journals on the desirability of schools and districts often measure the stakes of success. With the increased attention on teachers we have seen an increase in accusations being made regarding teacher practice in administering standardized assessments, the mistreatment of children, and use of technology.

Today, high-stakes tests are used for a variety of purposes leading to a typical student taking 112 mandated standardized tests between pre-kindergarten classes and 12th grade, a new Council of the Great City Schools study found (Layton, 2015). During the 2011-2012 school year, the average elementary teacher had 26 students per class. The average secondary teacher had 25 students per class during the 2009-2010 school year (Rampell, 2017). The numbers, however, are skewed due to the Special Education population, where teachers typically have much smaller classes (Rampell, 2017). High numbers of students, combined with a disparity of resources between rural, suburban, and urban schools have made the job of teaching more challenging. Yet, teachers stand before their students each day doing the best they can with whatever resources they have (DuFour, 2015), and yet are often falsely accused of committing some degree of malpractice. Teachers can be accused of a variety of things, from misplacing student work to egregious offences such as falsifying test results or assaulting students.

In January 2016 five Detroit area teachers were escorted from their elementary school after being accused of cheating on the M-STEP test, Michigan's state standardized

test. While an investigation is still pending, these teachers have been removed from their classrooms for the foreseeable future after their students received unusually high scores on the annual exam (Asher, 2016). Currently, four of the five teachers have launched a lawsuit against the district alleging violation of First Amendment Rights (Higgins, 2016).

Falsifying test data, while an egregious accusation in its own right, is not the most common accusation made against teachers. The most common type of accusation involves mistreatment of students. In October 2015, Deborah Tersigni, a special education teacher in California, was cleared of charges of child abuse after a judge ruled that she had been falsely accused (Travis, 2015). According to the Travis (2015) it took more than two years for Tersigni to be cleared of the charges and it remained unclear whether or not the school board would rehire her. In another incident it took nearly a year for Mission Viejo California teacher, Kristen Michelle Roush, to be cleared of accusations of “lewd and lascivious acts with a minor” (Nazarian, 2015). The teacher was arrested after a parent called the police reporting inappropriate contact. The teacher was sentenced to three years probation for one misdemeanor charge for, “an innocent hug” (Nazarian, 2015, unpagged) and agreed to resign her position at the school.

Another common type of accusation revolves around the use of technology. An eighth-grade student in Florida was charged with a felony for unauthorized access of a teacher’s computer, the student changed the background, on the teacher’s computer, to a photo of two men kissing (Solomon & Writer, 2015). In this instance, the student received a suspension for inappropriate access to school technology; however, the teacher was reprimanded for not having a more challenging password (Solomon & Writer, 2015).

In a 2015 article from the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*, a high school student tweeted that he made out with one of his high school physical education teachers (Walsh, 2015). The allegation by the student was proven false and he was suspended for his actions, but later sued the school district and the city for a total of \$425, 000 claiming he should have been suspended, and he won (2015). There was no mention of what happened to the teacher involved.

Fortunately, not all cases end with the reprimand, elimination of the teacher from the story, or resignation of the teacher. In Portland, Oregon, Dan Domenigoni was the target of malicious complaints by students (Argetsinger, 2000). According to the *LA Times*, after five years he successfully won a \$70,000 lawsuit against the students and parents for defamation and received letters of apology. He believes teachers should sue to “send a message” (Argetsinger, 2000, unpagged). Regardless of receiving a verdict of innocence, rebuilding a reputation after fighting false allegations is a never ending process for San Bernardino teacher, Roger Talley. Speaking with NBC Los Angeles, Talley stated that he was proven “factually innocent” (Healy, 2013) of inappropriate contact with students. However, the damage had been done. The California Board of Teaching revoked his credentials and the teacher is “appalled,” by what he finds when Googling his name. Many websites, including Mugshot.com, do not update their information as a case proceeds (Healy, 2013).

Rationale for the Study

My journey through false accusations by students and parents began in February 2015. The 2014-2015 school year was my fifth year at a suburban middle school. I was

teaching sixth and eighth grade Spanish classes to approximately 300 students whom I loved seeing everyday and enjoyed working closely with three other Spanish teachers. During work time on various activities and projects, my students enjoyed listening to and watching Youtube videos from Kevin, Karla, y La Banda. This group takes popular English songs and sings them in Spanish. One day there was a new video and the students asked to watch it; I turned it on and no more than one minute later turned it off. What appeared to be frothy white clouds became the silhouette of two people kissing in an open-air cabana. I did not dwell on this incident and it seemed everyone just moved on.

I did not give the video a second thought until a week later my principal told me that a parent had sent an email saying I was watching pornography on my computer, showing it to students, and I was promoting online dating sites. The school's immediate response was to ignore these accusations in the hope that they would disappear; however, it became clear that strategy was not working. I was left to cope with my emotions. I felt utterly alone as my colleagues tried their best to comfort me, but could not understand fully what it felt like to teach under these circumstances. As the days went on, my feelings changed from shame and guilt over having made a mistake in not previewing the video first to fear about what students may do next. More students made false reports to the office, inquired about my employment status, and attempted to put evidence on my computer. The situation culminated when a student called to report the story to the news. During this month of allegations, I relied on the union for support during various meetings. Support also came from other teachers who sought me out after hearing what

was happening. They shared their stories and offered advice and encouragement. The students involved did not receive a consequence and I never received an apology.

Focus of the Research

Based on the rise of false accusations being brought against teachers by students and parents, and my personal experience with the trauma it can bring, I believe researching these questions could help equip teachers to react if a situation arises in their practice and will also help practitioners understand that they are not alone. Furthermore, the lack of research on this topic in the United States indicates the need for investigation of the current working conditions in schools, the level of surveillance of teachers, and the performativity/constructed identity of teachers within the United States.

Definition of Terms

Throughout the course of my study, I used terms that may be interpreted differently depending on the experiences of the reader.

Working conditions: Defined by the International Labour Organization “as working time (hours of work, rest periods, and work schedules) to remuneration, as well as the physical conditions and mental demands that exist in the workplace” (“Working conditions,” 2017, unpagged). Working conditions for teachers refer to the factors that repeatedly have been identified by teachers as class size and workload; time for professional, non-teaching work; resource adequacy; stimulating professional interaction; opportunities to learn and improve; support for professional risk-taking; and ability to influence schools decisions; and congruence between individual and organizational goals (Bascia & Rottman, 2011).

Surveillance: David Lyon, the Director of the Surveillance Studies Centre, defines surveillance as “the systematic and focused attention to personal details for the purposes of influence, management, or control” (2015, p. 1) This term was used to describe the environment in which teachers are working and being watched for evaluative purposes and communicative purposes.

Performativity: An interdisciplinary term often used to describe the capacity of speech, as a production of the body of speech (Felman, 2003), as well as other nonverbal forms of expressive action, to perform a type of constructed identity. It is the construction of identity and the reality that surrounds and conditions it through (mostly verbalized) social interaction. The defining act is typically performed by entire groups: it is not enough to perform oneself as something. The audience contributes more than mere ratification of an individual's performance; it conditions and channels that performance, and so makes its results not only meaningful but real (Robinson, 2006). For the purposes of this study, performativity will be used in the context of the constructed identity of teachers.

Summary

Returning to President Roosevelt’s quote, the credit belongs to the teacher. Now is the time to examine the conditions of teaching and how those conditions may lead to an increase in the number of false allegations being brought against educators. What strategies teachers use to help themselves overcome these obstacles and what districts can

do to support them. Following the ideas of Boyer's (1992) scholarship of teaching; I hope to add to the conversation of helping teachers become the best versions of themselves.

Helping teachers learn a process for reflection, and critical thinking. It is the teachers who are striving to educate learners and prepare them to be productive citizens in our ever-changing global community.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

The content of this chapter will provide the foundation necessary to determine how working conditions, surveillance, performativity, and emotions have contributed to the rise of allegations being brought against teachers by students and parents from actions that are minor to those more egregious. Further, the chapter explores how these conditions impact the emotional state of teachers today. These sections will also examine the possible changes that could be made to create a more emotionally healthy working environment for teachers.

This chapter provides a foundation for the focus of the research and assists in answering these questions:

1. How do teachers describe the emotions, emotional state, health impact resulting from false accusations by students and parents?
2. What are the strategies that teachers develop to overcome, cope with the impact of false accusations by students and parents?
3. What can districts do to help teachers who are faced with false accusations?

Background

The focus is to begin a discussion supporting teachers who have been the recipient of false accusations by parents and students. This project has its foundations in the historical significance outlined in Chapter 1. It is also grounded in four themes from

literature: working conditions, surveillance, performativity, and emotions concerning teaching in our modern society.

In recent years there has been increased media attention on teachers. Each year, the school report cards are published with the results of numerous standardized tests. For those schools ranked “achieving” as measured by growth targets, graduation rates, or achievement ranking in magazines like *Newsweek*, there is much rejoicing and celebration of the great work teachers do. If a school is not so fortunate, it is often assumed that teachers are not doing enough. Furthermore, each year a story appears of a teacher being accused of some malevolence or inappropriate behavior. Typically, these accusations arise from students or parents reporting the behavior to school administrators, leading to an investigation of the situation, and hopefully a resolution. However, there is a missing piece in these stories, that of the teacher. In the United States there is a shortage of research around the rise of false accusations being brought against teachers by students and parents. While outside the US in Great Britain and Canada there is a growing dialogue about what these situations do to teachers and what can be done to help teachers recover and what can be done to prevent more occurrences from happening. The number of false allegations being made against teachers is difficult to determine, as there is no central database or available statistics about the issue. However, a study conducted at Nipissing University found that nearly 13 percent of male educators said they had been falsely accused (Gosse, Parr, & Allison 2010). In a March 2015 article for the *Independent*, Richard Gardner cited a United Kingdom Department for Education survey

(Rawlinson, 2017) that found one in five teachers surveyed had experienced a false accusation by a student and one in seven by a parent or family friend of a student.

The rising numbers of accusations can be attributed to many factors. However, four seem to be most prevalent in the research: the working conditions of today's educators, the level of surveillance of educators, the performativity of the teaching profession, and the current emotions of teachers. For the purpose of the literature review, these themes are arranged from the most basic, working conditions, to the most ambiguous, emotions of teachers.

Working Conditions

This section discusses the working conditions of teachers and the impact these conditions have on the increase of accusations being made against teachers as well as how these conditions impact the surveillance, performativity, and emotions of teachers today.

Working conditions are defined by the International Labor Organization "as working time (hours of work, rest periods, and work schedules) to remuneration, as well as the physical conditions and mental demands that exist in the workplace" (Working conditions, 2017, unpagged). Working conditions for teachers refer to the factors that repeatedly have been identified by teachers as:

critical to the quality of their work: class size and workload; time available for professional, non-teaching work; resource adequacy; collegiality and professional interaction; opportunities to learn and improve; support for professional risk-taking and experimentation; ability to influence schools decisions; and

congruence between individual and organizational goals (Bascia & Rottman, 2011, p.789).

Waller's *The Sociology of Teaching* posed the question, "What does teaching do to teachers?" (1932, p. 375). From there, many researchers have studied teachers' roles in a variety of lenses. Several of these analyses paint a picture of teachers' roles and work as steady through time and resistant to the changing times (Cohen, 1988; Cuban, 1993). The picture of teachers' work depicted by these studies is of simple, mundane tasks such as lectures, assigning recitations, and giving worksheets, with few intellectual demands and a large amount of work that is dull (Cohen & Spillane, 1992). In some occasions the teachers have described teaching as routine without a lot of variety or uncertainty (Rowan, 1998). Elmore (1966) wrote that if change in education does occur, it only impacts a small number of teachers.

Other studies, however, indicate that the work of teachers changes all the time and that with strong mandates, teachers are usually powerless to resist these changes. For example, Richardson and Placier (2001) describe how teacher change occurs naturally through collaboration with colleagues, evaluations, professional development, revising curriculum, and by simply getting new students each year. Similar studies in external change, have found evidence of deskilling (Apple, 1982), intensification (Hargreaves, 1992), marginalization (Bailey, 2000), and the expansion of teachers' work (Bartlett, 2004). Leithwood (2006) offers eight internal emotions that teachers may experience with regards to their working conditions: "sense of individual and professional efficacy, collective professional efficacy, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, level of

stress and burnout, morale, engagement in school or profession, and pedagogical content knowledge” (p. 14). The regulation of teachers’ work also brings undesired changes such as job dissatisfaction, reduced commitment, burnout, loss of belief in oneself, and an early exit from the profession (Calderhead, 2001).

Despite the changes taking place in education, teachers typically have some autonomy in the lesson planning, content, and pedagogy but are caught in the tension of administrative directives (Metz, 2003), who stated, “Schools live with a perpetual tension between a formally hierarchical structure, in which teachers are line subordinates, and a vaguely defined tradition of attenuated professionalism; they work out varying compromises between these two opposing principles” (p. 48). This tension is created by the number of tasks that teacher are expected to do each day, and with an increased level of sophistication due to the rigorous expectations of the policies of districts, state, and federal governments (Valli & Buese, 2007).

Considering the increased number of tasks teachers are asked to perform and the high level of precision with which they must work, Bailey (2000) dubbed teaching a nearly impossible job: “Teachers must devote increased attention to more classroom details as well as to more time spent outside the classroom learning, planning and...justifying their actions to others” (p. 117). This illustration provides two ways teacher roles have changed: the increased responsibilities outside of the classroom and the increased responsibilities within it. Bartlett (2004) recommends these roles be assimilated into the structure of the school day. If these roles are excluded from the day, teachers tend to become exhausted and overwhelmed with an already full plate.

As teachers are expected to perform this nearly impossible task; their role becomes more intense. This intensification is a process in which “teachers are expected to respond to greater pressures and to comply with multiple innovations under conditions that are at best stable and at worst deteriorating” (Hargreaves, 1992, p. 88). As Apple and Jungck (1992, p. 25) argue, intensification erodes working conditions, forcing teachers to work under “interventionist styles of management” where they “rely on ‘experts’ to tell them what to do and...begin to mistrust the expertise they have developed over the years.” Thus, the act of teaching has become overridden with the external ideas, plans, and requirements. These conditions have led teachers to distrust their own expertise and their confidence has begun to falter (Valli & Buese, 2007).

To teachers it often feels that US educational decision makers tend to dismiss teachers’ concerns about their working conditions, not understanding them as relevant to the quality of teaching and learning processes, but instead viewing teaching conditions in competition with resources for students learning (McDonnell & Pascal, 1988). However, it seems fair to say that teaching conditions are learning conditions (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011). Meaning, providing teachers with optimal working conditions provides students with optimal learning conditions. Working conditions directly impact the degree to which teachers are actively committed to and engaged with teaching, and these conditions thereby affect the likelihood that teachers will work hard to create exciting learning environments in their classrooms (Louis & Smith, 1991). Yet, in many districts, expressions of concern by teachers about working conditions are still viewed as unprofessional (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011).

Teaching conditions are learning conditions (Bascia & Rottman, 2011) and if students are not learning as expected, the first conclusion is that teachers are resistant, lazy, or incompetent (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011). On October 23, 2014, *Time* magazine ran a cover story about the decaying teaching profession, causing many teachers to become defensive and upset. In response Gawker.com ran a series of online articles asking teachers to write in responses to prompts about what they do each day. One teacher of young children wrote in about extending her workday in order to be prepared for her elementary school students:

For teachers with young kids, it is difficult. During the school year, I drop them off at daycare and latchkey at 7 so I can be at school before my students. I put them to bed at 8, and then resume schoolwork most nights. On weekends I find myself saying, "Let mama finish her school work, then we'll play." Yes, I signed up for this, and I love my job, my school, and my students. But the amount of work I do at home to be competent in the classroom limits the time I can give at home. So, for the eight summer weeks that I do nothing related to teaching, I feel zero guilt, because I am spending them with my own children, who must share me during the other 44. (Evans, 2014, unpagged).

This teacher is not alone in her efforts to balance work and family life; several such responses were posted with a similar sentiment.

When compared to teachers from other high achieving countries to which the United States is often compared, such as Finland and Singapore, teachers here work more hours and have more students. However, these teachers are paid less and have fewer paid

hours of professional development and collaborative work time (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Yet, their workloads are such that in another Gawker.com response a teacher had this to say, “and the final thing I will leave you with: I have actually taken sick days in order to get work done because I don't get enough time in my week for all the extra that is asked of us” (Evans, 2014, unpagged).

The idea of teachers' unions advocating for better working conditions was addressed in the literature because teachers' unions are nearly the only organizations that have paid significant attention to the conditions of teachers' work (Bascia, 2004). It was also acknowledged that many of the decisions made about teacher working conditions are made without teacher or union input. Thus, teachers' unions are rarely involved in the policy-making processes and are left to react after decisions are made (Bascia, 2009). That being said, an argument has been made that this issue could be a matter of simple semantics. In their article about teacher stress and accountability in the United Kingdom, Hepburn and Brown (2001) argue that teaching is a stressful profession, often made more so by the working conditions in which teachers find themselves. The use of language such as “stress” and the feelings that being stressed can evoke in teachers is not useful in making systematic changes to the conditions. In fact, teachers and unions should de-emphasize the physical symptoms of work related stress because those are viewed as personal problems. Rather, teachers and unions should identify specific problems within the organization that are clear and could be fixed provided resources were made available (Hepburn & Brown, 2001).

Surveillance

This portion of the literature review is an overview of the increased level of surveillance of teachers today due to the increase in regulations, testing, and evaluations required by governments to track teacher development and success or failure. This surveillance is a result of the current working conditions of teachers and a contributing factor to the performativity of teachers and well as the emotions surrounding teachers today.

The working conditions of teachers and the increased accountability measures being placed on them has lead to an increased amount of surveillance. Surveillance has been defined by David Lyon, the Director of the Surveillance Studies Centre and author of *Surveillance after Snowden* (2015), as focused, systematic and attention to personal details for the purposes of influence, management, or control. This term will be used to describe the environment in which teachers are working and being watched for evaluative purposes and communicative purposes.

One of the ways schools hold teachers accountable, and thus evaluate teachers, is through the observation process. While relationships with administrators or other observers can be healthy, lead to growth, and professional dialogue, teachers are beginning to feel the strain of being observed multiple times and without their previous knowledge. Another Gawker.com respondent had this to say:

[my district] has recently initiated an evaluation system that requires teachers collect data and prove the value of how and what they are teaching by uploading 'artifacts'. Teachers are 'rated' based on the number of 'domains' they hit such as 'Arrangement of the physical/virtual learning environment and the logistics of

learning.’ So called informal drop-ins occur without rhyme or reason. My last ‘evaluator’ snuck into the first ten minutes of an eighty-minute class when I was hurrying to make copies of vocabulary homework. This particular class of sophomores are sweet but antsy and it always takes me at least ten minutes of—’Let’s everyone get in their chairs.’ My ‘evaluator’ entered into [the program] ‘Students did nothing for the first ten minutes of class.’ Such is life. The relationship between teachers and Administrators [has] become, over the years, decidedly adversarial. They don’t trust the people they have hired—as they have told us many times—are lucky to have a job” (Evans, 2014, unpagged).

In England, Locke et al. (2005) concluded that surveillance techniques build a dichotomy of emotions in teachers because while they feel the accountability measures are excessive, they also believe these same measures increase their professionalism. However, Mahony et al. (2004) highlight the importance of context when assessing the impact of new reforms. Their study of threshold assessments concluded that a high surveillance and low trust culture was established between teachers, administrators and the government. These procedures also fail in their specificity regarding how the ability of the teacher should be measured. Hebson, Earnshaw, and Marchington (2007) assert that the ability or inability of a teacher in the classroom is not clear cut because teaching is such a multidimensional set of activities.

One of the goals of every school is to create positive relationships with parents. But when does that relationship change from a partnership to surveillance? Gill Crozier (1998) studied two United Kingdom schools to closely examine the line between

partnership and surveillance between parents and teachers. The United Kingdom Department of Education (1992) published a White Paper, which stated “the corollary of increased autonomy for schools is greater accountability by them to parents, employers and the wider community,” (p. 4). Providing more information to parents about their student’s progress, the ongoing of the school, and publishing results of standardized exams is seen as providing parents with knowledge in order to hold schools accountable for their performance and ensure high standards of teaching.

It seems, then, that partnership in education is more than building parent support for their child’s school. Crozier (1998) argues that partnership is part of an accountability process in building surveillance of teachers in schools. However, Crozier (1998) takes the argument one step further to include the idea that teachers also use surveillance techniques on parents and that conflict arises when the two parties are at odds in their observations of each other, stating, “in order to achieve a satisfactory partnership, they (the teachers) need to persuade parents, and through parents the pupils, to adopt their value system of what it means to be a ‘good’ parent and a ‘good’ pupil” (p. 126). This is an integral part of ensuring success for both the school and the student, as schools need parents to help monitor the behavior of the child, thus enabling him/her to produce test scores that will reflect well on the school.

This monitoring is predominantly one-sided notes. Crozier (1998) states that teachers are expected to communicate with parents much more than parents are expected to communicate with teachers, thereby creating an imbalance. Teachers understand that parents have greater choice in selecting a school for their child and they are occasionally

forced to “compromise their professional decisions in favor of market imperatives” (Crozier, 1998, p. 129), because parents could easily be lured to a different school marketed as better than their current choice. Upon speaking to teachers in both schools studied, teachers noted, “where parents were happy then there was no problem” (Crozier, 1998, p. 132). As a method for keeping parents happy and informed, both schools developed rigorous communication systems for keeping parents informed for all items and events school related with no expectation of hearing from parents in return. These systems of communication were designed to maintain, “harmony...amongst most of their parents was manifested by an ethos of accessibility to teachers” (Crozier, 1998, p.134). Surveillance by parents and teachers is not a new concept; however, it has been intensified with the marketization of education and has become very one sided (Crozier, 1998).

It has fallen to local unions to protect teachers from over surveillance by parents, who, when they find things not going their way or become upset, may falsely accuse the teacher. Local teachers’ unions and other educational authorities are, according to the Canadian Education Association, "struggling to identify such incidents," and appear "ill-equipped to develop realistic procedures and plans that safeguard due process and the reputations of those falsely accused" (Bradley, 2011, unpagged). Some local teachers’ unions have begun assembling lists of ways teachers can protect themselves from false allegations. The Northwest Professional Educators have a page dedicated to such items on their website: <https://www.nwpe.org/>. The list includes such things as not leaving classrooms unattended, talking to students only in public areas such as hallways, not

providing students with personal information, and for teachers of young children, not changing diapers or underwear unless another adult is also watching (Munk, n.d).

Performativity

This portion of the literature review is an overview of the increased level of performativity of teachers today due to their working conditions and increased level of surveillance. This culture of performativity leads to the current emotional landscape of teachers and the teaching profession.

Performativity is an interdisciplinary term often used to describe the capacity of speech, as a production of the body of speech (Felman, 2003), as well as other nonverbal forms of expressive action, to create a type of constructed identity. It is the construction of identity and the reality that surrounds and conditions it through (mostly verbalized) social interaction. Entire groups typically perform the defining act: it is not enough to perform oneself as something. The audience contributes more than mere ratification of an individual's performance; it conditions and channels that performance, and so makes its results not only meaningful but real (Robinson, 2006). For the purposes of this study, performativity will be used in the context of the constructed identity of teachers.

Kitayama and Markus (1994) formulate that one reason for the assumption of a singular teacher identity is the belief that emotional experiences that affirm the cultural frame are those that will be highlighted and emphasized by the group. Thus making certain behaviors and emotional responses more common. While others see performativity as the ongoing discursive acts that are practiced within social, cultural, and

political contexts, through the dramatic and continuous construction of meaning (Butler, 1995).

Performativity is defined by Zembylas (2003) as the ways in which teachers understand, experience, perform, and talk about emotions highly related to their sense of belonging. This action could be an act of speech, a way of completing tasks, the following of school rituals, or participation in an activity with others. Therefore, another reason that there seems to be one constructed identity for teachers is the way in which they experience and express emotions. Performative emotions become practiced ways of knowing out of a fear of not fitting in. One reason for the development of performative emotions, and thus a constructed identity for all teachers, comes from when our feelings are trivialized, ignored, systematically criticized, or extremely constrained by lack of our expressive resources. This situation can lead to a very serious kind of dismissal--the dismissal of the significance of a person's life, in a way that reaches down deeply into the personal significance of one's own life is to him or herself (Campbell, 1997).

Emotions

This portion of the literature review is an overview of the emotional landscape of teachers today due to their working conditions, increased surveillance, and culture of performativity.

In 1983, Arlie Hochschild identified teaching as an occupation in the sector of emotional labor. Heblson et al. (2007) argue that the emotional labor of teaching has been devalued in the shift toward technical aspects of teaching that can be measured. In an

early study of this concept, Hargreaves (1998) demonstrates that educational reforms and measures of technical competence rarely look at the emotional aspects of teaching and learning standards. Hargreaves furthers this demonstration by saying “teaching is not simply about knowing your subject...Good teachers are not just well-oiled machines.

They are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy” (p. 835).

Emotions motivate and accompany the performances of the teacher; on the other hand, emotions are also changed, established, or reformulated based on these performances.

Teachers are often represented and acted upon as if they were selves of a particular type: suffused with a recognized, coherent, and enduring subjectivity, grounded in a unified psychological identity. This unified identity is often assumed to the emotional culture of the school in which teachers work as it has been established through repeated acts of emotional discourses (Zembylas, 2003).

Teachers’ emotions are important; however, some claim it has a divergent relationship with experience. These researchers insist that if teachers believe in their own efficacy, that is not the same as actual capacity. Efficacy impacts the amount of effort exerted by the teacher, their level of resilience, and how well they cope with stress (Bandura, 1997; Ross, 1992; Smylie, 1990). Based on these emotional responses to working conditions, Zembylas (2003) asserts that the construction of the teacher self begins and is greatly influenced through social interactions, performances, and daily negotiations within a school culture that privileges emotional self-discipline and autonomy. Teachers are sometimes unable to express their vulnerability in terms of

anger, happiness, frustration, or other emotions out of fear that their emotions may be viewed as professionally inappropriate (Hargreaves, 1994). When teachers identify their emotions, those identifications are based on their experiences, therefore what one-person experiences as trauma or as a happy occasion may not be interpreted identically by another.

It is now the teachers, rather than the students, who are seen as the carriers of stress in the classroom (Hepburn & Brown, 2001). Through extensive surveys, researchers assert that teachers report a whole range of symptoms associated with stress (Cole & Walker, 1989; Kyriacou, 1987; Travers & Cooper, 1996): fatigue, illness, and inability to concentrate (Borg, 1990; Proctor & Alexander, 1992; Sheffield et al., 1994). These findings seem to solidify that teaching as a profession has become more stressful and that teachers respond to this stress by adopting various coping strategies. Johnson et al. (2009) reported in a cluster analysis that 40% of K-12 grade teachers were disheartened due to stress. Kyriacou (2001) defines teacher stress as the “negative emotions experienced by the teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher” (p. 28). In 2009 the Mayo Clinic revealed results from a survey that concluded that while teachers reported being stressed, the least used coping strategies for all teachers were drinking alcohol, using prescription drugs, taking a day off, exercising, and procrastinating. Unrelenting levels of stress have not caused teachers to take days off because of the consequences for students.

There are a range of possible sources of the stress impacting teachers, (Travers & Cooper, 1996) including the pressures of testing, interactions with students and parents, and administrative issues. Schools and teachers are also dealing with severe cutbacks in resources, overloaded class sizes, pay cuts or freezes, and furloughs (Richards, 2012). These triggers for stress can be seen as part of the degree of mismatch between what demands are being made on the teacher and the teachers' ability to cope with those demands (Kyriacou, 2001). These sources of stress have been embraced in many teachers' unions across the United Kingdom who have adopted the findings as "hard evidence" (Hepburn & Brown, 2001, p. 692) regarding the effects of teacher stress. Recently, "the major contributing factors to problems of stress (although not the only ones) are current levels of workload and bureaucracy in the education system" (Hepburn & Brown, 2001, p. 693). Teacher stress in the UK has been framed as a political problem stemming from an increase in government interventions in schools (Hepburn & Brown, 2001).

By adopting this tactic, however, teachers are being viewed as incapable of handling their roles and responsibilities (Hepburn & Brown, 2001). Therefore, Hepburn and Brown (2001) argue, through their extensive interview process, that teachers and teachers' unions should de-emphasize the physical symptoms of stress because those can be viewed as a personal issue and instead focus on problems that have concrete solutions, such as reduced class size, increased collaborative time, and the like. One interview participant commented to Richards (2012):

I have never been more stressed and may leave the profession. I LOVE

teaching, but am no longer free to teach the way I know works...My students and those around me see a giant smile and a can-do attitude.

Privately, I am struggling (p. 300).

The private struggle of this teacher is part of the inner world mentioned by Marzano and Marzano (2015), and can be interpreted as the emotional world of teaching. These emotions are not only deeply personal and individual, but emotions are also socially organized and managed by social conventions (Rose, 1990). "I went to a therapist," one teacher told Richards (2012) to "help me cope with my feelings of inadequacy and inability to 'get it all done'" (p. 302). If teachers are to care for themselves effectively, they must begin by identifying how they develop an emotional knowledge about their pedagogies and themselves (Zembylas, 2003).

As the literature has made clear, teaching is a heavily emotional practice with much of the teaching experience grounded in the normalizing of power and the negotiation of wanting to be true to self but not wanting to be marginalized (Zembylas 2003). Thus, the things teachers do in their schools and classrooms are dependent on how they "perceive and respond" to the working conditions (Leithwood, 2006, p. 8). Teachers continuously report that the stress of their jobs makes it difficult to find time for family, friends, and relaxing activities (Richards, 2012): "My body is giving out before my mind. I have no life other than teaching. Every night, every weekend I'm grading planning, communicating with parents. I'm never caught up. I miss having life" (p. 302). Teachers often do not realize how deeply embedded they are in these norms and rules; they find it difficult to escape from them and feel compelled to continue to perform in line with the

emotional culture of the school, or they risk being seen as eccentric, if not outrageous. All behaviors, habits, and morals must be regulated. Emotion management becomes a technique of power that depends on emotions being seen as “normal” and “standard” responses. Emotion management becomes a kind of truth, a performative truth out of fear that questioning accepted beliefs and ways of acting, but instead simply following them in order to avoid marginalization (Zemblyas, 2003).

Sociologist Barry Glassner (1999) defines a culture of fear as living in a culture in which extreme irrational fears are stoked while more serious concerns are downplayed or ignored. This culture has taken over the role of teaching. Teachers are more, not less likely, than many other workers to get fired (Goldstein, 2015), driving up a fear of losing one’s job, income, insurance, or disappointing others. The Teacher Development Trust states, “No teacher has ever completed a school day with every item on their ‘to do’ list fully ticked off. It’s pretty much impossible” (Weston, 2015, unpagged).

There are districts where creating a culture of fear is encouraged in order to weed out, weak teachers. In an article for Tes.com, an administrator is quoted as saying, "Fear is good. Make them fear failure. Make them so scared that if they don't perform, or if they don't behave in a way that you want them to, you'll ask them to leave." (Exley, 2014, unpagged). What does working in this culture of fear actually mean for teachers and students? “The mode of knowing that dominates education creates disconnections between teachers, their students, their subjects because it is rooted in fear” (Palmer, 2007, p. 52). A culture of fear supersedes the ability to form relationships and connections between teachers and students. Fear, along with other negative emotions, exerts extreme

influence over our thinking and actions. Marzano and Marzano (2015) state that our mind remembers events in our lives that created negative emotions better than positive emotions; this is particularly true if those memories are around fear. Palmer (2007) “Some fears can help us survive, even learn and grow – if we know how to decode them” (p. 39). These fears can be embraced and prevent future mistakes and missteps. However, a sustained culture of fear is, as Palmer (2007) writes, “what distances us from our colleagues, our students, ourselves. Fear shuts down those “experiments with truth” that allows us to weave a wider web of connectedness” (p. 36). And, in a time when teachers are being asked to collaborate with students to create learning rather than deliver lectures from a podium, a “wider web of connectedness” (Palmer, 2007, p. 36) is exactly what they need.

Prolonged fear of the loss of control in one’s working environment leads to unnecessary stress. Despite much discussion concerning the nature of workplace stress, our jobs are getting more and not less stressful. Stress is not unique to the teaching profession, but working in schools does present a number of situations that are unique. Contract negotiations, large class size, and new grading systems all add to the feeling of teachers not being in control. Identifying those things that can be controlled and those that cannot can help to prevent daily hassles from becoming major problems (Smith, 2013). Stress is a natural biological response. Stress allows the body to prepare to either fight or run away in flight. Acute stress represents that immediate panic which drives the fight or flight response. If this stress continues, it can not only impact teachers

psychologically but can also lower immune systems (Smith, 2013), making us more vulnerable to physical illness.

Fear and stress breed illness as well as anxiety and perfectionism, two toxic emotions that further divide teachers from colleagues and students. Perfectionism is not self-improvement; it is about trying to earn approval and acceptance (Brown, 2010). Stemming from a fear of not measuring up to the standards set by the district in order to maintain employment, teachers strive to be perfect. Veen and Lasky (2005) call this inefficacious vulnerability: becoming immobilized by the new challenges to identity and sense of self, the results are powerful negative emotions and limited willingness to take risks. Risk taking, emotions, and professional vulnerability significantly contribute to teachers' identity formation (Reio, 2005), while a lack of or a stunted teacher identity leads to anxiety and feelings of worthlessness.

While constantly striving for perfection, anxiety can build around maintaining the illusion of being in-control and manage the perception that everything is okay (Brown, 2010). Eventually this unhealthy striving leads to “cynicism against students, education, or any sign of hope. It is the cynicism that comes when high hopes once had for teaching have been dashed by experience – or by the failure to interpret one's experience accurately” (Palmer, 2007, p. 47).

The culture of fear extends to daily classroom routines as well. Teachers are being told to incorporate more and more technology into their classes, lessons, and assessments. With class sizes that can reach 40, what happens when one adult cannot monitor responsible use? For some teachers, it means appearing on social media sites like

YouTube, Facebook, Vine, and Instagram (Honawar, 2007) without consent and with files that have been edited by students with their own motivations and perceptions. This breach of teachers' privacy has some educators approaching technology from a guarded perspective, and leaves many school districts scrambling to take action when an incident occurs.

These incidents are highly personal to the teachers that are impacted, and the fear that one might happen, or the unknown possibilities for the person experiencing an accusation is what, as Palmer (2007) writes, "distances us from our colleagues, our students, ourselves. Fear shuts down those 'experiments with truth' that allows us to weave a wider web of connectedness" (p. 36). The shock of receiving the news via email, phone call, or during a personal encounter can change the teacher's outlook on the day, which can have an impact on their ability to teach. Marzano and Marzano (2015) assert that, "if teachers understand and monitor their inner worlds, it might go a long way toward enhancing the effectiveness of their outer worlds- their classroom behaviors and use of instructional strategies" (p. 5).

Summary

As the researchers noted in this chapter agree, the arena of teaching has changed and continues to change at a fast pace. When examining the working conditions of teachers, people who are working to balance their own need for autonomy with the changing requirements of state and national governments. Furthermore, these changes have resulted in an increase in teachers leaving the profession and a decrease in new teachers entering the profession. In California, enrollment in undergraduate teacher

programs is down 53 percent over the past five years. It's down sharply in New York and Texas as well. In North Carolina, enrollment is down nearly 20 percent in three years (Westervelt, 2015).

Another point the researchers agree on is the need to increase the research on the impact of changes on teachers in the profession and a continued need to answer Waller's (1932) question; "What does teaching do to teachers?" (p. 375). How has teaching made an impact on the number of false accusations being made against teachers? In a March 2015 article for the *Independent*, Richard Garner cited a United Kingdom Department for Education survey (ATL, 2015) that found one in five teachers surveyed had experienced a false accusation by a student and one in seven by a parent or family friend of a student.

With researchers agreeing on these points, it is interesting to note the dates of some of the references in this chapter. While dated, these references serve as a marker for the beginning of the conversation about expectations and moral standards for teachers and the rise of attention paid to those in the profession. The span of time these references illustrate is notable because of its length, however, it is worth noting that very little has changed or been done to improve the situation. In fact, the opposite appears to be true as recent authors agree that the number of false allegations being brought against teachers has increased.

Chapter 3

Methods

Introduction

This chapter describes the research design, data collection, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. The study was mixed methods combining survey and interview data collection. This chapter also reviews the research setting, participants, data collection tools, analysis techniques, and approval to conduct the study.

This was a mixed method study based on survey and interview data. The research was conducted using a qualitative approach: grounded theory. In keeping with Charmaz's (2013) claim that the "research problem [should] shape the methods" used (p. 27). This approach generated data for systematically comparing and analyzing factors that impact teachers' sense of efficacy (Charmaz, 2013). Gathering rich data will give solid material for building a significant analysis. Rich data were detailed, focused, and full. They revealed participants' views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives (Geertz, 1973). One way to gather rich data is intensive interviewing a guided, one-sided conversation that explores research participants' perspective on their personal experience with the research topic (Charmaz, 2013).

Before embarking on an interview process, this approach allowed me to also incorporate a survey, that I composed and piloted. Followed by interviews with selected survey respondents with unique insight into the topic (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) these interviewees identified themselves in the survey as an individual willing to share.

The interviews were analyzed and the data used to gather themes, and strategies for how teachers overcome accusations based on the findings (Charmaz, 2013).

Survey Design

The survey portion of the research followed Fink (1998) as a guide to compose the questions. Fink advises that survey questions should avoid loaded and emotionally charged words (2012). The elimination of emotions from the survey allowed for participants to answer honestly without the bias of the person who composed the questions.

A pilot survey (Appendix 1) was administered with a small group of 10 respondents. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a pilot survey should be used to provide a sense of how much time it takes to complete the survey, to identify concerns with the language of the questions, and to give an idea of what the responses will be from the questions. The pilot “can be successful in identifying needed changes is as few as 10 individuals are willing to complete it and provide suggestions to improve the clarity and format” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 237). The pilot survey was sent out to 10 teachers, all of whom responded.

The pilot survey data was examined for responses that could be indicators for confusion or poorly worded questions. The pilot survey revealed that the questions were clear and all questions were left intact for the official survey.

After piloting the survey and examining the pilot for revisions, a snowball approach was used (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). With the help of Education

Minnesota, the state Teachers' Union, the survey was disbursed to its members via social media outlets via Twitter and Facebook and at the conclusion respondents were asked to share the link with other teachers they know (Hatch, 2002). This method helped to diversify the respondents and increased the rate of return (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The survey respondents were teachers from various districts throughout the state. The survey was controlled using Google Forms. Whereas Fink (2012) recommends allowing respondents up to two months to complete a survey, there was enough data after four weeks to begin summarizing and identifying interview candidates.

Qualitative Interviews

After analyzing the data gathered through survey, I conducted semi-structured interviews to obtain additional data from participants about the strategies they used to improve their sense of efficacy. The interviews allowed me to delve deeper into the participants' meanings about what they considered to be accusations and strategies for overcoming them (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In developing interview questions, I was careful not to include any biases or emotions from my own experience and what I did to overcome the feelings I experienced. I did not assume that my interview participants share the same sentiments. Interviews focused on the participants' statements about their experience, how they portrayed this experience, and what it meant to them (Charmaz, 2013). Having questions devoid of emotionally charged words allowed for the interviewees to share their experiences without an implication of my emotions. Another goal in eliminating emotional language from the questions was to create open-ended,

nonjudgmental questions that encouraged unanticipated statements and stories to emerge (Charmaz, 2013).

I intended to have a select number of standard questions for all interview participants (Kvale & Brinkman, 2008) to employ principles advocated by Rubin and Rubin (2012). They assert that each interview experience is unique as the participant has a story to share (2012). During the interview process respondents were able to answer the questions fully and no additional questions were needed to clarify or deepen the responses. However, questions were eliminated in some cases because respondents answered them without being asked. Furthermore, Rubin and Rubin advocate that questions should flow naturally or spontaneously based on the ebb and flow of the interview as a conversation in order to gain participants trust and deepen the value of the data. In the case of my interview process, the order of the questions was changed based on how the respondents were answering the questions and what seemed more natural rather than forcing an unnecessary or unnatural change in the conversation.

A similar interview process was employed with three school administrators from urban, suburban, and rural settings with the goal of understanding of how administrators are prepared to deal with similar situations their staff had experienced.

Teacher interview participants were obtained through the survey process. Those interested in participating left preferred contact information. Of the twelve who identified their interest; ten were interviewed. Four of the interview participants are from high school settings in various areas of content and location. Five teacher interviewees are from a middle school setting with one also teaching at the high school level. Finally, one

of the interview candidates is an elementary school teacher. See Appendix 5 for further details.

The researcher identified administrator interview participants. One interviewee is an assistant principal at an urban high school. The second administrator is an assistant at a suburban middle school. The final administrator interview participant is an assistant principal at a rural high school on a reservation. See Appendix 5 for further details.

After completing the interviews, I used the work of Charmaz (2013) as a guide for coding and data interpretation. For initial coding, I deciphered initial data trends and began to place data into categories for additional or further exploration in the data. A more focused coding approach was used to narrow the initial codes to those areas that contained the most complete data and made the most analytical sense for continuing the study and drawing conclusions.

A vital aspect of this topic is understanding the perspective of the people involved and the meaning each brings to my research. Each participant had a unique story that is worth telling.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

One assumption of this study was the belief that people would want to share their stories with me. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) assert that the integrity of the researcher lies in his or her honesty, experience, knowledge and fairness. Part of the trust building process of the interview required me to be open and honest about my experience and interest in this topic. Before my experience with false accusations, I had a very limited idea of what others had experienced. Most of what I knew came from lunchroom gossip

and a few whispered hallway conversations. The number of colleagues, who came to me to offer encouragement, shared their stories, and to tell me it would get easier surprised me. I assumed that others will feel safe sharing their stories with me because I can empathize and relate to their experience. My own experience is mild compared to others, and I could not rely solely on that to build trust with potential interview candidates. Part of the trust building process was not over empathizing and maintaining a professional distance between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). This professional distance was difficult for me to maintain due to having a similar experience as my interview candidates. As the interviewer, I needed to focus energy into not allowing myself to become too emotional during the interviews.

In dealing with an emotional situation I also assumed that those who shared with me would be honest in the details of their stories and would not sensationalize their experience for the sake of giving me a good story or interview. Rubin and Rubin (2012) claim that interviewees can only speak their truth from their own perspective. Therefore, the stories shared from the interviewees are the truth from their point of view.

Limitations were the limited number of studies on this topic, specifically in the United States. The United Kingdom, Canada, and New Zealand have published a series of articles and studies, but the pool of research is shallow. I was also limited in the number of interviews I conducted.

A delimitation that I controlled as the researcher was the time the survey was available for respondents. I hoped this would maximize the number of people who responded by providing a window of time and a deadline. From there, I identified

interview candidates. I also composed my own questions, which allowed me the freedom to ask and probe for details as needed.

Permission to Conduct Research

The approval to conduct research was granted by Hamline University's Institutional Review Board on 13 February 2017. All survey respondents and interviewees signed letters of consent to participate.

Summary

This chapter explained how this study examined how teachers describe the emotions, emotional state, and health impact resulting from false accusations by students and parents. Using a Grounded Theory approach, I used rich data gathered from surveys and interviews to compare and highlight the experiences of teachers with regards to false accusations by students and parents. I also examined the strategies that teachers develop to overcome the impact of these experiences. Finally, I explored what districts do to help teachers who are faced with false accusations. I hope this study will help teachers and districts work together to create a supportive environment for teachers who are experiencing a difficult time.

Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

This chapter describes the results of the data analyses of an online survey (Teacher Survey) and semi structured interviews that were used to address three research questions: How do teachers describe the emotions, emotional state, health impact resulting from false accusations by students and parents? What are the strategies that teachers develop to overcome, cope with the impact of false accusations by students and parents? What can districts do to help teachers who are faced with false accusations?

First, the process and approach used to gather survey data results are overviewed. Next, the process for analyzing the Teacher Survey data is presented with a summary of the results. Finally, the process and approach used to analyze the semi-structured

interviews with teachers and school administrators are discussed. A presentation of the results concludes the chapter.

Teacher Survey Data Analysis

The teacher survey was disbursed before interviews were conducted in order to gather baseline information and seek interview participants. The teacher survey was sent out via social media outlets on Facebook. Social media were used in order to cast a wider net of participants and gain a variety of perspectives from various settings within the state and potentially beyond Minnesota. Education Minnesota Lobbyists shared the survey to the membership of the Minnesota Teacher's Union. By appealing to members of the union, more potential participants were reached than I could access on my own. Of the approximately 70,000 members of the Minnesota Teachers' Union, 50 responded to the electronic survey.

This analysis of the Teacher Survey follows the 10 questions in the order they appear on the survey (Appendix 1).

Survey Items 1-3: Demographic Information.

These questions focused on level taught, academic content area, and years of service. Of the 50 respondents 78% were secondary teachers and 22% represented an elementary population. Within those academic levels, the largest content area represented was Social Studies with 14.6% of respondents, followed by World Language or Spanish with 12.5%, Music or Band with 6.25%. Several other content areas were represented including Special Education, Humanities, Catholic Studies, Religion, Agricultural Education, Elementary, English, Language Arts, Science, English Language Learners,

Family Consumer Science, and Excel. The third question asked teachers to respond with their years of service. Thirty-six percent reported having 10+ years in the classroom. The second highest response of 1-3 years was reported by 24% of teachers.

Survey Item 4: Identify the most common things you were accused of.

Eighteen respondents cited the loss of homework. Twelve respondents cited gradebook concerns. Eleven respondents reported not being fair. These three items can be seen as related because they could occur in the same instance or in separate instances of accusations by students or parents or both. The literature review discussed information on surveillance by parents as they have become more involved in the education of their children (Crozier, 1998). Many schools use an online gradebook, thus parents are able to access gradebook data instantaneously. Thus, parents or students may contact a teacher immediately regarding work when the teacher may not have finished entering scores and accuse him/her of losing the assignment.

Survey Item 5: Identify the worst things they have been accused of.

These responses showed a correlation to the previous question because ten respondents commented that the worst thing they had been accused of involved the grade given to a student. Respondents stated brief comments regarding accusations they received about being racist, sexist, or not liking a student, and therefore had assigned him or her a low grade. Seven respondents said they were accused of not liking a student, while 10 were accused of not caring about students at all or understanding their unique needs. Eight respondents mentioned their content as part of accusations. The content was too difficult. They did not provide enough curriculum, or they were being too one sided.

While only two respondents identified themselves as special education teachers, four respondents said they were accused of not following or supplying IEP (individualized education program) accommodations appropriately. Six teachers reported discipline as part of the accusations brought against them by parents or students.

Survey Item 6: How teachers coped with accusations.

Nineteen stated that they talked with colleagues about the problem or issue, and four said they spoke to an administrator. Ten reported processing with family or close friends. Eight respondents said they participated in various forms of exercise such as running, yoga, or long walks as preferred coping mechanisms. Eight respondents mentioned participating in reflection or prayer to process their feelings. As noted in the literature review, Palmer (2007) encourages a reflective practice for teachers to process their feelings and build connectedness with their colleagues. Six teachers wrote that by removing themselves from the situation they were able to cope better. Three respondents reported seeing a therapist. Three respondents reported using self-talk as a method for coping and reframing. Brown (2010) urged using self-talk to calm and collect feelings before taking action. Three respondents wrote that the emotional release of crying helped with relieving stress. Six of the respondents said that they try to do more to appease the accuser as a coping mechanism. Examples of this included having a face-to-face meeting, doing things to prove himself or herself, and setting up a plan to meet expectations. Other methods of coping recorded were researching best practice, listening to music, reading, and blowing it off.

Survey Item 7: How accusations were communicated to them.

Fifty-six percent responded that they received emails communicating the accusations. Due to the highly personal nature of these accusations, teachers felt them deeply. The shock of receiving the news via email can have an impact on their ability to teach. The 24% who responded that the accusations were communicated in a face-to-face manner said that it was during a conference time. Accusations brought up on the spot either through email or in person did not allow the teachers to process or monitor their feelings and continue teaching. Marzano and Marzano (2015) assert that, “if teachers understand and monitor their inner worlds, it might go a long way toward enhancing the effectiveness of their outer worlds-their classroom behaviors and use of instructional strategies” (p. 5).

Survey Item 8: Describe administrative support.

Respondents were asked to describe if they felt supported by administration while experiencing false accusations. Forty-six percent said they felt somewhat supported and helped by an administrator. Forty-two percent said they felt supported by and could find solutions with an administrator. The remaining 12% reported not feeling supported by an administrator and worked to find solutions alone. These responses challenge the ideas of Mahony et al. (2004) described in the literature review wherein they assert that the amount of assessments and performance measures can build an atmosphere of distrust between teachers and administrators. In this study, 12% of the teacher responses show that they have a level of trust with their administrator because they are able to work through a problem and find solutions together.

Interview Data Analysis Process

Interview data involved two phases. The first step involved coding the interview transcripts. According to Charmaz (2006), coding within grounded theory requires “naming segments of the data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data” (p. 43). Otherwise stated, “coding is the first step in moving beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytical interpretations” (Charmaz, 2013, p. 43). Within grounded theory the coding has two main phases:

- 1) an initial phase involving naming each word, line, or segment of data followed by
- 2) A focused, selective phase that uses the more significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, and organize large amounts of data. While engaged in initial coding, [the researcher] mines early data of analytic ideas to pursue in further data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46).

Using the open-coding process, categories began to emerge from the data. Each piece of data was identified within the transcript and then grouped together in similar or matching categories. Charmaz (2006) defines the creation of these categories as “the analytical step in grounded theory of selecting certain codes as having overriding significance or abstracting common themes and patterns in several codes into an analytical concept” (p. 186). The categories represented potential answers to the research questions.

Interview Data Analysis Results

The following sections include an explanation of the interview participants as well as a section for the interview questions. The sections are organized in the order the questions were asked (Appendix 3).

Participants

Teacher interview participants were obtained through the survey process. Those interested in participating left preferred contact information. Of the twelve who identified their interest; ten were interviewed. Four of the interview participants were from high school settings in various areas of content and location. Five teacher interviewees were from a middle school setting, one of whom was also teaching at the high school level. Finally, one of the interview candidates was an elementary school teacher. See Appendix 5 for further details.

The researcher identified administrator interview participants. One interviewee was an assistant principal at an urban high school. The second administrator was an assistant at a suburban middle school. The final administrator interview participant was an assistant principal at a rural high school on a reservation. See Appendix 5 for further details.

All teachers answered the same questions; some additional questions were asked as the conversation necessitated, to clarify and or expand upon the teacher's narrative to ensure understanding of the situation (Appendix 3). Likewise, all administrators answered the same questions (Appendix 4), unless additional questions were needed to clarify and or expand upon the narrative to ensure understanding of the situation. Each participant spoke from his/her own experience. Findings are presented, by question beginning with the responses to the Teacher Interview questions.

Teacher Interview Results

Interview Item 1: Identify a time when you experienced false accusations by students, parents, or both.

Each teacher described a unique experience that occurred in his or her recent past. The first category that emerged from the responses was accusations that pertained to teaching. The abbreviations are as follows: ELT (elementary teacher), MST (middle school teacher), and HST (high school teacher). See Appendix 5 for information about these respondents.

HST 1 experienced accusations of not teaching math and instead showing videos on how to complete problems and tasks. The accusations of not teaching were brought to HST 1 in the form of emails and conversations at conferences. HST 1 was reviewing math content from previous years, but in a different way, by incorporating student choice. One choice included watching recorded lessons so students could work at their own pace. HST 3 was accused of not teaching a student in line with the accommodations of an IEP plan. HST 3 was not aware of the allegations being made until the assistant principal came and stated that the allegations had been made. MST 3 is a Special Education teacher who was accused of not meeting the needs of a student based on an IEP. In this case, the parent involved brought the allegations to MST 3 in an email. ELT 1 was accused by a parent of not having fair grading practice or the proper ability to teach math. A parent entered the classroom and angrily made the accusations.

The second category of accusations that emerged related to teacher care or relationship with students. HST 2 was accused of not caring what a student's name was and, therefore, did not care about the student. The issue was not brought to the attention

of the teacher until the student changed classes. MST 1 was accused by a student and parents of not caring for a student and treating the student too harshly. The student was making inappropriate comments toward the teacher and female students in class. MST 4 asked students to answer questions regarding family history. A student did not complete the assignment and MST 4 commented that some day the student might want to know about the heritage of the family. At conferences the parents accused MST 4 of not being sensitive to students who were adopted; however, MST 4 was not aware the student was adopted because neither the student nor parent had communicated that to the teacher. MST 5 made a joke to a student who was collecting homework before departing on a weeklong vacation. MST 5 later received an email saying it was none of the teacher's business when a family takes vacation. HST 4 was the only participant to be threatened by a student. HST 4 was placed on a hit list by a student from class after the shooting in Columbine. Originally, HST 4 was not on the student's published list, but was added later when the student decided to make a change, because the student did not feel the threat or list was given sufficient attention because the original teachers were not well liked. However, HST 4 was a well-liked teacher and the student believed the threat would become more credible with the addition.

MST 3 was the only participant who experienced accusations from students with regards to technology. A student in MST 3's class created a Facebook profile using the teacher's information, friended students, and began making comments (some inappropriate) on other students' profiles and pictures. In this case, another teacher brought the existence of the profile to MST 3's attention.

Interview Item 2: Feelings during that experience.

Surprise was the first category that emerged from the interviews. All participants responded that the accusations were a surprise to them and not something they saw coming. HST 2 said, “in the moment, I was, like I said, completely taken aback. I was completely surprised and kind of shocked.” HST 3 stated, “ I was just completely shocked, like I was surely caught off guard by the allegations that I just wasn’t aware of it...I didn’t understand where the accusation came from.” MST 4 said, “I felt like there was this assumption...me being the teacher, I need to be reprimanded for that, you know. Just being accused was-, it felt pretty harsh.” Once the surprise wore off, teachers reported feeling angry.

The second category that emerged from the interviews were feelings of anger. Interview participants expressed feeling angry while going through their various situations. HST 1 said, “I mean I was just mad...I don’t mind if you, or the kids maybe disagree on, I guess how my decisions are made...but to say that I am not teaching is just not factual.” MST 3 stated, “you know there’s always two sides, even with my students, I don’t know but they just agree with their side, but it’s important for them to have a chance to hear both sides.” Other participants referenced feeling angry that their side of the story was not sought after by their administrators leading to feelings of frustration.

Frustration was the third category that emerged from the experiences of interviewees. The frustration stemmed from a lack of voice in their circumstances and not being heard. HST 2 replied, “I was really frustrated with myself....somewhat undermined, mistrusted, misunderstood.” and “I was just really frustrated. I just didn’t

trust my administrator or guidance counselor the same way after that.” MST 3 voiced, “That was really frustrating and if you had the principals coming down, that didn’t happen, I mean that didn’t, the first time they called it was like they just said, ‘why aren’t you doing these things?’”

Fear emerged as a category for those who had an encounter with their accuser and those who assumed they would be reprimanded because of what was happening. These sentiments echo the research of Palmer as well as Marzano and Marzano. ELT 1 recounted, “I was frightened. I was really afraid. He was, he was very, he swore at me, you know, it was one of those; it was an explosive situation so I was frightened.” MST 2 said, “I felt scared because, I mean, as a teacher your, your image and your persona, I mean everything, what people say about you, I mean, when they go home and they talk about you. I mean that’s important, your integrity, what people think about you as a person, what they think about you as a teacher.” MST 5 responded that “I’m gonna be in huge trouble for this, this is not at all who I am as a teacher, I actually really like this student, you know, what a big misunderstanding.” Fear was also part of HST 4’s narrative due to the nature of being placed on a hit list and not feeling safe in the workplace.

Teachers reported feeling overwhelmed by their situations and not knowing exactly what to do to make it better. MST 1 voiced this: “I was coming home each day totally overwhelmed and wondering what, what can I do?” Others described a feeling of helplessness at knowing what their next steps should be or where to turn for support.

Interview Item 3: Feelings about teaching or the profession changed because of your experience.

Nine of the interview participants reported having their feelings changed about teaching. Several noted that while their feelings were hurt during their experience, they were hopeful that students learned something. Three respondents noted that the behavior was expected at their grade level because students are growing and maturing.

One respondent, HST 4, reported that the experience caused some lingering doubt regarding relationships with students and questioning motives. Further, it sparked a habit of keeping data and records of communications with students and administrators.

Interview Item 4: Describe any short-term effects on your emotional or physical health or both.

MST 1 was the only respondent to report an impact on health. MST 1 suffered tension headaches and sought a chiropractor for relief.

Interview Item 5: Long-term effects on your emotional or physical health or both.

None of the respondents reported long-term health issues from their experiences.

Interview Item 6: Coping with or overcoming the false accusations.

All teachers reported that colleagues were helpful in overcoming the accusations because they offered insight into the exact environment in which the situations were occurring. Two interview candidates were married to other teachers and responded that having a spouse who was familiar with the setting and the stresses of the profession was very helpful. Exercise, specifically running, was named as a coping strategy by MST 1, who said it assisted in relieving the stress. HST 1 remarked that removing self from the

situation was helpful; having strong work-life balance. MST 5 noted that one strategy, specifically if accusations are made through email, was to pen a response first and then have colleagues read it before sending it. MST 2 said that “working careful” from that point on has helped to overcome the accusations. MST meant not posting a personal photo on class webpages or any other identifying information that could be used in a manner not intended by the teacher.

Interview Item 6: Advice you would give to a colleague in a similar situation.

The resounding advice from all interview participants for colleagues was in regards to self-protection and self-care. With regard to protecting self, HST 3 recommended that even non-tenured teachers attend meetings with a Union representative. Having support ensures that there is an unbiased witness to the conversation. HST 3 asserted that this witness will not have the emotional connection to the situation that the teacher has and will aid in rational decision making. HST 2 brought up not being afraid to stand up for oneself. The interview participants from middle schools all commented on keeping a log of communications for records, specifically referenced email communication, which is becoming the preferred method of communication and records be kept in case situations like those experienced by the teachers ever arise.

The theme of self-care came through the data with mentions of crying by ELT 1, who said the release of emotion was very helpful in regaining center and focus. Other interview respondents said they would tell their colleagues to find a trusted friend to process with. Three interviewees also said they would ask their colleagues to take a

reflective approach to their practice. They stated questions such as “What can you do differently?” and “Is there any evidence that could be found and interpreted that you did this?” as help to guide through to a decision.

Interview Item 7: Describe the support provided by your administrator.

The first theme from this portion of the data was that administrators were not involved at all. MST 4 said this made it easier because of a fear of being in trouble if administration had gotten involved. HST 4 reported that the administrator was involved, but not communicative. HST 4 elaborated that the administrator “laughed off” concerns regarding the safety of the teachers on the hit list.

The second theme from the data was the change in relationship between the teacher and administrator. Three respondents answered that, after their situations were resolved, their relationships with their administrators were not the same. HST 2 said there was a dissolution of trust between the two because of the lack of communication that the teacher experienced from the administrator. HSTs 2 and 3 and MST 3 commented that, for them, the relationship changed because the administrator involved did not listen or acknowledge their side of the events or story. Instead, they felt the administrators approached them from a stance of guilt rather than innocence. MST 1 was involved with two administrators at the time of the incident and stated that the two had different styles of dealing with conflict, often resulting in the teacher being left in the middle, not knowing how to respond.

The third theme was that of the supportive administrator. ELT 1 described the support received as “wonderful,” and found it valuable. Additionally, the administrator at

the time was new, and ELT 1 remarked that other teachers were anxious to see how the administrator would respond to the situation to see if the administrator was “on our side.” MST 5 said the administrator complimented the efforts of the teacher and asked if additional support was needed.

The final theme was that of the absent administrator. For HST 1 and MST 4, the absence of an administrator was fine. HST 1 believed it was not necessary at the time, because the situation did not reach a critical level. MST 4 was relieved an administrator was not involved for fear of being in trouble. However, for MST 2 the lack of administrative support is still a raw topic, and said that this is still something that “pisses me off,” because, as the teacher opines, “they should be there.”

Interview Item 8: Describe how you feel about that support now.

There were two categories for this data. Those interviewees who felt that the situation was resolved and had been able to move on and those who had some unresolved feelings. The majority of the respondents, even those who experienced a change in the relationship with their administrator, could look back and say that the situation was resolved and they had moved on.

However, MST1 and MST2 still felt an unresolved tension. MST 2 had feelings of resentment toward the student who started the Facebook page and the lack of support from the administrator. MST 1 felt that the situation with the student should have resolved sooner, but because the administrators could not agree on a solution, it dragged out for too long. HST 4 believed that the administrator missed an opportunity to listen and possibly heal a relationship that instead remained broken.

Interview Item 9: Describe what would have supported you better.

Three categories emerged from the data. First was desire for administrators to ask questions rather than approaching the accusations as facts. MST 3 believed this approach would save teachers a lot of stress because it would feel more like the administrator was supporting the staff member instead of taking the side of the parent. This sentiment appeared in HST 3, MSTs 1 and 4 who all stated that their first encounter with an administrator regarding accusations felt confrontational because the administrator appeared to be on the side of the accuser rather than in search of the truth in an unbiased way.

The second theme for support was an apology. Teachers in each situation wanted an apology either from the administrator or the accuser. None of the teachers received any type of apology or closure with their accuser or administrator once the allegations were proven false. Thus, the teachers were left with having to find the closure on their own.

Finally, the teachers identified a desire to have a voice in their situations. For MST 2 that would have been to have a say in determining the punishment for the student who created the Facebook profile, rather than having the student serve after school detention under the supervision of MST 2. HST 3 desired a voice in expressing that the teacher and students had a healthy relationship and evidence of meeting the requirements of the IEP. MST 4 shared a desire to express that the student had not previously shared

about the adoption, nor had the teacher met the parents to make the connection independently.

Interview Item 10: Share ideas for changes that districts can make to support teachers in the future.

The teachers recommended three types of changes. The first focused on undergraduate teacher preparation. MST 1 believed that undergraduate programs can and should do a better job of preparing teacher candidates for conflict with students, parents, and administrators. Others agreed that their undergraduate preparation was subpar with regards to classroom management.

The second element of change would come in administrator preparation. HST 1 believed a minimum of 5 years should be set before teachers can become administrators. That way, would-be administrators have more classroom experiences to rely on when entering an administrator profession. MST 3 and ELT 1 stated that administrators need training on how to ask questions when gathering information, rather than stating “facts” that may not be true. Classes on conducting or being part of challenging conversations would help administrators support teachers and have healthy conversations with teachers and parents.

The third element involved professional development for all employees. MST 2 also recommends that districts should stop asking or requiring teachers to post pictures on social media or class web pages because images and information can be altered or taken out of context. MST 1 went on to teach in a district that offered one day of professional

development for teachers about conflict resolution and supports available by the district to help teachers who find themselves in need.

Administrator Interview Analysis

Three administrators were selected for interviews by the researcher. There was one each from an urban, a rural, and a suburban school district. The interviews took each of the research questions and broke them into specific smaller questions. The questions are reported in order below. (See Appendix3.) All participants answered the same questions and shared from their own experience. Additional questions were asked only to elaborate on the narrative or clarify understanding.

Interview Item 1: Describe a time when a teacher was experiencing false accusations by students, parents, or both.

From this question, two categories emerged from the data: accusations that originated from a student and those that came from a parent. Admin 1 told of a teacher who received a Nazi salute from a student in the hallway during passing time. The teacher is African American. The student was unable to provide a reason for the behavior other than the race of the teacher. The student claimed he was waving at the teacher. The student was suspended. The parents and the student were unhappy with the suspension and wanted it to be revoked. Admin 3 described a situation of two female students who claimed a male teacher made comments about them and their bodies.

Admin 2 shared a story of a teacher accused of forcing students to say the Pledge of Allegiance. If a student opted not to stand or participate, all students would start over until all students participated. Schools are required to offer students the opportunity to say the Pledge once per week, but no one is required to participate. In this case, the parent went so far as to contact a School Board member.

Interview Item 2: Describe the support you offered to the teacher.

The administrators described three different levels of support they offered to teachers. First was immediate conversation with the teacher. Admin 1 described having a conversation with the teacher in which it was discovered that the student was not in the teacher's class. The teacher expressed feeling safe at school and declined an offer to take a day off. Admin 2 discussed meeting with the teacher to discuss the parent's claims and ask additional questions before calling the parent again. Admin 3 wanted the teacher to feel heard and that he had a voice in the situation.

Part two of the support offered by administrators involved observations. For Admin 1 the observations were in the form of watching surveillance video from the hallway involving the interaction between the teacher and student. Admin 2 completed walkthroughs of the teacher's class at the designated time for the Pledge of Allegiance to observe teacher and student behavior. Admin 2 also spoke to various students from the teachers' classes to gather more information regarding the expectations of the teacher.

Part three of the support offered by administrators interviewed was described as timeliness. All three described taking action immediately or as soon as they were

informed of the incident. Admin 3 believed this was supportive because it showed that the incident is not only important to the teacher but also to the administrator involved.

Interview Item 3: Describe your preparation to support teachers in these situations from your administrative license preparation.

The administrators admitted that there was no such preparation for how to deal with or support teachers in these situations. Admin 1 noted taking a class called Educational Law and having conversations about personnel issues, but was not “formally trained...even as an intern.” Admin 2 said that in a class called The Principal, the professors had students practice scenarios with a partner that were close to real life, but did not supply the same level of urgency or stress that occurs in “the real world.” Admin 3 also stated that there was no formal preparation in dealing with difficult conversations or situations, but said that finding value in such practice would be difficult as each situation is unique given the personalities involved.

The administrators all agreed that having a class or increased preparation for having these kinds of conversations with teachers and parents would be very helpful because there would be less stress and they would have an easier time coming to a solution.

Interview Item 4: Advice you would give to a teacher in a similar situation.

The advice from administrators took two forms. The first involved the teachers’ well-being and feelings. Admin 3 would advise the teacher to stay calm and not panic albeit admitting that is “easier said than done.” Further, “keep doing your job to the best of your ability. Be open and reflective.” Finally, “trust the system.”

The second type of advice was regarding sharing with others. Admin 1 “the best thing you can do is to go to probably both the union and administration and explain what happened...what you believe to be the truth is important.” This advice echoes the advice HST 3 would give to another teacher in not going to meetings alone, but instead bringing an outside observer.

Interview Item 5: Advice you would give to a colleague helping a teacher.

The advice to administrators had three layers. The first is clerical, making details stay in order. Admin 1 believes it is “really important to write things down.” Having the stories in written form from the parties involved is important to keep the details of the events in order and help eliminate misunderstanding from a spoken conversation or account. Admin 3 would tell a colleague to “think before you act.” Adding that it is important to “do your due diligence, but don’t involve too many people.” Admin 3 meant that on some occasions, other parties may need to be brought in, but the number should be limited to make sure the rumor mill does not get out of control.

The second layer of advice was allowing the teacher to feel reassured. For Admin 1 that means making it “clear to staff to use their union representative as support. Outside eyes to hear or pick up on things others miss.” And as decisions are being made “make sure the staff member is comfortable with how to move forward.” Admin 3 used the phrase “be empathetic” to describe the same feeling, but at the same time “be objective” in order to keep a clear mind.

The third layer of advice is what the administrator can do for him or herself. Admin 2 would advise a colleague to “Learn your community, to understand how to

respond, and be helpful instead of reactive.” Admin 3 said it was important to “find a colleague to talk through it and discuss a plan of action.”

Interview Item 6: Anything you would do differently in the future.

Two of the administrators cited something they would do differently in a similar situation in order to make the process smoother. For Admin 1, written statements from the teacher and the student would have eliminated the conflict that came about after the student was suspended. Admin 2 would have tried to solve the situation more quickly, by prioritizing it over other things. This would save the parent and teacher from prolonged stress over the situation.

Admin 3 could not think of a change to be made, but was able to justify those thoughts with “the teacher may feel differently. But the relationship I have with that teacher is better than it ever has been.”

Summary

The survey and interview analysis work together as research methods in order to better understand the research questions about how teachers describe the emotions, emotional state, health impact resulting from false accusations by students and parents; what are strategies that teachers develop to overcome, cope with the impact of false accusations by students and parents; and what districts can do to help teachers who are faced with false accusations. All of the participants provided valuable insight into the process of working through situations of varying degrees and types of false accusations brought against teachers by students, parents, or both. When analyzed together, a larger picture begins to form of where the process is strong and where improvements can be

made. The next chapter will summarize and interpret the findings as well as include a personal reflection as a teacher and researcher, which will hopefully be able to help teachers and administrators in the future.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Introduction

Teachers stand somewhere between being a private citizen and a public employee who unwillingly enter into a political world that seems ever changing. Teachers have the powerful responsibility of influencing student lives and supporting lifelong learning. It is a richly rewarding profession as each day teachers challenge student minds to stretch and grow. Though exhausting on the best of days, teaching and caring about students offer vitality and rewards that continuously replenish energy (Cunningham, 2009). Teachers have the unique opportunity to prepare students for jobs that do not exist yet, to help young people become members of society, and to act as role models of good citizenship (DuFour, 2015).

Due to the importance of teaching as a profession, the increase in public awareness and scrutiny has also changed, “as the nation’s interest in schooling has grown, the stakes for success and failure have gone up” (Rury, 2013, p. 223). Scores on standardized testing and rankings by local media, Newsweek, and other journals on the desirability of schools and districts often measure the stakes of success. It is in this environment of fear of failure and high stress, surveillance, and an emphasis on performance that teachers have also seen a rise in the number of accusations about sometimes great and atrocious things, and at other times minor about offenses such as losing work or failing to update grades appropriately, brought against them by students and parents.

You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them Maya Angelou. The purpose of this project was to discover how teachers describe the impact of false accusations by students and parents, overcome the situation, and what districts can do to offer support. Throughout the process I surveyed and interviewed teachers to discover what types of false accusations they encounter and what strategies they use to overcome these accusations. I also interviewed administrators to gain an understanding of what it means to support a teacher facing false accusations. After gathering the data, I analyzed and coded for themes from the survey and interviews. This chapter serves as the closure of this research. Conclusions are presented through examining each research question, implications of the research, recommendations, and a summary.

Key Understandings and Connections to Literature

How do teachers describe the emotions, emotional state, health impact resulting from false accusations by students and parents? Connection is why people are here; it is what gives purpose and meaning to our lives (Brown, 2015). For the teachers who shared their stories of false accusations, the underlying sentiment was the loss of connection to their students. The student from HST 2's class opted to change to a different teacher, leaving HST 2 without the ability to repair the connection or find closure. While MST 2 wanted the student removed from the class, this removal also prevented an opportunity for the connection to be rebuilt. Until recently, however, when the student reached out to MST 2 to apologize for the behaviors and to tell MST 2 of his/her intent to become a Spanish teacher.

What are the strategies that teachers develop to overcome, cope with the impact of false accusations by students and parents? I have come to understand that, once the situation has been resolved, teachers are exceptionally resilient. Nine of the ten teachers interviewed are still teaching, MST 1 recently left the profession to stay home with children. This shows the resiliency and the growth mindset of teachers when faced with difficulty. Mindset change is not about pointers here and there. It's about seeing things in a new way. When people change to a growth mindset, they change from a judge and be judged framework to learn and help learn framework (Dweck, 2008). HST 1 said that if faced with this kind of situation again, one thing she/he would do differently would be more up front with the reasoning behind the instructional choices made in the classroom. This acknowledgement of the need to learn in order to move forward, serves to illustrate Dweck's mind shift from fixed to growth.

What can districts do to help teachers who are faced with false accusations?

Throughout this study, the most important thing I have come to understand is the need for teachers and administrators to have training in conflict resolution and having challenging conversations. When parties are in conflict it is difficult for them to see the perspective of the person (s) with whom they are experiencing difficulty. In the case of teachers and administrators; they may not be the parties in direct conflict, however, these principles still apply. The administrator can, in a way, come to represent the accusing party.

Teachers reported in their survey responses that email is the most common way accusations are communicated to them. Therefore, the administrator is the first person they see when another party becomes involved. The 3 big blind spots are tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language. The listener is very aware of these; the talker is not (Stone, et al., 2010). Email eliminates the ability for the teacher to see and interpret the voice, expression, and body language of the party making the accusation; making it very important that administrators are aware of their own unspoken communication when approaching a teacher regarding false accusations.

In order to help teachers and administrators through the conflict of navigating false accusations universities and school districts need to begin by incorporating basic understanding of conflict and how to bring resolution to such situations. That way, when emotions are high, parties can approach a situation with the ability to clear their minds and begin the process of moving forward. In their book, *Beyond Reason*, Shapiro and Fisher (2006) claim that there are five core values that, when threatened, lead people to feel that they are in conflict:

- Appreciation: The feeling of being understood and that an individual's ideas have merit;
- Affiliation: Feeling of connectedness;
- Autonomy: Feeling the ability to make choices and impact decisions;
- Status: Feeling of being “someone” and of being treated with respect;
- Role: Feeling of clear purpose and meaning.

If a person feels that one or more of these elements are being threatened, that individual is experiencing a conflict. When parties are in conflict, the need arises for conversations in order to bring resolution to the problem. Stone, Patton, Heen, & Fisher (2010) assert that these conversations are almost never about getting the facts right, but are rather, difficult conversations about conflicting perceptions, interpretations, and values. This sentiment came through in the teacher interviews as the plea for a voice in their situations, the desire to feel they are heard, and experience compassion.

Listening well is one of the most powerful skills you can bring to a difficult conversation (Stone, et al. 2010). Listening well not only requires awareness of body language, voice, and facial expressions but also compassion. Compassion is a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is suffering combined with a desire to make the suffering easier (dictionary.com). For the teachers interviewed, that compassion could have come in the form of an apology from the administrator. An apology is supposed to be a communion – a coming together. For someone to make an apology, someone has to be listening. They listen and you speak and there’s an exchange (Ronson, 2015). Even though the administrator is not making the false accusations, he or she is often a

communicator in the situation, and if practicing good listening and compassion, could alleviate a lot of pain of the teacher, which contribute in a positive way to the teacher's performance, in and out of the classroom.

Combined with training and support in conflict resolution and having challenging conversations, I have come to understand the importance of asking for help. Everyone involved in this study, survey respondents and interview respondents, reported talking to and asking for support from colleagues. Schools and districts must work to encourage the growth of community among teachers and administrators alike to form healthy, emotionally supportive environments for everyone. As the teacher interview respondents suggested, having a third party attend meetings helps to clear out the emotional debris and listen for facts. For despite our best efforts, when we are in conflict or in an emotionally charged situation we cannot always see the light at the end of the tunnel. However, as the respondents to this study reported, having a community of colleagues provides support and gives perspective to the situation.

Limitations

The major limitation of this study is sample size. The 50 survey respondents are not fully representative of all teachers in the state, and in no way reflect the sentiments of all teachers. The ten teacher interview respondents also represent a small sample size and may not echo the feelings or experiences of all teachers in the state. Additionally, the administrator interview candidates were selected by me, and are administrators that I know and trust. Their practices for conflict resolution and dealing with difficult situations

is perhaps not reflective of the way in which all administrators would respond when faced with such situations.

Future Research Possibilities

While I was able to reach a small section of teachers, one factor that is absent in this study is the voice of students and parents. I did not gather data from the perspective of those whom I target as making the accusations. If this research were to be expanded, student and parent data and or motive would be an interesting addition to the data in order to better understand their feelings toward teachers and the education system.

Additionally, this project could be expanded by working with out of state teachers and administrators to examine similarities and differences with regards to the accusations being made but also the preparation and approach to dealing with these situations.

Another opportunity for future research might be to explore the degree to which false accusations deter prospective teachers from the profession. Finally, another avenue for further research would be to examine the impact of false accusations on teacher attrition; either of those who experienced false accusations or simply the threat of false accusations and the impact on teachers leaving the profession.

Implications and Suggestions

There are implications for future study for K-12 teachers and administrators, and for higher education institutions that license teachers and school administrators. This research project has many implications for teachers. First, teachers should continue to foster healthy communities of support with their colleagues. In both the survey and interviews colleagues were seen as the strongest support for those experiencing false

accusations. Second, teachers should build relationships with their union representatives. HST 3 and Admin 1 recommend that teachers attend meetings regarding the accusations with an objective third party to listen and watch for things that may have been missed by those directly impacted by the situation. Third, teachers need to develop self-care habits. This self-care is both professional and personal. The middle-school interview participants all commented on keeping a log of communications for records as a form of professional self-care. ELT 1 said the release of emotion was very helpful in regaining center and focus. Three interviewees also said they would ask their colleagues to take a reflective approach to their practice by asking questions such as “What can you do differently?” and “Is there any evidence that could be interpreted in such a way as to make you appear to be guilty of the offense of which you have been accused?” Asking and then reflecting upon the answers to such questions could help guide the teacher’s response and lead to better decisions. A final recommendation for teachers would be to address the accusation of not teaching by invoking elements of Cognitive Theory (Hadley, 2001) into their teaching. Cognitive theory says that teachers should explain to students why they are doing what they are doing and how each activity will aid in learning. If students understand the instructional decisions being made by the teacher, they may see and understand that learning can take many forms and become less likely to accuse the teacher of not teaching.

There are implications for future study related to school administrators. First, when working with a teacher through false accusations it is important to practice empathetic listening and offer teachers a voice. Interview respondents repeated having

the desire for administrators to ask questions rather than approaching the accusations as facts. MST 3 believes this approach would save teachers a lot of stress because it would feel more like the administrator was supporting the staff member versus taking the side of the parent. This sentiment appeared in HST 3, MSTs 1 and 4 who all stated that their first encounter with an administrator regarding accusations felt confrontational because the administrator appeared to be on the side of the accuser instead of in support of the teacher. The other implication for administrators is to apologize. The teacher interview respondents expressed that an apology from the administrator or accuser as a simple way to bring closure to the situation and begin to move forward.

The research project offers multiple implications for those beyond schools. First, school districts, should find ways to foster and encourage positive relationships among the staff. Because colleagues were named as the most important form of support; these relationships need to be held as an important element of overall district culture. School districts might also consider developing a protocol for supporting teachers experiencing varied degrees of false accusations. Knowing these situations are occurring and the lack of preparation on the part of the administrators; districts should have a method for solving these situations to provide support to both administrators and teachers. Another style of support could come from professional development for teachers and administrators about conflict resolution and working through challenging situations and conversations.

Second, university level changes; teacher and administrator data reflect a need for change at the university level. For teachers this change would encompass classes and preparation for teachers when dealing with conflict and difficult situations. For

administrators this change would encompass preparation and practice with scenarios involving accusations being brought against teachers. This preparation, as Admin 3 pointed out could consist of one scenario with discussion going toward both fact and false accusations being brought against a teacher allowing administrators to process both sides.

Communicating Results

The results of this study can be presented in a variety of settings from individual schools, districts, universities, to state union organizations. I believe the place to start would be at union organizations. State union organizations have members that connect with all districts in a given state. These members can assist individual teachers in schools and through, the negotiation process, could influence district change in a contract. Every summer, the state level teacher union organization holds a summer seminar with break out sessions for representatives to attend. Sharing the results of this study would be an appropriate setting.

Concluding Thoughts

Teaching is a process and it is hard work. Teachers are in the arena each day trying to do their best. Teachers stand somewhere between being private citizens and public employees who unwillingly enter into a political world that seems ever changing. Teachers have the powerful responsibility of influencing student lives and supporting lifelong learning. Now is the time to examine the conditions of teaching and how those conditions may lead to an increase in the number of false allegations being brought against educators. What strategies teachers use to help themselves overcome these obstacles and what districts can do to support teachers?

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly...who at the best knows? In the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly...

- President Theodore Roosevelt

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Appendix 1

Teacher Survey

Dear Participant:

My name is Elizabeth de Leon. I am a students at Hamline University in the School of Education under the supervision of Barbara Swanson. You are invited to participate in a research project entitled: How teachers manage false accusations by students and parents. The purpose of this survey is to measure the respondents' responses to the types of accusations they face, the strategies used to overcome them, and the perceived level of support from administrators. This study is part of the required coursework for completing my doctoral dissertation.

The following survey was developed to ask you a few questions regarding your experience in education. It is my hope that this information can identify factors that may assist teachers in overcoming false accusations by students and parents. There are no identified risks from participating in this research.

The survey is anonymous. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate without consequence. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. You will receive no compensation for participating in the research study. Responses to the survey will only be reported in aggregated form to protect the identity of respondents, and for completion of requirements for a doctoral dissertation. Neither the researcher nor the University has a conflict of interest with the results. The data collected from this study will be kept in a locked cabinet for three years.

Further information regarding the research can be obtained from the principal researcher (Elizabeth de Leon: elane03@hamline.edu) or my faculty advisor, Barbara Swanson, bswanson@hamline.edu. If you would like to know the results of this research, contact Elizabeth de Leon, elane03@hamline.edu. Thank you for your consideration. Your help is greatly appreciated.

[Your signature below (answer to question 1) indicates that you have read the above information, are at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in How teachers manage false accusations by students and parents.]

1. I have read and agree to the terms of the consent:

* Yes, I agree

* I disagree. Please discard my results.

2. Grade level:

- Elementary
- Secondary
- Post Secondary

3. Years of service:

- 1-3
- 4-6
- 6-10
- 10+

4. Please identify the most common things you are accused of: (ex: losing homework)

5. Please, if applicable, identify the worst thing(s) you have been accused of: (ex: not caring about students, showing inappropriate content in the classroom)

6. How do you cope with your feelings when experiencing accusations: (ex: meditation)

7. How are accusations from students and/or parents typically communicated to you:

8. When dealing with accusations; how supported do you feel by administration?

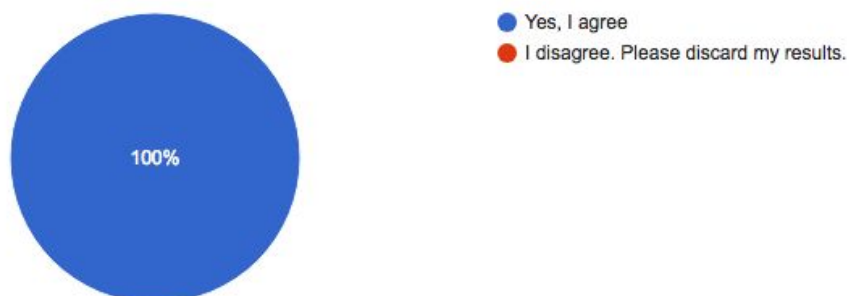
- I don't feel supported. I deal with it on my own.
- I feel somewhat supported. My administrator helps me.
- I feel supported. My administrator and I work together to find solutions.

Appendix 2

Teacher Survey Results

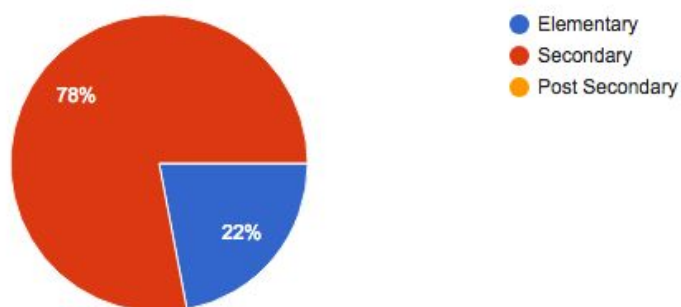
I have read and agree to the terms of the consent

50 responses



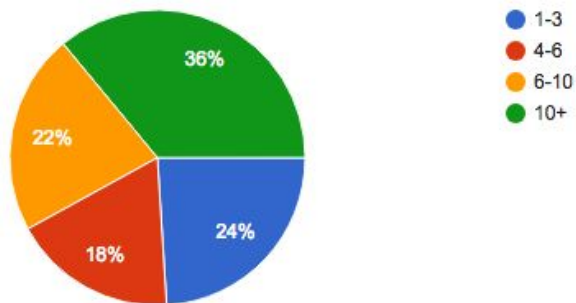
Grade level:

50 responses



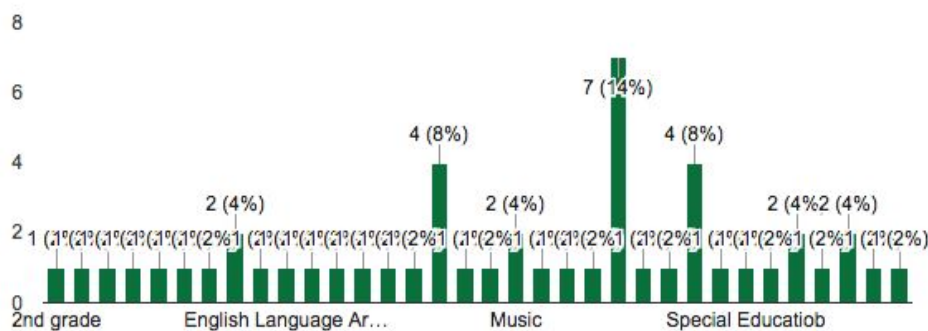
Years of service:

50 responses



Academic Area (Special Education, Math)

50 responses



Identify the most common things you are accused of:

Not being fair	10
Loss of homework	18
Not clear directions	5
Targeting students	2
Not liking students	4
Favoritism	2
Gradebook	11
Availability	4

Busy work	1
Timeliness	6
Communication	5
Make-up work	1
Homework	2

Identify the worst thing you have been accused of:

IEP accommodations	4
Not providing choice	1
Disliking students	7
Having an agenda	1
Not being understanding	1
Giving busy work	1
Content	8
Not helping	1
Grades	8
Inappropriate	1
Discipline	6
Not caring	10
Racist/Sexist	2

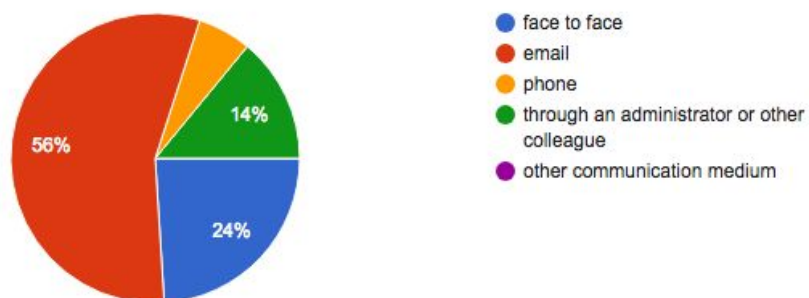
How do you cope with your feelings when experiencing accusations: (ex: meditation)

Remove from the situation	2
Calm down	6
Music	1

Co-workers	19
Administration	4
Reflection/Prayer	8
Work out	8
Read	1
Family/Close Friends	10
Crying	3
Research	1
Therapy	3
Self Talk	3
Do more	6
Blow it off	2

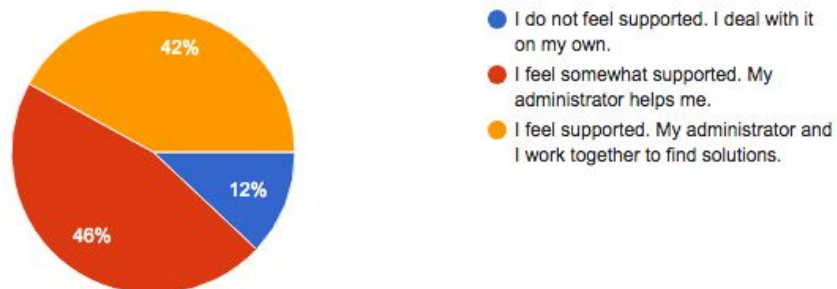
How are accusations from students and/or parents typically communicated to you:

50 responses



When dealing with accusations; how supported do you feel by administration?

50 responses



Appendix 3

Teacher Interview Questions

1. How do teachers describe the emotions, emotional state, and health impact resulting from false accusations by students and parents?
 - Could you describe, in as much detail as you feel comfortable sharing, a time when you experienced false accusations by students or parents *or both*?
 - How did you feel during that experience?
 - Have your feelings about being a teacher or the teaching profession changed since this incident? If so, how? If not, why?
 - What were any short-term effects on your emotional or physical health or both?
 - What were any long-term effects on your emotional or physical health or both?
2. What are the strategies that teachers develop to overcome, cope with the impact of false accusations by students and parents?
 - What did you do to cope with or overcome the false accusations?
3. What can districts do to help teachers who are faced with false accusations?
 - What advice would you give to a colleague who is in a similar situation?
 - What support did your administrator/s provide?
 - How do you feel now about that support?
 - What might have supported you better? For what reasons? and why?
 - What change/s are needed at the district level to help employees who are falsely accused of ____?

Appendix 4

Administrator Interview Questions

1. How do teachers describe the emotions, emotional state, and health impact resulting from false accusations by students and parents?
 - Could you describe, in as much detail as you feel comfortable sharing, a time when a teacher experienced false accusations by a student, parents, or both?
 - How did you support the teacher during that experience?
2. What are the strategies that teachers develop to overcome, cope with the impact of false accusations?
 - In your preparation to be an administrator, what or how were you prepared to help support teachers in these situations?
3. What can districts do to help teachers who are faced with false accusations?
 - What advice would you give to a teacher in this situation?
 - What advice would you give to a colleague?
 - Looking back, is there anything you would change about how the situation was handled?
 - What changes were made/are needed to help support teachers and administrators in these situations?

Appendix 5

Interview Participants

Participant	Identification Code	Content Area	Setting
High School teacher 1	HST 1	Math	Outer-ring suburb
High School teacher 2	HST 2	World Language	Suburban
High School teacher 3	HST 3	Social Studies	Urban
High School Teacher 4	HST 4	English	Suburban
Middle School teacher 1	MST 1	World Language	Suburban
Middle School Teacher 2	MST 2	Social Studies	Suburban
Middle School Teacher 3	MST 3	Special Education	Suburban
Middle School Teacher 4	MST 4	Middle and High School Social Studies	Suburban
Middle School Teacher 5	MST 5	Science in an at risk school within a school setting	Suburban
Elementary Teacher 1	ELT 1	Catholic Elementary	Rural
Administrator 1	Admin 1	Assistant Principal	Urban
Administrator 2	Admin 2	Assistant Principal 2	Suburban
Administrator 3	Admin 3	Assistant Principal 3	Rural

